Olympic dreams come true for Toronto students

Written by Evan Boudreau, The Catholic Register
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TORONTO - Every athlete's dream is to compete at the Olympics, said Anjelika Reznik, a dream soon to be reality for her and fellow Toronto Catholic student Anastasiya Muntyanu.

The two 17-year-old students — Reznik attends Cardinal Carter Academy for the Arts while Muntyana is a student at Bishop Allen Academy — will represent Canada in rhythmic gymnastics at the Olympic Summer Games which begin July 27 in London, England.

"I actually would have never thought I'd be going to the Olympics," said Reznik, a native of Kazakhstan who spent eight years in Israel prior to immigrating to Canada where her gymnastics career began. "The reason my mom put me in gymnastics was actually to give me something to do instead of just walking around. I started more for fun."

Accompanied by her twin sister Viktoria, Reznik began at the recreational inner-club level. The twins' dedication and natural talent quickly moved them into the higher ranks, with success at the provincial level earning the duo an opportunity to compete at the first ever Youth Olympics in Singapore. There they captured a bronze medal in the four balls four ribbons routine.

Along with the medal and memories — the highlight of her career to date, said Reznik — the two also garnered an invitation to tryout for the national team that would compete at the 2011 World Rhythmic Gymnastics Championships in Montpellier, France, a qualifying competition for the London Olympics. Anjelika Reznik made the team and began spending a lot more time with new teammate Muntyanu before heading to France.

"We spent the whole year, and then the whole summer time in Spain, training really hard," said Muntyanu, who took up the sport at six years old while living in Ukraine. "Then we peaked at the right time and at the right place. That's the time when we managed to get the wild card to participate in the Olympic Games."

Between Reznik and Muntyana, they've collected five bronze, nine silver and three gold medals competing with Canada’s senior and junior national teams at various international competitions, including the 2011 Pan American Games.

Despite a rigid training schedule for the past two years at their home club, Toronto’s Kalev Rhythmic Gymnastics Academy — four hours a day, six times a week — July is a crucial month for the pair and their teammates, all six of whom are Olympic rookies. The team returned to Spain and is in the midst of a month-long training blitz before rhythmic gymnastics’ four-day competition begins Aug. 9 in London.

"We have a great facility there and we don't have to rush. We have the whole day to ourselves and we can just plan and work as long as we need to," said Muntyanu, who’s daily training doubled this month to eight hours per day. "We're kind of separated from the rest of the world when we are in Spain. We are isolated so we can really focus on our sport goals."

Although the dream is to capture two golds, one in the five-ball routine and another in three ribbons two hoops, Muntyanu stressed the number one goal is to perform at the team’s best collective potential.

It's a desire shared by Reznik who, after making the team, put much of the rest of her life on hold. When classes and compulsory rehearsals at Cardinal Carter conflicted with her training, she became a part-time student.

Reznik, who spoke with The Register before heading off to Spain, rationalized, "If I have to miss school to train, and it will help me do well in the Olympics, then I'll do that because that's my only focus right now."
It's a sentiment shared by Muntyanu.

“Training is my number one priority and I’m skipping anything and everything to be here at the gym,” said Muntyanu, who spent much of the interview stretching on one foot. “My teachers have had a lot of planning to do with me being away but they dedicated their time to help me because they know how important this is to me.

“I'm just so thankful to have such a great community around me so that I can focus on my sport and also do well in school.”

While both sang praises about the lengths to which their school communities have gone to accommodate their Olympic dreams, Muntyanu said the reality of competing in London hasn’t fully sunken in yet.

“It still hasn't actually kicked in that we are actually going there and we are actually going to be performing,” she said. "It's still actually hard to believe that we achieved that."