

FENCING PHENOM
Olympic gold medal winner Galya Pundyk brings her fencing expertise to Fairfield County at the aptly named Olympian Fencing Studio.



Eventually, her fencing teacher helped Pundyk's parents see that trading in their daughter's dancing shoes for a sabre was the right call. Pundyk's time spent dancing gave her a sense of rhythm and spatial awareness. These skills, as well as the ability to be prepared for every outcome signal a fencer with finesse. "It teaches you how to stay mentally strong, how to have good balance, and to find joy in hard work," says Pundyk.

From age 12 to 15 Pundyk competed and practiced intensively but not as rigorously as she did from 15 to 19. "It was very intense all the time, every day, three-times a day—before school and after school. This period was really tough, but it was worth it," she says. "Even if I hadn't won at the Olympics," she adds, "I wouldn't have regretted taking up fencing."

She won her first Cadet Tournament at the age of 15, then won her first Cadet National Championship, thereby earning herself a spot on the Cadet National Team. Once a member of the Women's Ukrainian Sabre Team, Pundyk won her first silver medal at the 2007 Senior World Championship in St. Petersburg, Russia which qualified her for the 2008 Olympics in Beijing, China at the age of 19. That year, she and her teammates stunned the world when they won gold.

Following the Olympics, Pundyk continued competing and medaling. Her highest world ranking was number seven. She ended her competitive career as an

Sabreuse Galya Pundyk

THE EVOLUTION OF AN OLYMPIC FENCER // BY MARGARET MAY

▶▶ PICTURE a game of chess being played: Two seated competitors scan a checkered board to plan their next moves and predict those of their opponent. Two brains battle it out until one competitor's victory is sealed by the lift of a finger. "Checkmate" is uttered. A queen is cornered. Now, picture that game being played with the opponents' bodies as the pieces, the two competitors rhythmically advancing and retreating with weapons in hand. That's fencing.

Rev that description up to sprinting speed with the fencer on attack given priority. The touches can be made with any part of the blade but only on the upper body. That's sabre fencing. "It's a tactical game," says Galya Pundyk, a past member of the Ukrainian Women's Sabre Team and an Olympic gold medalist. "You need to have a plan A, plan B, and plan C. You need to hide your weakness and try to trick your opponent."

Originally from Western Ukraine, Pundyk is petite in

stature but poised, joyful, and tenacious. At the age of 12, her younger brother's involvement with fencing drew her away from the dance studio and onto the fencing strip.

"My parents had decided I was going to be committed to dancing all my life, so I was scared to say I didn't want to do that. I convinced them to let me try fencing with my brother, Dmytro. So I went to fencing once a week and to dance lessons on all the other days. Then, slowly, slowly, I moved more towards fencing."

Olympic gold medalist, a two-time World Champion, a four-time World Vice-Champion, a two-time European Champion, and a four-time silver and three-time bronze European Medalist.

So, what brought the sabre to the U.S.? "At a fencing camp in Turkey, I met a very handsome guy, who happened to be American, and whose family lived in CT," explains Pundyk. After she missed the cut for the 2016 Olympics in Rio de Janeiro by one spot, she and her fiancé William Boe-Wiegaard,

a professional tennis player, moved to Wilton. She was offered a job as the assistant coach of both the Women's and Men's Fencing Teams at Yale in 2016. After getting teaching requests from parents who saw her refereeing at regional and national competitions, Pundyk opened The Olympian Fencing Studio this past June, located at 388 Danbury Road in Wilton.

"Every fencer is a little bit different," says Pundyk. "Fencing is like handwriting—we all learn the same way

but we all have our own style."

After nearly two decades of intense practice, travel, and competition, Pundyk says that when you feel yourself losing speed, it's time to bow out gracefully. "A lot of people ask me why I haven't gone to open competitions in the U.S. The truth is, I'm not ready to lose to someone ten years younger than me," she says with a laugh. It's apparent that her greatest assets to earning her success have been her intelligence, humor, and grace.



En Garde, Prêt, Apprenez!

» **Fencing:** The action or art of using a sword with precision.

» **"En-garde, prêt, allez":** What the referee says to start each match. It translates to "On guard, ready, go".

» **Assault:** A friendly recreational match between fencers where the score may or may not be kept.

» **Bout:** A match where the score is kept.

» **Jury:** A group of four people that call the hits and keep score manually.

» **Lamé:** An electronic jacket worn by the two fencers; it keeps score electronically.

» **Point:** The tip of the sword. In foil and

épée fencing, this is the only part of the blade that can hit and earn the fencer a point.

» **Right of Way:** Decision criteria to determine which fencer's hit has priority; in foil and saber, if both hit simultaneously, it determines which fencer gets the point. In épée, both fencers earn the point if they hit at the same time.

» **Saber:** A sword with a knuckle guard and flat blade; a type of fencing. The target area with this sword is the entire upper body.

» **Foil:** A lightweight sword with a rectangular blade.

» **Épée:** A heavy sword with a large guard handle and a triangular blade; point.

—MARGARET MAY



**LISTEN
WEEKDAYS
5:30-10AM**

**COUPLES COURT
7:40AM**

The **ANNA &
RAVEN** Show

