

DAISY FLORES



BY MIRA RADOVICH  
PHOTOGRAPHY BY MICHAEL MERTZ

# GOING FOR

FLORES TRAINING AT THE  
ARIZONA FENCING CENTER IN MESA



**Y**ou have cancer.”

Those are three words that no person wants to hear. At age 30 and a picture of health, Daisy Flores, Gila County Attorney, never expected to hear them when they were uttered to her.

It was August 2001 and Flores had just returned from the United States Fencing Championships in Sacramento, where she took third place in the Women’s Division I Epee competition.

Flores, an avid athlete, was born and raised in Globe, one of eight children with nary a broken bone among them. “I was the healthy one, so it was a shock,” says Flores of her diagnosis. “I got back from Nationals and the next day my doctor told me I had thyroid cancer.”

# THE GOLD

Attorney Athletes Strut Their Stuff

## “THERE’S NOTHING I’M AFRAID OF IN THE COURTROOM BECAUSE I FACE SOMEBODY WITH A WEAPON IN THEIR HAND EVERY DAY.”

Three weeks later, Flores had surgery to remove her thyroid. (During the procedure, her parathyroids were inadvertently damaged. Because of this Flores has to take calcium supplements every four hours for the rest of her life.)

Three months later she won the North American Championships in Women’s Division I-A Epee.

“I beat our national champion, former Olympians and the No. 1-ranked female Canadian fencer,” Flores says. “Physically I was not up to par, but my mind took over and told my body what to do.”

Such a feat is another day at the office for Flores, the first female county attorney in Gila County.

“We’re a small community, but it’s definitely interesting for the public to have the perception that there is a woman in this

office, where people typically look to a male figure,” says Flores. That’s also one of the reasons she enjoys fencing.

“It’s a rare sport where a woman can be outmuscled by a man, but she can still out-think him,” Flores says. “I’m only 5’4” and it is an advantage to be small in fencing because there is less target area, and you can get in close and fight close.”

“That’s why I think it’s great for girls—it puts you on an even playing field with boys.”

Flores competes with men at local and regional events and says their reaction when beaten by a woman ranges from shock to horror to anger. However, she says that fencing has a genteel aspect to it, such as opponents saluting each other, and that keeps the sport civil.

Last summer Flores was invited to train

at the Olympic training facility in Colorado Springs before heading to the World Fencing Championships in Portugal, where she finished in the top-half of competitors.

“It was pretty amazing to represent the United States as an athlete,” Flores says, adding that in Europe, fencing is treated like NBA basketball is here. “Athletes were signing autographs all over the place.”

Back in Globe, Flores continues to train daily and hopes to reach her goal of winning a national title in Division I Epee. “To compete at the Olympic level, you have no other existence than fencing,” she says. “You have to compete in about 10 to 15 world cup events in Europe each year, which I can’t do with my job. I’m one of the few competitive fencers who is a professional with a full-time job.”

Flores likens being a prosecutor to competitive fencing. “When you are in a courtroom, you are one-on-one with your opponent,” she says. “Like any attack the defense might present, I have to find my parry and riposte it. There’s nothing I’m afraid of in the courtroom because I face somebody with a weapon in their hand every day.”

## IN THE SWIM



Charlie Hickcox doesn’t face courtroom battles every day, but the Phoenix attorney and real estate developer knows all about winning. But as you sit with Hickcox amid the mountain of blueprints engulfing his office, you would never guess you are in the midst of an Olympic swimming champion.

Growing up in Phoenix, Hickcox began swimming competitively at age 12. In high school he wanted to try other sports like football and basketball. “I was 6 feet tall and weighed 135 pounds,” Hickcox recalls, “but my parents wouldn’t sign the release because I was so frail they thought I’d get killed.”



**CHARLIE HICKCOX**

Hickcox (left) in 1968 on a  
"100 Greatest Olympic Athletes"  
card, and today in his north  
Phoenix office.

**“AT THE OLYMPICS, YOU ARE REPRESENTING YOUR COUNTRY, AND THERE IS NOTHING BETTER THAN THAT. NOW, EVERY TIME I SEE A FLAG OR HEAR THE NATIONAL ANTHEM, I STILL GET THE SAME CHILLS.”**



The Olympic medals ceremony in Mexico City, 1968. Hickcox (center) receives a gold for the 200-meter individual medley.

Thanks to his tall, lithe frame, Hickcox excelled at swimming, earning a scholarship to Indiana University in 1965. He helped lead the Hoosiers to seven NCAA swimming titles, and in 1968, he qualified for the Olympic games held that year in Mexico City.

Hickcox was 21 when he took the games by storm, winning three gold medals (200 meter individual medley, 400 meter individual medley, 400 meter medley relay) and one silver (100 meter backstroke).

“At the Olympics, you are representing your country, and there is nothing better than that,” says Hickcox. “It was the pinnacle—seeing those flags go up when I

won. Now, every time I see a flag or hear the national anthem, I still get the same chills and feel the same pride of being an American.”

Hickcox says he is humbled by the experience. “Winning really meant a lot to me, but it didn’t overshadow me, didn’t make my life. I’d be the same person today even without the gold medals. They don’t make you a better person than anyone else. There are a lot of people who work really hard and don’t make it, and they are still great people.”

