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FAIRVIEW PARK

Teen figure skater gets national recognition

By **BRIAN LOVE**

Skating wasn't a pleasant experience when Jessica Sassano tried it the first time.

The 6-year-old fell constantly. She was cold. She just couldn't stay up. She left the ice in tears.

Now, a dozen years later, the 18-year-old Sassano is ranked No.

2 in the Midwest and No. 3 in the nation by US Figure Skating.

"I hated it," Sassano said about her first experience. "I couldn't wait to get out of there. I was crying."

She returned, however, and there was a huge change. The first time was to experience it with her mother at an open skate. The next time, there

was a coach.

"I fell in love with it," she said. "The difference was coaching. I had someone who could help me."

Along with the high ranking, Sassano also received a national honor from the Program Development Committee of U.S. Figure Skating.

"I am pleased to inform you that

Jessica Sassano has been awarded the GOLD level Graduating Seniors Award," said the organization in a statement. "The Graduating Seniors Program recognizes those student-athletes who have worked hard to pursue figure skating while maintaining their academics. While figure skating is not

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a traditional school sport, it requires the same dedication, perseverance, and time management as any varsity sport. It is the goal of U.S. Figure Skating to help ensure these student-athletes are recognized for those skills.”

The process took a year. It dealt with items that included the ranking and schoolwork. Sassano, a senior at Fairview Park High School, has a 4.2 grade-point average.

Her mother remembers that first skate for a different reason.

“Did Jessie tell you she broke my arm?” Melanie asked, laughing. “She fell down and I went to reach for her, and I fell down.”

It hasn't been easy. Sassano, the only daughter and youngest of four children, practices about three hours each day at Winterhurst ice skating rink in Lakewood. She also teaches young skaters. She does this while going to school.

“I have a strange schedule,” she said. “I go to class. Then, I go to practice. Then I come back to class. Then, I go to practice. And I finish up with school.”

Throw in that schedule time for teaching youngsters to skate as well.

That work has paid off. With the high ranking, there is a very good chance Sassano will be going to the National Solo Dance Final in Santa Clarita, California, Sept. 7-10. The top six in each region qualify.

Sassano has been to the nationals before. In 2015, she and partner Ethan Hall finished fourth. Sassano at 10 was the youngest competitor at the tournament.

Sassano is good, to put it simply. She is a six-time gold medalist, which means she has won six out of seven gold medals. The only event she did not win was for pairs figure skating.

But that final might be at a bad time. She will be starting college then at The Ohio State University.

“It's going to be rough,” Sassano said. “That's about the time classes begin. I won't have time to get used to it. Still, I wouldn't change anything. It's incredible.”

Would a trip to Milano Cortina for the 2026 Olympics be in the future?

“It's been my dream since I was a little girl,” Sassano said. “I think every girl who skates dreams about being in the Olympics.”

Her mother says it's possible, but she wants her daughter to enjoy college.

“When they're in figure skating, they miss



Photo courtesy of Melanie Sassano

Ranked third in the country, Jessica Sassano splits time with school but has a 4.2 GPA.

out on so much,” Michelle said. “She's going to compete in solo dance for Ohio State, and when that season is over, she'll compete in solo dance

for the United States Figure Skating Association.”

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