

# SL Athletes are **GOOD** as **GOLD!**



## Three Area Talents Share Their Secrets to Success

WRITTEN BY SCOTT SCHAEFFER

**Every four years**, the world tunes in to see athletes from around the globe participate in the Summer Olympics. While most connect to the Olympic Games through their televisions, three local athletes are building personal connections of their own.

### Diving Right In

Sugar Land resident Yulia Pakhalina learned to dive at the age of four when her grandmother introduced her to the sport in Russia. Pakhalina's lifelong dedication earned her a gold medal in synchronized diving in the 2000 Olympic Games in Sydney. She also won a silver medal in synchronized diving and a bronze medal in individual springboard diving at the 2004 Olympics in Athens.

"It was a great experience at the Sydney Olympics. The experience to win the gold was like nothing else I had felt before. It was overwhelming. I felt proud and happy for my diving partner, Vera Ilyina, my coaches, and my country," Pakhalina says.

Rather than rest on her laurels, the woman referred to in competitions as the "Russian Texan," is training six days a week in hopes of repeating her success in both sports in the 2008 Beijing Summer Olympics. Her current regimen consists of three hours of training in the morning followed by three more hours after lunch.

"I train in both Houston and Russia," Pakhalina says. "I prefer to stay in Sugar Land and train in Houston



Gold, Silver and Bronze medal winner,  
Yulia Pakhalina lives in Sugar Land

though. I believe Sugar Land is an excellent place for athletes to live. I love living here!"

Pakhalina and her husband, Mohammad Anwar, know well the sacrifices that come with success.

"Life itself is full of sacrifices. It's a part of life, so I don't think that I'm doing anything special, but I do wish that I had more time to spend with my husband and family in Sugar Land and Russia," Pakhalina says.

If sacrifice and determination count, Pakhalina and Sugar Land will soon be celebrating Olympic success.

### On the Run

Sugar Land business owner Gene Mitchell started running competitively in high school. Since then, his legs have carried him to a track scholarship at Villanova University, through marathons in London, Chicago, and New York, and to the height of his racing career – an invitation to the 2006 U.S. Olympic Marathon Time Trials.

"It's the accolade every marathon runner is going after. It's the pinnacle of my career," Mitchell says.

Only recently has Mitchell, who logged a 27th place overall finish in the New York Marathon, put down the stop watch to focus on the sheer joy of running.

“Running provides a sense of freedom and a chance for my mind to escape. It makes my mind more nimble and fine tunes my body,” Mitchell says. “It makes the other parts of my life that much better.”

Mitchell has started a new mission to share his passion for running with residents of Sugar Land by opening Texas Running Company, located next to Whole Foods. He offers running, walking, and fitness apparel; sports nutrition; a social running group; and a professional gait analysis to help customers find the right fit.

“Sugar Land is one of the most fit communities in the country and is a great place to run,” Mitchell says.

Mitchell encourages those interested in running to abandon their fears and jump right in.

“Don’t hesitate to become involved,” Mitchell says. “It’s not about how fast or slow you run, but about making your body and mind its very best.”



Sugar Land business owner Gene Mitchell was invited to run in the 2006 U.S. Olympic Marathon Time Trials

## Pedal to the Medal

The gate drops and Tiva Feltman is off in a flash, her legs churning and her pony tail streaming from beneath her helmet. She glides over dirt rollers and coasts through berms with other girls in close pursuit. Such is the life for the girl known in BMX (bicycle motocross) circles as “Las Vegas.”

“I enjoy the adrenaline rush and the quick-pace action of the BMX race,” 15-year-old Feltman says. “I also take a little pride in knowing some of my competitors are nervous about racing against me.”

Feltman’s competitors should be nervous, as she has twice won the Texas Girls District Championships and the Texas Girls State Championships and currently ranks sixth in the nation in her age group. Already this year, Feltman and her family have traveled to competitions in Florida, Missouri, Texas, and New Mexico with upcoming trips to Illinois, Georgia, Oklahoma, and California. One of Feltman’s greatest accomplishments is receiving a rare, but well-deserved, BMX equipment factory sponsorship.

