

Nastia Liukin's Leap From Junior to Senior

By Luan Peszek

Nastia Liukin has made the leap from junior champion to senior champion with grace and precision! Nastia, who will turn 16 on October 30, has won numerous gymnastics titles in the last couple of years including Junior National Champion twice in 2003 and 2004, Pacific Alliance Champion in 2004, and the 2005 American Cup/World Cup Beam Champion.



Photograph © Steve Lange

Nastia won gold on beam at the 2005 American Cup.

More recently, Nastia concluded a European tour with style, winning the USA vs. Great Britain and the USA vs. Switzerland all-around titles. In addition to winning the titles, she also unveiled some new skills along the way. On floor she upgraded her tumbling using a three-and-a-half twist for one of her passes. She also added a new skill on bars--Ono to front staldler half.

"It was really fun and a great experience," said Nastia. "We were gone for a long time – about two and a half weeks. The best part was competing for the U.S. and being there with the team."

Finally age-eligible for senior competitions, Nastia's goal this year is to make the 2005 World Championships team and possibly win a medal. She said, "I'm training a quad on floor and a double twisting Yurchenko on vault. We'll see how it goes before the U.S. Classic and Visa Championships this year."

Nastia is coached by her dad, Valery, and Natalya Marakova, at World Olympic Gymnastics Academy in Plano, Texas. The gym is owned by Valery Liukin and Evgeny Marchenko, who are paving their names in history with all their success. Evgeny was Carly

Patterson's personal coach when she won the Olympic Games all-around title. WOGA has had numerous National Team members since the gym opened in 1994 and even opened another gym in Dallas in 2001. Now, Nastia is the one to watch from WOGA.

Valery gives a lot of credit for their success to Natalya saying, "Natalya was the Soviet Union's National Team Choreographer in the 1980's. She has coached a world champion on floor. She makes our girls look beautiful. I can't say enough great things about her. She does a wonderful job."

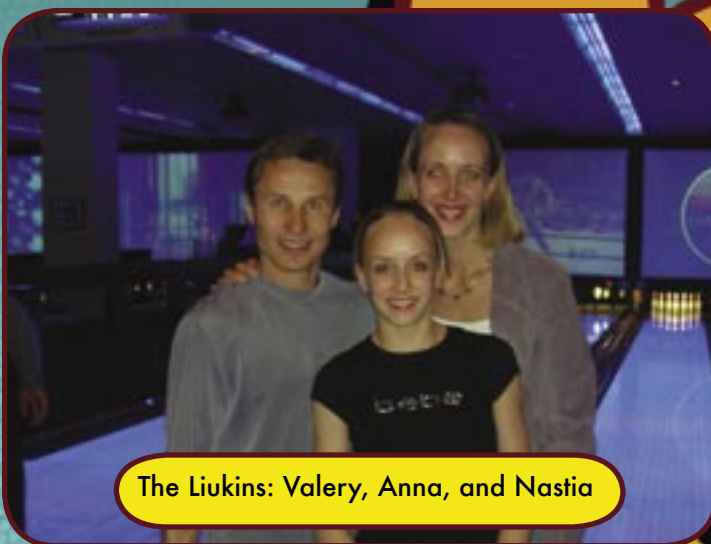


Natalya Marakova shown here working with Nastia.

Although both of Nastia's parents, Valery and Anna, were world class gymnasts, both agree that it's their daughter who deserves the spotlight now. Their combination of power and grace seems to have made the perfect gymnast. But, neither parent pushed Nastia into the sport, it was Nastia herself who wanted to do gymnastics.

Here's Nastia at age 3.





The Liukins: Valery, Anna, and Nastia

Liukin's Life

Favorite Event: Bars

Favorite Skill: back twisting on floor – I like doing quads.

Favorite Event: Pan American Games and American Cup

Favorite Clothes to Wear: I like to dress up and I like to wear casual clothes, too.

Favorite Food: Sushi

About how many leotards do you have? I'd say around 50

Something not many people know about Nastia? I speak Russian and English and am learning Spanish so I'll be trilingual.

Fun fact: I've started driving a little bit with my dad. We haven't decided yet when I'll get my license.

Who she'd like to thank? I just want to say thanks to my parents for all they do for me, to my beam coach and choreographer Natalya, and to all my teammates!

Comments on training with Olympic Champion Carly Patterson: "She's the same Carly. It's like nothing has changed. It's great having a best friend who has done so well. I'm very proud of her."

Nastia's Family: Nastia's dad, Valeri, is a four-time medalist from the 1988 Olympics, a World Champion, and the first gymnast to compete a triple back. Nastia's mom, Anna, was the 1987 Rhythmic Gymnastics World Champion.

Anna said, "Both Valeri and I were in the sport and we know how challenging it can be. It's a hard sport. In my wildest dream I couldn't imagine Nastia doing gymnastics. She was a gym rat because we were both in the gym coaching and she would watch the bigger girls and then repeat what they were doing. Valeri noticed she was doing pretty well. She started doing compulsories and stuck around and liked it. It was her choice."

We asked Valeri what it's like to coach his daughter and he said, "It's very easy. In the gym I'm the coach and at home I'm her dad. She's very self-driven. She wants to be the best and that's it. There's no problem coaching her."

As far as school, Nastia is a sophomore at Spring Creek Academy, a small private school that caters to her gymnastics schedule. "This school really helps me with my gymnastics and the heavy travel schedule that I have. My schedule is gymnastics from 8-12, then school from 12:30-3. After school I go home and do homework until my gymnastics practice from 5-8. After gym I finish all of my homework that I didn't have time to do in the afternoon."

Although Nastia has limited free time, when she's not in the gym perfecting her skills she enjoys swimming, shopping and hanging out with her two dogs, Layla and Chad, who are Springer Spaniels.

Nastia is one to watch as the new quadrennium unfolds. Her ability to leap from junior champion to senior champion quite easily shows a very bright future for a young rising star!



Photograph © Steve Lange

Nastia warms up at the 2005 American Cup.



Nastia in Moscow