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Lee-Elabd plans on attending Princeton

by BAIN SERNA

A LAMO HEIGHTS – When it comes to crossing swords with other people, Saint Mary's Hall graduate Farrah Lee-Elabd usually emerges the victor.

The 17-year-old earned a bronze medal in fencing earlier this year at the 2016 Junior World Cup held in Burgos, Spain, and is on her way to the NCAA.

"I was extremely surprised and proud to have medaled at such a challenging tournament," said Lee-Elabd of her World Cup bronze. "I began the day with no expectations, and before I knew it I was



Farrah Lee-Elabd (right), a graduating senior at Saint Mary's Hall, took the bronze in fencing in January during the 2016 Junior World Cup held at Burgos, Spain. She plans on attending Princeton University in the fall, where she will continue to compete with the blade. Courtesy photo

already fencing in the semifinals. Winning bronze reminded me of my ability as a fencer, and it reassured me that I am still continuing to improve as a fencer."

Lee-Elabd's win was dubbed "La Revolución de Las Modestas" (The

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Rebellion of the Underdogs) by a Spanish newspaper the day after the World Cup, due to her victory over top-ranked fencers. Lee-Elabd will soon be taking her fencing skills to Princeton University, where she will be on the fencing team vying for an NCAA championship.

Lee-Elabd's parents, Darren El-Abd and Nina Lee, played a crucial role in her international success.

"Without their unwavering support and commitment, it would have been impossible for me to reach the elite-level fencing that I've achieved," Lee-Elabd said.

Lee, who graduated in May from Saint Mary's Hall, said she never dreamed her daughter would win a medal at the Junior World Cup this past January, where 168 of the best fencers in the world age 20 and younger competed.

"I watched all her bouts and was impressed at how well she was fencing," Lee said. "In order to get that medal, Farrah had to fight extremely hard to defeat several more experienced top world-ranked

fencers, including Nadine Stahlberg from Germany and Irina Okhotnikova from Russia, who are currently ranked No. 1 and 4 in the world, respectively. Also to her credit, Farrah was the youngest fencer to get a medal at that competition."

Lee-Elabd started fencing when she was 7 and began competitions at 9. She has traveled nationally and internationally for fencing competitions, earning many medals, including gold, in high-level competitions.

"I tried several sports when I was younger such as gymnastics, soccer, softball and golf, but none of them clicked with me," said Lee-Elabd, an Alamo Heights resident.

The teen specializes in the epee fencing discipline (the other two are saber and foil) and trains at Olympian Fencing Club, 3200 McCullough Ave., under the guidance of coaches Velizar Iliev and Viktor Svatenko. Iliev was a U.S. Olympian and three-time world champion in modern pentathlon (a five-discipline sport that includes fencing), and Svatenko

is a four-time Olympic coach.

"She has a very mentally tough personality, which has helped her during her fencing career," said Iliev of his pupil. "Fencing is a very challenging mix of physical and tactical and is equally suited to male and female. Fencing requires a lot of thinking and planning, but it's in a split second, as everything happens very fast."

Lee-Elabd said she has learned a lot about dedication, focus and strength through fencing.

"Competing in any tournament is physically exhausting, but I know that the only way to win is to endure the fatigue for as long as possible," she said.

She takes academics just as seriously as her athletics, including her years in the private school on the North Side.

"I feel very fortunate to have attended Saint Mary's Hall for the past four years," she said. "I am grateful that the faculty and staff have been extremely accommodating and supportive of my fencing endeavors. It takes a lot of work and proper time management. I do homework in

airports, on planes and in hotels."

Over the years, fencing has taught Lee-Elabd self confidence and self reliance, according to her father.

"She gained important critical thinking and time-management skills," El-Abd said. "Farrah is an incredibly smart, hard-working and determined young lady. She is an honor student at Saint Mary's Hall and a 2016 National Merit Scholarship finalist."

Princeton is known for having one of the strongest epee fencing teams, according to Lee-Elabd.

"I am very excited to experience collegiate fencing," she said.

She is looking forward to attending Princeton.

"I hope that my fencing skills will contribute to the Princeton fencing legacy," she said. "I hope to help Princeton win the NCAA tournament during my years there while also taking full advantage of my time as a Princeton student. I want to explore my passions and hopefully get an excellent career start." 