

# 'Fit Girl' campers told to follow their dreams

By SUE HOFFMAN

Olympic gold medalist Dominique Moceanu understands the importance of determination and following her dream. Six weeks before the 1996 Olympics in Atlanta, she was diagnosed with a stress fracture in her leg.

"My career could have ended easily if I hadn't had the determination," she told girls, ages 9 to 13, attending Fit Girl Camp at Roxbury Elementary School in Solon last week. "My Olympic dream was hanging in balance. I reached for the gold despite my injury."

Ms. Moceanu followed her dream. Although she didn't win an individual gold medal, her performance contributed to achievement of a gold medal for the U.S. gymnastics' team. At age 14, she was the youngest U.S. gymnast in history to win a gold medal. She had trained for 11 of those 14 years, earning several national titles along the way.

"You can imagine the pride and honor," Ms. Moceanu said about her team's Olympic victory. The team, which was the first and only U.S. team to win the Olympic team gold medal, became known as the "Magnificent Seven."

"Accomplishing your goal is never easy," said Ms. Moceanu, the daughter of Romanian immigrants. Now married to former Ohio State gymnast Dr. Michael Canales and the mother of two children, she gave her advice on how to succeed.

"Find sound mentors. Surround yourself with greatness. When you accomplish one goal you have another dream. Never stop believing you can accomplish those things. Learn to stay motivated when people want to

pull you down."

Besides winning the Olympics, Ms. Moceanu dreamed of becoming an author — which is another dream that has come true.

In 2009, she signed with Disney to co-author "The Elite Gymnasts," a four-book series for middle schoolers about teens going after the gold at the Olympics. The book combines her own experience as well as that of others, she said.

Ms. Moceanu's messages fit in perfectly with the theme of Fit Girl Camp, said camp founder and President Leah Lambert Dustin, of Chagrin Falls. "Our camp is designed to empower girls by providing consistent messages and effective take-away tools that develop personal responsibility for a healthy lifestyle and wellness."

Ms. Lambert Dustin, who has taught health and physical education for the past 19 years in the Solon School District, with experience at every grade level, started Fit Girl Camp in 2007.

"This camp stems from the powerful effects exercise has had throughout my life," said Mrs. Lambert Dustin, the mother of two daughters and a son. She said her own hobbies of fitness training and running have greatly enriched her life.

"Our teachers and trained specialists help girls develop the fun side of fitness by offering action-packed educational games, workouts and activities that reinforce the importance of strong mind and strong body connections," she said.

Since it was launched, Fit Girl Camp has run for several sessions each summer. This month, two one-week sessions were held at Roxbury



Photo by Itamar Gat

Olympic gold medalist Dominique Moceanu told campers at Fit Girl Camp, in Solon, to follow their dreams.

Elementary School. A session will be held at St. Joan of Arc School in Chagrin Falls July 11 to 15.

Ms. Lambert Dustin said 74 students are attending Fit Girl Camp this summer, including 44 in Solon.

Maria Baldini, who will be a seventh-grader at Solon Middle School, was back at Fit Girl Camp for the fourth year. "I'm a cheerleader and I also tumble," she said. "Mrs. Dustin gives us a good example to follow and keeps us moving."

In addition to Ms. Lambert Dustin, staff members include assistant director Heather Brzuski, a health and physical education teacher in the South Euclid-Lyndhurst School District; physical education specialist Sue Bubonics, a Solon teacher who facilitates after-school programs for kindergarten through sixth grade; Katie Kravetz, a graduate of Solon High School and Miami University who provides dietetics and nutritional awareness instruction; along with guest speakers.