

BLOOD, SWEAT



AND TEARS



Many of us grew up with a favorite sport or extracurricular activity, but while most of us hung up our cleats or our helmets years ago, some took it to the next level. When it comes to inspirational stories, there are few more stirring than that of the local who made it to the big time. Within the next pages, you'll find the stories of six locals who had what it takes to become a professional in their field—whether it be racing towards the finish line, touring the globe with a world-renowned dance company or racking up three Olympic gold medals.



LOCAL PROFESSIONALS SHOW US WHAT SETS THEM APART FROM THE REST

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Bend, Don't Break

FROM OC TO NYC, THIS DANCER'S CAREER IS ALWAYS EN POINTE

WRITTEN BY: **JORDAN NISHKIAN**
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EXPERT: Danica Paulos
CREDENTIALS: Dancer



When speaking with Danica Paulos and watching her dance, it's clear to see that she is living the life she was meant to. "I've always known that I wanted to be a dancer," she says, reminiscing of how

her grandmother started putting her in classes at Huntington Beach's Orange County Dance Center when she was five years old. Now, 20 years later, she is a member of one of the most prestigious dance companies in America, the Alvin Ailey American Dance Theater.

Through years of trials and tribulations, Paulos' hard work never wavered. Her passion for her craft and her tenacity pushed her to where she is and who she is today. "The greatest challenge I've had to overcome is to know my worth," she explains. When she first joined her current company, she was

given a temporary contract; she was only supposed to fill in for an injured dancer for one international tour. And while she was grateful for the opportunity to live out this dream, there was a nagging feeling that she wasn't worthy and that "they didn't want [her] for a long time—only a short time."

Thankfully, Paulos found her worth and her joy. "I realized that my time is now and that I'm here for this, and I'm going to enjoy every single moment." That revelation came to her five years ago, and she has been dancing with the company ever since.

When asked what her words would be to her younger self, Paulos answered that she "would tell her that her love for dance is the most important aspect of this whole experience, and not to let the opinions of others, whether positive or negative, blind her. Stay true to that inner calling of who you are."



STATS:

20

Years Dancing

10

Tours With Alvin Ailey American Dance Theater

200

Performances a Year



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"I love it because it's the most freeing experience. When I'm dancing, it feels like nothing else is really going on except for this present moment. It feels like a sacred prayer."



Stepping Forward

• 2018 marked Alvin Ailey American Dance Theater's 60th Anniversary. What began in March of 1958 has become an era of exploring the African American experience through modern dance.

Back to Her Roots

• "The first time I performed in Orange County with the Alvin Ailey American Dance Theater for my friends and family, there were about 40 young students from Orange County Dance Center there. It was really overwhelming to see my two worlds colliding. That was the moment it really hit me."

DANICA PAULOS

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