

EYES ON OLYMPICS



Teen ice dancing duo has won medals in brief career, but seek shot at gold

BY ABBY LUBY

WIRLING, JUMPING and spinning on ice is what teen ice-dancing duo Ariana Weintraub and Avidan Brown do best.

Ariana, 14, and Avidan, 18, are active contenders in the highly competitive field of ice dancing, or ballet on ice. The teens have glided gracefully at national and international ice arenas, vying for championships for the first year and a half. The ultimate goal: the 2014 Winter Olympics.

Avidan lives in Riverdale, and Ariana lives in Mount Kisco, Westchester. Both started skating when they were about 6. Avidan said he, at first, stumbled around on the slippery surface and hated it. "I was crying because I was falling a lot," he said. He gave it up for a few years, but tried it again when he was 9, and took to it very quickly." Ariana remembers her first attempts at skating were "a little rough. But then it was natural after that."

The 2014 Winter Olympics is a distant goal, but there are numerous competitions coming up — two "Grand Prix" in the fall, one in Lake Placid, the other in Estonia.

Getting ready for the contests requires rigorous, four- to six-hour daily workouts on rinks in Montclair and Hackensack, N.J. The teens practice ballet and ballroom dancing three to four times a week, along with regular strength training.

"We do have the weekends off, which is when we rest and hang out with friends," said Avidan, who frequents Seton Park to play Ultimate Frisbee. Both teens are home-schooled, which fits into their nonstop training schedule.

The pair won a gold medal at last year's Israeli National Ice Skating Championships and received significant recognition in 2008 at

the North Atlantic Regional Championships in Lake Placid and the Junior Nationals in Colorado.

Dancing on ice with a partner isn't easy.

"You have to be very much synchronized with your partner, and be very creative and precise," explained Avidan. "It's like you have to have eyes in the back of your head and develop a sixth sense to know just where your partner is."

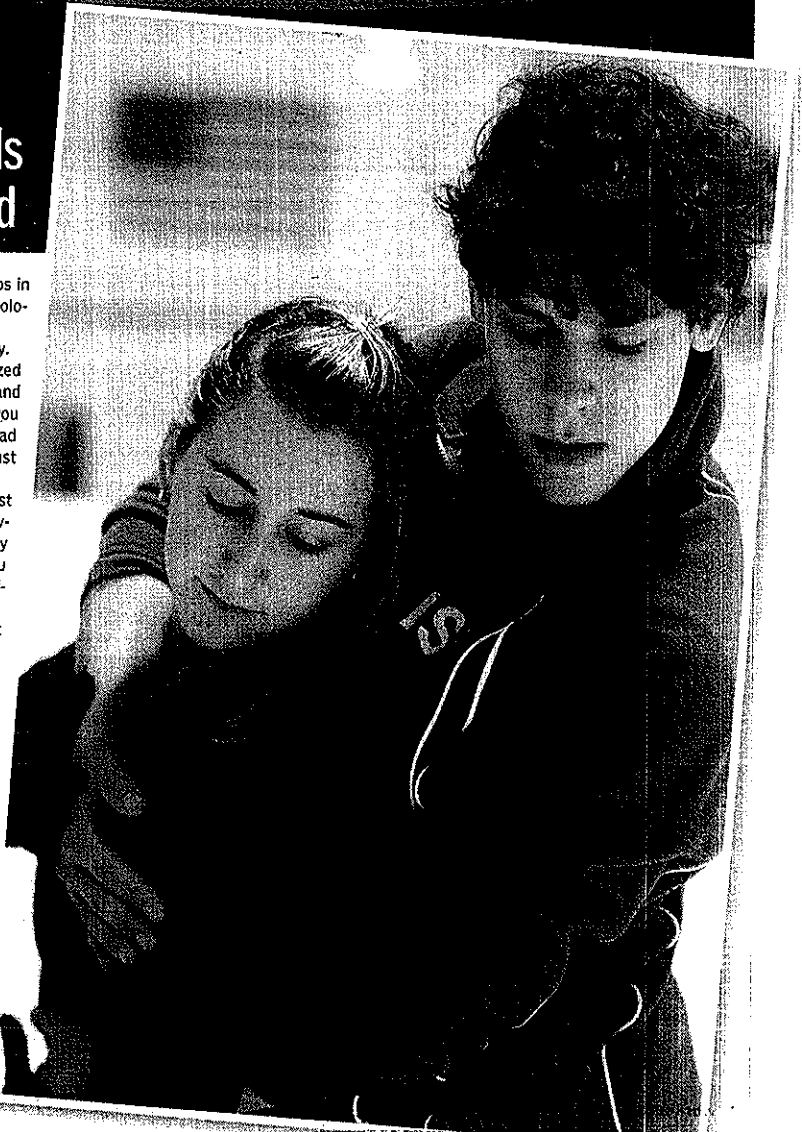
The complicated footwork is the most challenging for Ariana. "The lifts and moving spins, which we call 'twizzles,' are very hard. Sometimes it's overwhelming. You get excited and confused with all the different steps," she said.

