



Natalia Oustroumov

**“Israel has been very good to me.
It would give me great pride to be the
first Israeli woman boxing contender in
the 2012 Olympics, and to represent my
country with honor.”**



הסוכנות היהודית לארץ ישראל
Jewish Agency for Israel



Natalia Oustroumov (22) was born in St. Petersburg, Russia. With the fall of the Soviet Union her parents made aliyah with their three young daughters in 1992. The family's first home was at the Jewish Agency Absorption Center in Ashkelon. Four years later, they moved to Afula.

In Afula, Natalia's younger sister attended one of the first after-school boxing clubs for girls. Natalia joined her shortly thereafter. "Amateur boxing for women only began in Israel in 1998," says Natalia. "So when I joined in 1999, it was still in its infancy."

At first, boxing was just a sport for Natalia. However, she was very good and was encouraged by the club trainer to practice more seriously. In 2001, the boxing champion of Kazakhstan made aliyah and taught Natalia what competitive boxing was all about. "I was the Israeli women's boxing champion for six years," laughs Natalie. "But there was almost no competition."

In addition to her training, Natalie, as the oldest sister, helped her mother to care for her five younger siblings after her parents'

divorce. During her army service, Natalie was recognized as an "outstanding athlete" and was able to continue her training.

In March 2005, at an International Competition in Russia, in which Natalia won the gold medal, she was spotted by the Russian Olympic coach. He invited her to train with the Olympic team during the summer. When the second Lebanon war broke out she was frightened for her mother and five brothers and sisters, and had difficulty training.

For Natalie, the hardest part of her career is the financial stress. There is not much economic support, and Natalie receives help from her 72-year-old grandmother, a retired surgeon who still lives in Russia. She is studying physics at the Open University, and tutors high school students to make extra money.

Natalie recently received support from the Jewish Agency for Israel to attend a competition in India. She also won a gold medal in an international competition in Berlin, and stood with tears in her eyes as "Hatikva", the Israeli national anthem was played. "I hope to be able to participate in the 2012 Olympics. It would be an honor to represent my country – Israel."