

St. Petersburg Times

Two sisters' rink dreams

[NORTH PINELLAS Edition]

St. Petersburg Times - St. Petersburg, Fla.
Author: ALEXANDRA ZAYAS
Date: Sep 12, 2006
Start Page: 3.B
Section: METRO & STATE
Text Word Count: 416

Document Text

Copyright Times Publishing Co. Sep 12, 2006

Not even the sun was awake early one Tuesday morning when the Leonov sisters twirled across the rink at the Ice Sports Forum in Brandon.

Masha landed a triple toe loop. It wasn't perfect, so the 13-year-old from Berkeley Preparatory School tried again. And again. Her Achilles tendon throbbed, but her ache for world recognition as a figure skater burned stronger.

Masha won first place in her division at one of the nation's most rigorous tournaments this summer - the Liberty Summer Competition in Philadelphia - and will compete in the South Atlantic Regional Championships next month.

Rank high, and her chances of going to the 2010 Olympics go up. Rank low, and they dwindle.

Her big sister, Katya, shared that dream until she caught her skate while practicing weeks before the regionals in October and broke her leg. Two surgeries later, the 16-year-old glides cautiously but still practices as often as she can.

Since Masha was 5 and Katya was 7, the Leonov sisters have trained in one of the world's most unforgiving sports.

"You go out there, and you only get one chance. You can lose your trip to the Olympics because of one fall," said Katya.

The Russian family bleeds excellence, ambition and discipline. What they don't have is time.

One of their biggest obstacles: "the speed limit," said their dad, Andrei Leonov, as he zoomed along the Lee Roy Selmon Crosstown Expressway en route from the rink in Brandon to Berkeley Prep, where they both attend.

Andrei Leonov and his wife, Elena, who also have two boys, Nikita, 11 and Andrei, 3, take turns shuttling their daughters to and from skating classes. Because Tampa doesn't have a rink, the girls practice in Brandon and Oldsmar on weekdays and in Kissimmee, where their coach lives, on weekends.

Most high-level young figure skaters the girls' age are homeschooled to accommodate practice and travel, but both of them love the classroom.

School was Katya's best outlet after her injury. It gave her a chance to discover the extracurricular activities she had missed out on because of skating. Her new dream is to go to an Ivy League school and study international relations.

Masha tries to keep up with nonskating school activities and jokes about the time the science and Latin clubs were competing in the same city as her figure skating competition. She juggled the three competitions the same weekend.

Alexandra Zayas can be reached at 226-3354 or azayas@sptimes.com.

[Illustration]

Photo: PHOTO, KEN HELLE, (2)

Reproduced with permission of the copyright owner. Further reproduction or distribution is prohibited without permission.

Abstract (Document Summary)

Since [Masha] was 5 and [Katya] was 7, the Leonov sisters have trained in one of the world's most unforgiving sports.

One of their biggest obstacles: "the speed limit," said their dad, Andrei Leonov, as he zoomed along the Lee Roy Selmon Crosstown Expressway en route from the rink in Brandon to Berkeley Prep, where they both attend.

Andrei Leonov and his wife, Elena, who also have two boys, Nikita, 11 and Andrei, 3, take turns shuttling their daughters to and from skating classes. Because Tampa doesn't have a rink, the girls practice in Brandon and Oldsmar on weekdays and in Kissimmee, where their coach lives, on weekends.

Reproduced with permission of the copyright owner. Further reproduction or distribution is prohibited without permission.