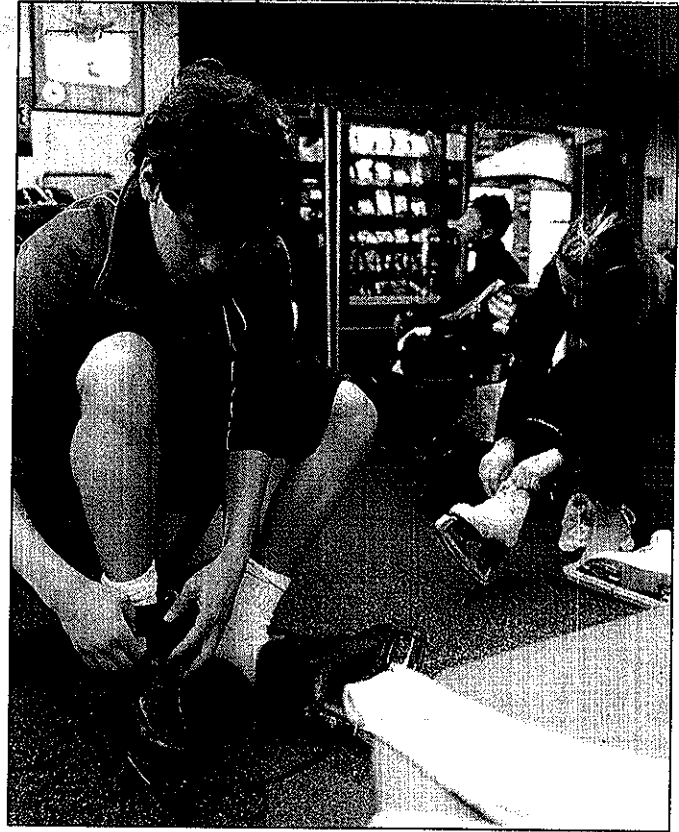
Their coach, Israeli ice dancer Galit Chait, is a three-time Olympian and earned a bronze medal at the 2002 World Figure Skating Championships. Chait said the teens have what it takes to compete on the ice: "As partners, they get along so well. They are good kids and very hard workers. They never complain, even when they want to."

Chait said a trip to the 2014 Olympics isn't quite a reality yet. "It's the dream and goal of every athlete," she said, "but right now, Ariana and Avidan are in the development stages, focusing on learning and competing."

Appearing in front of thousands at various competitions is the best experience, Ariana said. "My nervousness disappears as soon as I start skating, and then I notice how good it feels with the wind on my face," she said. "It really does feel effortless."

Photos by JULIA XANTHOS





Ice dancers Ariana Weintraub, 14, from Mount Kisco, and Avidan Brown, 18, of Westchester, take pointers from coach Ilit Chait at the Floyd Hall Arena in Montclair, N.J. The duo, who represent New York at international competitions, will compete for two Grand Prix events in Lake Placid and Estonia.



"The lifts and moving spins, which we call 'twizzles,' are very hard," Ariana said. "Sometimes it's overwhelming. You get excited and confused with all the different steps." That's why practice — four- to six-hour daily workouts — makes perfect for the pair.

Photos by JULIA XANTHOS