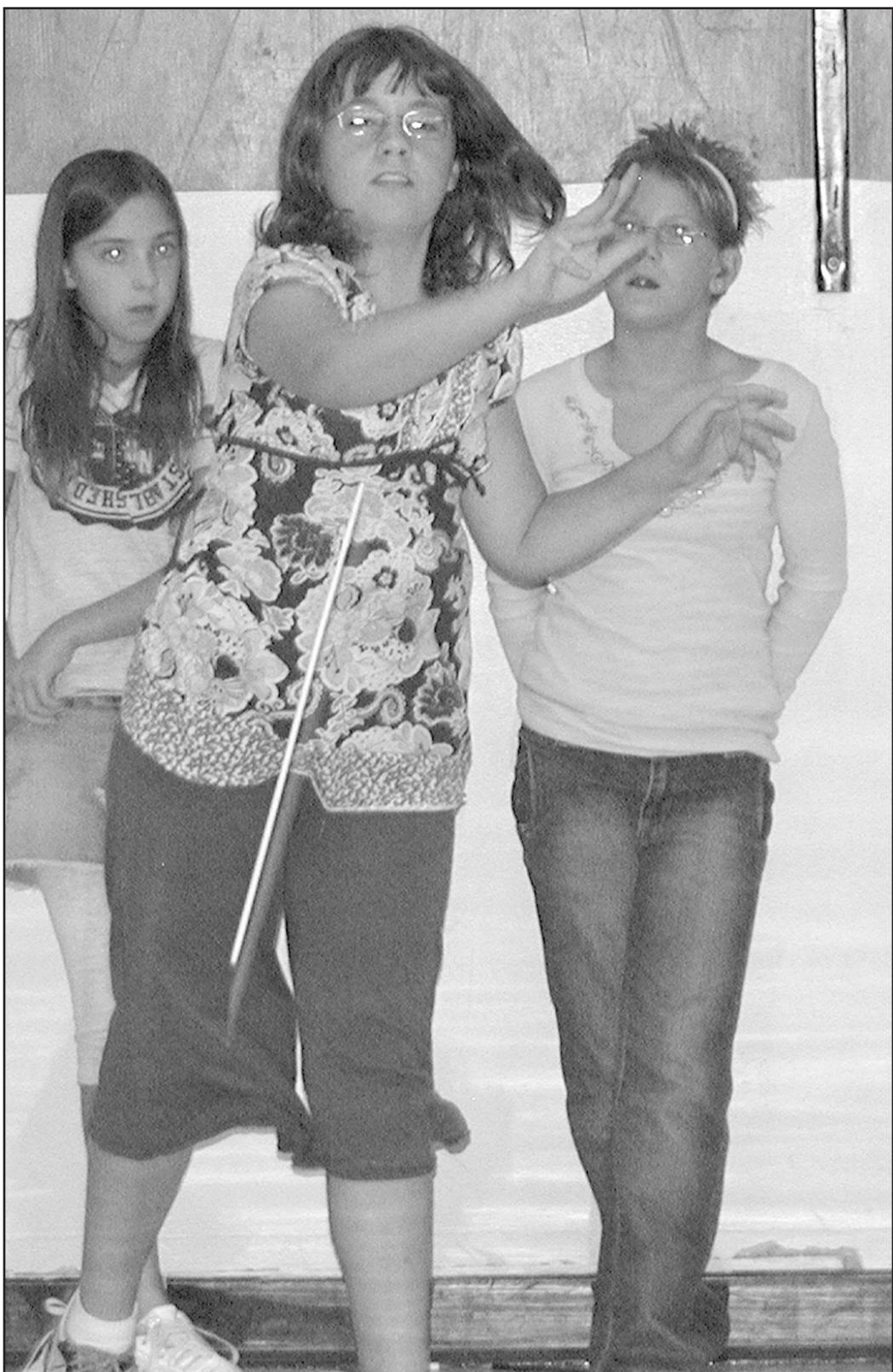




DURING MATH OLYMPICS on Thursday morning at Oberlin Elementary School, Emily Larson (above) knelt down to straighten out the tape measure while Caitlin Gault (below)

threw a paper-straw javelin as team members Kassidie Jensen (below left) and Shylo Shields watched.



Students learn math with Olympic games

Fifth and sixth graders threw the discus, shot and javelin during class last week.

Sounds dangerous, but the kids were tossing paper plates and soda straws, not the real thing.

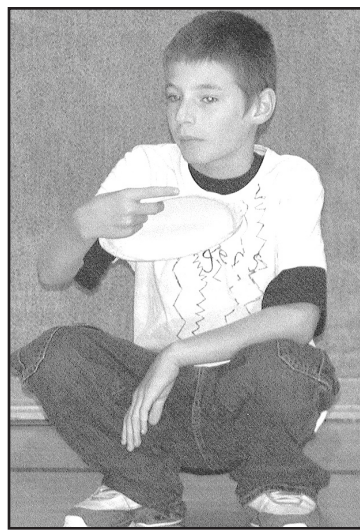
Those weren't the only Olympic events the Oberlin Elementary School in which students took part; they also did the pole vault, balance beam, a water event and weight lifting.

Although the activities took place in the gym at the grade school, it wasn't for physical education class, but for the sports-themed Math Olympics.

For a math exercise for the fifth and sixth graders, teacher Carol Dixon came up with a unique way for the kids to review real measurements. It was a perfect tie-in with the Olympics, she said.

"Michael Phelps didn't get as good as he is without hard work and practice," said Miss Dixon. "Math takes hard work and practice, too."

During the Math Olympics at the end of last week, the fifth graders worked with American units of measure, including inches, feet and yards, while the sixth graders did metric measure, using meters.



KNEELING DOWN, Nolan Pierce prepared to throw his paper-plate discus.

The students will be tested on the measurements on the state assessment tests in the spring, Miss Dixon said.

The students were divided into teams, she said, then each person on the team had to answer a question. For example, how many teaspoons are in a tablespoon? The team got three points if the student answered

the question correctly, partial points if it was answered incorrectly and and disqualified if the student didn't even try.

After answering, each student had the chance to take part in an event. For the discus, the kids threw paper plates. The team whose member threw his or her plate the farthest had to go to measure how far it went, to the nearest centimeter or inch.

The teams got points for being first, second, third or fourth in each event.

For shot put, the kids threw a small, colored pom-poms, like a giant cotton balls, and for the javelin, a paper straw. For the pole vault, said Miss Dixon, they had pieces of dowel cut into different lengths. Students had to choose the dowel closest in length to a given measurement. For the balance beam, they had to estimate weights; for the water event, the capacity of containers, and for weight lifting, a large can of chili beans or a cube of beef bullion.

Part of the value, she said, was to show the students that math can be fun and it's OK to enjoy the subject.

— Story and photos by Kimberly Davis