Since BMX becomes an official medaled sport at the 2008 Summer Olympics in Beijing, Feltman has set her sights on a world stage.



Sugar Land’s Tiva Feltman, AKA “Las Vegas,” has her sights set on Olympic Games 2012



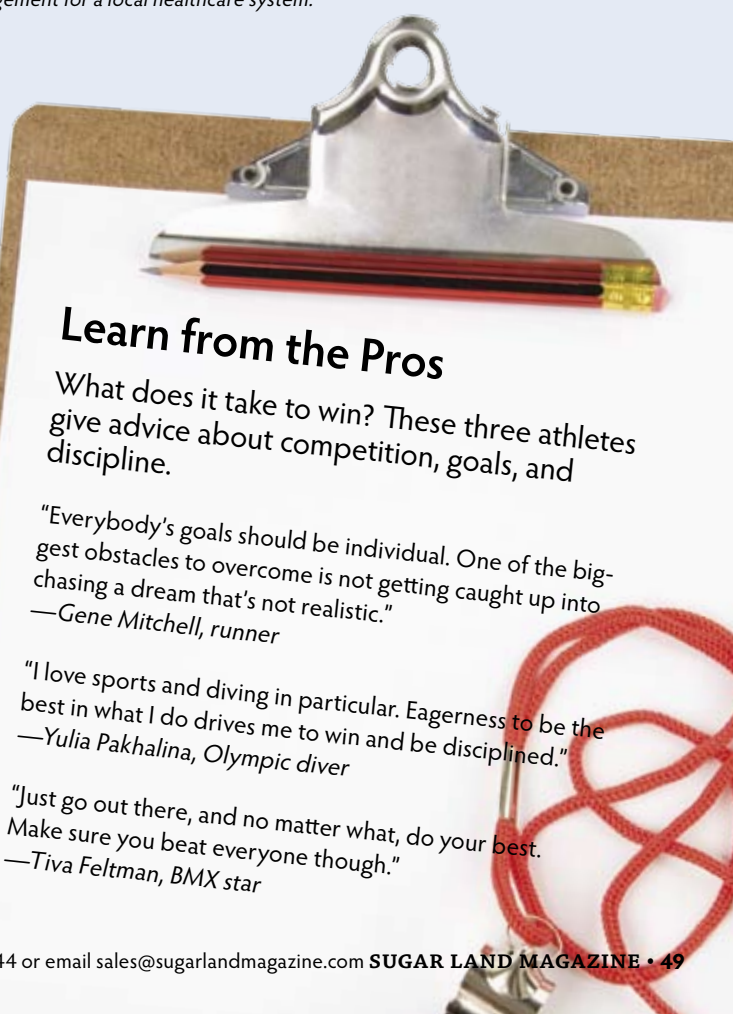
“I’m working on it,” Feltman says of future Olympic participation. “The competition looks fierce, but I’m willing to go the extra mile to make it in 2012.”

Amidst the sacrifices for her sport, Feltman also takes time to run for the Dulles High School girls track team, focus on her studies, and spend time with family.

Tiva’s father and fan, Robert Feltman, attributes much of her success to her positive attitude.

“Tiva keeps a good positive attitude about her athletic activities. She may not always win in her competition, but she always tries to improve the next chance she gets,” he says. “Tiva is self-motivated and trains hard for her sports.” SLM

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## Learn from the Pros

What does it take to win? These three athletes give advice about competition, goals, and discipline.

“Everybody’s goals should be individual. One of the biggest obstacles to overcome is not getting caught up into chasing a dream that’s not realistic.”  
—Gene Mitchell, runner

“I love sports and diving in particular. Eagerness to be the best in what I do drives me to win and be disciplined.”  
—Yulia Pakhalina, Olympic diver

“Just go out there, and no matter what, do your best. Make sure you beat everyone though.”  
—Tiva Feltman, BMX star