Today, Hickcox uses his medals and Olympic experience to educate the public. He delivers motivational speeches to schools, businesses and civic groups. “My

message to kids is about listening,” he says. “I tell kids that listening to your parents, teachers and coaches and being prepared is how you win.”

Hickcox says preparing for the Olympics taught him about having a successful career. “After I got my law degree, I practiced for five years as a litigator,” he says. “Being a competitor and the intensity of preparation is very important for litigation.”

As a developer of shopping centers, Hickcox focuses on contracts in management and sales. He enjoys his work and the camaraderie of his colleagues. “We have a group of dedicated people and everyone pulls together,” Hickcox says. “It is a team effort, just like in sports, and every person here is important to the process.”

A self-described Hawkeye Pierce-type, Hickcox finds fun in whatever activity or challenge he faces. “My goal for each day is to make somebody smile or laugh, and if I do that, I’m successful.”

## OLYMPIC DREAMS DEFERRED

**A**n Olympic gold medal was also the dream of Greenberg Traurig attorney Ben Aguilera, who grew up in Juarez, Mexico, across the border from El Paso, Tex. Aguilera joined the Junior Mexican Volleyball team in Mexico City when he finished high school in 1978. He began training up to nine hours per day, five days a week, and he went to college from 6:00 p.m. to 10:00 p.m.

The hard work paid off as Aguilera made the senior volleyball team in 1979. The team competed in the qualifying round for the 1980 Olympic games in Moscow but was defeated by the United

**BEN AGUILERA**



States. Ultimately, the United States decided to boycott the Olympics, making the Mexican team the next up to go to the games.

“Mexico as a country did not join the boycott,” Aguilera says. “They left it up to each individual sports federation, and the volleyball federation decided not to send a team.”

**“SPORTS ACTUALLY  
MADE ME A  
DIFFERENT PERSON.  
IT TAUGHT ME  
A LOT OF  
DISCIPLINE.  
IT TAUGHT ME  
TO MAINTAIN MY  
STRENGTHS AND  
IMPROVE MY  
WEAKNESSES AND  
TO BE FOCUSED.”**

“Not going to Moscow was a crush,” Aguilera says. “It felt like somebody gave me a blow to the stomach. At that time I was so disappointed that I was looking for alternatives on how to accomplish my dream.”

In 1982, Aguilera finished college with a business administration in accounting degree and had to make a decision to pursue a career in sports or in finance. At the time, the Brazilian national volleyball team was training in Mexico, and Aguilera practiced with them.

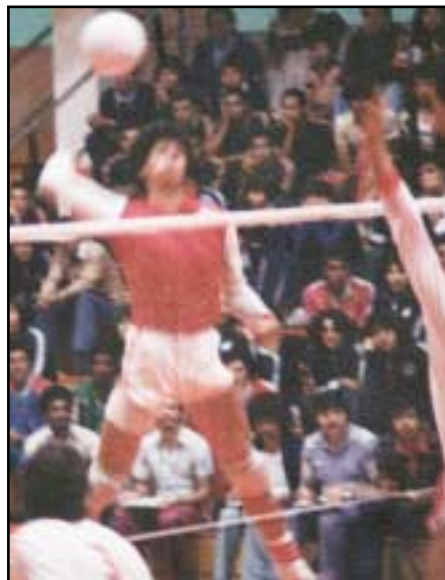
“The Brazilian coach asked me if I wanted to join their team,” says Aguilera. “He didn’t guarantee me a spot on the team but did promise an opportunity to at least try out. I debated whether to join the team, and to this day it was one of the harder decisions of my life.”

Aguilera would have had to change his nationality and commit to remaining with the Brazilian team for three years. When he





Above: Aguilera at the World University Games held in Mexico City in 1979.



Left: Spiking the ball en route to a victory against Germany at the World Cup in Argentina, 1982.

discovered Mexico would be fielding its own team for the 1984 Olympics in Los Angeles, he declined the Brazilian offer.

“We didn’t qualify in 1984, and Brazil ended up playing the United States for the gold medal,” Aguilera laments. “I still regret that decision, but I would have felt at the time that I was betraying my country.”

After getting a graduate degree in finance and coaching volleyball for seven years, Aguilera went to law school. He began doing audits of international corporations along the U.S.-Mexico border, where he interacted with American accountants and attorneys. His diverse

training led him to a career in international corporate securities law in Phoenix.

“I like to help my clients make money, provide jobs to help Mexico grow and expand Arizona’s markets globally,” Aguilera says. “I help U.S. clients establish relationships with Mexican manufacturing companies. With my background and knowing the language, I know what it takes to do business in Mexico.”

Aguilera says he would not be successful in law without his athletic experience. “Sports actually made me a different person,” Aguilera says. “It taught me a lot of discipline. It taught me to maintain my strengths and improve my weaknesses and to be focused. You have to know what game you want to play, know the rules of that game and train if you want to be successful.”

These Arizona attorneys all have parlayed athletic victories—and adversity—into successful law careers. Even the venerable broadcaster Dick Vitale would have just one thing to say: “Awesome, Baby.” ▀