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OLYMPIC DREAMS

Could pole dancers spin their way to a gold medal?

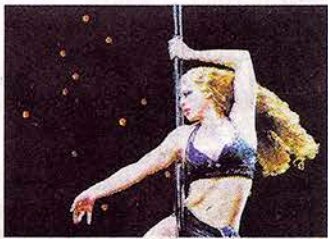
By Ed Komenda
A version of this story was posted on lasvegassun.com at 2 a.m. Friday.

If Fawnia Dietrich gets her way, the 2016 Olympic Games will come equipped with a stage anchored by two poles — one that spins and one that doesn't.

The Las Vegas pole fitness instructor is pushing to make pole dancing an Olympic sport. An online petition, sponsored by Vertical Dance and Labfitness, has more than 7,000 signatures.

It has been a tough sell trying to get the International Olympic Committee to recognize pole dancing as a legitimate sport.

"We haven't convinced them



MONA SHIELD PAYNE / SPECIAL TO THE SUN

Artist Emily Belmont showcases pole dancing.

yet," said Dietrich, founder of Las Vegas' Pole Fitness Studio and the mastermind behind the Pole Expo taking place this weekend.

More than 1,200 pole fitness enthusiasts stormed the Palms to attend pole dancing workshops and compete. The expo

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Artist Shaina Cruza performs during the 2013 U.S. National Pole Championships at the Tropicana.

DANCERS BEGAN TO SPIN IN THE '20S

runs through Sunday. Dietrich hopes it will help her Olympic campaign. "Pole dancing has been taught for almost 20 years," Dietrich said. "Most people dance because it's fun... and empowering." The practice demands fitness that in many ways resembles Olympic training. "Some of them come in here, and you're just like, 'God, I wish I had your arms,'" said chiropractor Kintara Oku, who treats Dietrich and other local pole dancers. "It's an unbelievable exercise."

Oku treats male pole dancers, as well — mostly former gymnasts looking for a new sport. The chiropractor says women tend to be better pole dancers because they're more flexible.

But even good flexibility can't prevent injuries. Many of Oku's patients come to him with injured rhomboid muscles, which are attached to the spine just below the neck. The muscles retract the shoulder blade.

Oku sees arm and leg injuries, too. Inverted moves require lots of shoulder strength. Dancers also depend on their hands, calves, hamstrings, abs and bottoms. Posture and a good grip are key elements. Oku also wouldn't be surprised if pole dancing eventually does make its way into the Olympics. "They do stuff on the stage that amazes you," Oku said.

Want to know more about pole dancing? Here are some facts about the ancient art: • Pole dancing isn't just for women. • The proliferation of pole dancing fitness classes over the past decade has made the practice more acceptable for men and children. Some studios offer pole dancing classes for kids as young as 5. Male gymnasts also frequently pole dance to stay in shape. • Pole dancing is a fusion of Chinese, Indian, Dutch and French dances. The Indian sport mallakhamb, in which

tricks are performed on a wooden pole, is believed to have originated in the 12th century. Chinese pole dancers use two poles and hop from one to another. Their poles typically are covered in rubber to allow the performers to stick better. Both sports are generally male dominated.

Western pole dancing originated in the 1920s at traveling fairs, in which women would dance on a pole on small stages. • Some poles spin. Most clubs use rotating poles. Spinning poles mean dancers need less strength to perform moves. Dancers typically look more graceful, like figure skaters, when using rotating poles. If pole dancing ever does become an Olympic sport, there likely would be categories for both spinning and stationary poles.

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How to work a pole like a dancer rather than a fireman

By Ed Komenda
If you're not hip to the language, conversations between pole dancers might surprise you. Like any sport or hobby, it has its own lingo. It's not too hard to catch on, though. Many moves explain themselves and are literal representations of the concept they depict. Want to look like a pro on the pole? Or at least understand the dancers' locker room talk? Here are a few pole dance moves defined:

The Superman
This move looks like it sounds. Like a flying superhero, a dancer positions his or her body parallel to the ground, with one arm extended. To keep themselves suspended, dancers must squeeze the pole between their thighs and hold on with their other hand.

The caterpillar
This move is named for the "S" shape into which it contorts a dancer's body. The dancer is inverted and holds onto the pole in three ways: with pinched knees, wrapped feet and squeezed hand.

The butterfly
Like you learned in biology class, the butterfly comes after the caterpillar. Invert your torso, spread your limbs and mimic the shape of a butterfly's open wings.

The gemini
This move requires no hands. The success of the gemini depends on the strength and confidence of a dancer. To perform the gemini, a dancer suspends his or her body upside down, with arms spread wide and the pole tucked snugly between his or her calf and thigh. Because the move is so complex, dancers often practice it with their shoulders at ground level.