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University of
New Hampshire

International Educator

The Newsletter of UNH Global Engagement

Spring 2014

UNH LAW STUDENT IS FORMER OLYMPIAN

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Razan Taha

Many people might say that law school can be as grueling as training for the Olympics, but very few indeed could claim to know that for sure.

UNH Law student Razan Taha, 22, came to the law school in September from her home country of Jordan to attend the master's program in Commerce and Technology. When she was just 16, she represented Jordan in the 2008 Beijing Olympics, competing in the 50-meter freestyle race alongside the best swimmers in the world.

Taha, who is attending UNH Law with her older sister, Suzan, says sports were a big part of her family's life when she was growing up.

"I have five older siblings who are all into sports," Taha said. "My parents were always encouraging us – they felt that was the only way they could occupy us."

It worked: Her brothers Firas and Raed practiced karate until the age of 16 and got their black belts, while her two sisters (Suzan and Zena) were star members of the national handball team. Her third sister, Rima, raced in the 100-meter preliminaries in the 2012 London Olympics.



Razan Taha (l.) and her sister Suzan (r.)

Taha said competing in the Olympics was one of the best times – however brief – of her life.

“I went all the way to China for one event that ends in like 27 seconds,” Taha said. “It’s insane to imagine all this training for that one moment. Before the race, you go to multiple warm-up rooms, the call rooms. I was really nervous. All athletes just sit and prepare for the races – some people shivering, pacing, talking to each other. You have to just focus, that’s the best time to be confident and just visualize your race.”

Once her turn came, Taha said, her nerves melted away.

“I remember saying ‘Hi’ to the camera, I was just so happy,” she said. “Any fear and negative feelings went away. I was so happy, so confident. I swam a national record and dropped my time.”

Even though she didn’t win a medal, Taha says she left Beijing feeling victorious, and eager to return to the pool.

“After any challenge, you feel like you can’t wait to get back to training and get better,” she said, “There’s always this feeling like there’s unfinished work.”

In 2009, Taha left Jordan, and the national team she’d swam on since the age of 13, to study in the United States. She attended Daytona State College for two years then earned her Bachelor's Degree in Finance and Accounting from Limestone College in South Carolina.

Even though she continued to train in college and was continuously improving, she was at a competitive disadvantage over the full-time athletes on the national team back in Jordan: She lost her spot to another swimmer for the 2012 London Olympics.

But Taha looks on the bright side: “My sister ran the 100-meter race in that Olympics – at least one of us went.”

Even though she’d love to compete in the next Olympics, in Brazil in 2016, Taha may sideline those plans as she thinks about her career. She’s considering remaining at UNH Law to pursue a juris doctor degree, and she’s looking for a finance-related internship this summer.

Getting back to the question: Law school vs. Olympics?

I don't think law school is harder than preparing for the Olympics,” Taha said, smiling. “However, each one requires a different level of mental exhaustion.”

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