

Olympic Dreamer

A 13-year-old girl leaps over obstacles to achieve her gymnastics dream.

BY ALEXIS BURLING

Twirling multicolored ribbons in the air while pirouetting gracefully on your toes might sound like fun to some. But for Alexis Page, rhythmic gymnastics isn't just a hobby. It's a full-fledged Olympic dream—one that comes with long hours and financial strain. Such obstacles might discourage some kids. To Alexis, just the possibility of making it to the Olympics is well worth the sacrifice.

The toughest part for the 13-year-old New Yorker is her grueling schedule. She practices for four hours every day after school. Each weekend day, she gets up at 6:30 a.m. and takes a two-hour train ride, then a half-hour bus ride, from her home in Harlem to Aviator Sports and Events Center in Brooklyn. By the time she gets home on Sunday night, she's exhausted.

"She gets home very late," says her coach, Wendy Hilliard, "and she still has to do her schoolwork, turn around, and get up for school."

As sports go, rhythmic gymnastics is surprisingly expensive. This year, Alexis's mother, Pamela, estimates they'll spend nearly \$25,000—money they don't have. At least four custom-made leotards at \$600 each. A dozen



competition entry fees totaling \$2,000 or more. And thousands of dollars spent on meals, hotels, and flights to competitions in other states.

None of this has stopped Alexis from pursuing her dream.

On August 12, Alexis and her mother flew to Dallas, Texas, for the Visa Championships—a stepping stone to the 2012 Olympics. She needed to finish in the top eight to qualify for the national team. The odds were steep. But Alexis knew she could impress the judges.

"It takes courage," she says. "And courage is confidence. It's being a hero."

By the end of the weekend, the results were in. She finished fifth and became a proud member of the 2009 U.S. Junior Rhythmic National Team. What's the secret of her success? Determination. Drive. And a whole lot of courage. "You never give up. You never just go one day and say you can't do it the next day," she says. Sounds like the attitude of a true hero. ■

Word Power

discourage grueling impress
obstacles pirouetting steep

Find the six words above. Using all six, write a letter congratulating Alexis on making the Junior Rhythmic National Team.

No-Sweat BUBBLE TEST

Read the story on page 30. Then fill in the circle next to the best answer for each question below. Next time you take a real bubble test, you'll be a pro!

1. Which of these might be an alternate title for this article?

- A.** How to Make the Rhythmic Gymnastics Team
- B.** A Dedicated Gymnast
- C.** A Weekend at the Gym
- D.** The High Cost of Kids' Sports

2. According to the article, Alexis and her family spend money on which of the following for Alexis to compete?

- A.** custom-made leotards
- B.** flights to competitions in other states
- C.** entrance fees for competitions
- D.** all of the above

3. According to the article, which of the following challenges does Alexis face in her sport?

- A.** mean coaches and teammates
- B.** a grueling schedule
- C.** sports-related injuries
- D.** both B and C

4. What does the phrase, "full-fledged," in the first paragraph mean?

- A.** young
- B.** impossible
- C.** fully developed
- D.** complicated

5. According to the article, to what or whom does Alexis credit her success?

- A.** her coach and her parents
- B.** luck
- C.** courage and determination
- D.** natural-born talent

6. Why did the author write this article?

- A.** to describe one girl's commitment to living her Olympic dream
- B.** to teach readers how to excel at sports
- C.** to persuade people to watch Alexis in her next competition
- D.** to discuss the costs associated with rhythmic gymnastics

Critical Thinking

Answer the following questions on a separate piece of paper.

Explain your answers using information and details from the article and your own ideas.

- 1.** What are some sacrifices one must make to compete at a high level in a sport like Alexis's?
- 2.** How does Alexis explain her success? Do you agree with her explanation?