

# Is it in YOU?

## Desiring Olympic fame is one thing. Earning it is another.

BY CARY ASPINWALL  
World Scene Writer

Angela Judkins of Jenks remembers the moment her daughter Karly's dreams of Olympic gold began.

Karly was 4 years old — watching Oklahoma gymnast Shannon Miller collect gold medals at the 1996 Atlanta Olympics — when she got bitten by the gymnastics bug. After watching Miller and the U.S. team's dazzling performance on TV, Karly rounded up basketballs, jump ropes and hoops to start her training in rhythmic gymnastics in the Judkinses' living room. And promptly broke her arm.

Young athletes sitting at home watching Olympic swimmer Michael Phelps' record-smashing swims or gymnast Nastia Liukin's graceful flips naturally get a little starry-eyed.

"What if ... someday?"

So how do Judkins and other parents with young Olympic hopefuls get their kids from living room stunts and summer swimming to gold medals?

### Gymnastics



#### The Dream

Karly Judkins hopes to be an Olympic gymnast someday, if she can translate her success in power tumbling gymnastics to a win at World Championships or a spot competing in floor exercise for the U.S. women's team.

### TAKING A TUMBLE

**Karly Judkins:** "She has a God-given talent," said her mother Angela, "and we just wanted to see her do it."

#### The Reality

While it started with a broken arm, Karly's gymnastics career has blossomed in recent years. The 14-year-old is ranked sixth in the nation by USA Gymnastics in junior women's power tumbling, and she recently finished third overall in junior elite power tumbling at the Visa Championships for USAG.

"Karly has a God-given talent, and we just wanted to see her do it," mom Angela Judkins explained. "But it was very much driven by Karly."

#### The Commitment

Mom's been there all the way, of course, going to work at Karly's first gym to help pay for her lessons, driving her and dropping her off. Karly trains at least 12

hours a week at SSB Kids in Broken Arrow, and the Judkinses have two other sons, so it's a lot of schedule-balancing. And it's very expensive, Angela Judkins said.

World Gymnastics competition at the international level costs more than \$6,000 to attend. Nationals costs about \$1,500, and none of that includes private lessons, summer camps and regional tournament entry fees. Leotards can cost nearly \$200.

Now that Karly's older, she works to help pay for her gymnastics expenses. She helps teach at SSB and cheer/tumbling clinics so she can pay for the airfare, travel expenses and entry fees of her sport. Paying her way teaches Karly responsibility and discipline, Angela Judkins said.

#### Lessons Learned

It's been fun for Karly to watch U.S. gymnasts Nastia Liukin and Shawn Johnson win medals this past week, and she's excited to see Americans Erin Blanchard and Chris Estrada compete in trampoline gymnastics this week (a first for the U.S. this year). But she knows how tough it is to snag those spots.

Last year, Karly missed making the World Championships by two-tenths of a point. "It got me thinking, do I really want to keep doing this?" Karly said.

The answer is yes, even if it just means landing a spot on a great college team someday.

"It was a tough lesson for her, but it made her realize she really wanted to compete," Angela Judkins said. "Through that, she realized she wanted it more than she ever thought she had."

### Aquatics

#### The Dream

Parents from all over northeastern Oklahoma bring their hopeful young Michael Phelps and Natalie Coughlins to Swim Tulsa, where coach David Lynn has been training top swimmers for more than 20 years.

#### The Reality

At most, there are 52 swimmers who make the Olympic team. The closest a Swim Tulsa member has come to making that select group was Lynn's daughter, who qualified for the Olympic time trials years ago and swam



#### IN THE SWIM

**David Lynn:** "No one in our program has those \$300 laser suits yet."

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at the NCAA level for University of Arkansas.

"The group of people who get to be an Olympian is miniscule," Lynn said. "To make the team, you've got to be one of the top two people (in your event) in the country."

Many young swimmers may strive to someday set a school record or even make it to the Olympic time trials, but parents have to strike a delicate balance between supporting their kids and pushing too hard, Lynn said.

It's good to set realistic goals, such as shaving seconds off their swim time or making an elite swim team; swimming can teach all kids valuable lessons about setting and achieving goals, Lynn said.

#### The Commitment

Swim meets can be time-consuming, weekend-swallowing events, and practices can take as much as 40 minutes to 1½ hours three to five times per week, and even longer for senior-level swimmers.

"It's no more expensive than other sports," Lynn said, "but it does take time and money."

Lessons and training usually cost about \$50 to \$75 a month, goggles cost about \$15 per pair, and competition suits cost about \$60.

"No one in our program has those \$300 laser suits yet," he said.

Competitions and travel to out-of-town swim meets add to the expenses for parents, though. One advantage of swimming as a sport for parents with several kids? Swim teams usually all have practice and meets for multiple age groups and levels at the same time and place, so there's not as much running around, Lynn said.

#### Lessons Learned

There are a lot more fun things to do some days than get up early and swim laps, Lynn said. So parents have to teach kids to live up to the commitments they make to any sport.

"There are good life lessons in relationships and commitment with swimming," he said. "Another really nice thing about the sport is that it's a lifetime activity — years later, they can still swim."

So parents who realize their young swimmers may never make the Olympic team can know they're building healthy fitness habits for life, Lynn said.

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U.S. gymnast Nastia Liukin performs on the uneven bars during the apparatus finals at the Beijing 2008 Olympics. Liukin won the silver medal. AMY SANCETTA / Associated Press

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