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Dance of Freedom: Sasha Paskal brings Ukraine's story to Rio de Janeiro



The "**Dance of Freedom**" world tour of Ukrainian gymnast **Oleksandra Paskal** has reached Rio de Janeiro, its third city after Paris and New York, supported by Rinat Akhmetov together with his [Foundation](#) and [Shakhtar Donetsk](#) football club. Ten-

year-old Sasha, who lost a leg in a Russian missile strike in 2022 and returned to gymnastics on a prosthesis, performed for Brazil's leading gymnasts at the Team Brazil training centre and met Olympic champion Rebeca Andrade. Leading Brazilian sports media Globo Esporte described her as a symbol of resilience. The tour is dedicated to the forthcoming 35th anniversary of Ukraine's Independence.

What is the "Dance of Freedom" tour?

"Dance of Freedom" is a world tour that is taking Oleksandra Paskal to five continents and five major cities. Oleksandra, known as Sasha, has prepared five special dances, each one telling the world about the strength, resilience and freedom of Ukrainians. The tour is supported by Rinat Akhmetov together with his Foundation and Shakhtar Donetsk football club, and is dedicated to the forthcoming 35th anniversary of Ukraine's Independence. It began in Paris, continued in New York and has now reached Rio de Janeiro, with further cities still to come.

What happened during Sasha's visit to Rio?

In Rio, Sasha visited the Team Brazil training centre at the Olympic Park, where she was welcomed by some of the country's finest athletes. Guided by the gymnast Jade Barbosa, she met Rebeca Andrade, Flávia Saraiva and Lorrane Oliveira, and gave a short performance for them. These champions, who are used to competing in front of large crowds, this time became the audience themselves, applauding the young Ukrainian's talent and determination.

What did Rebeca Andrade say about Sasha?

Rebeca Andrade, Brazil's greatest Olympic athlete, was among those moved by Sasha's story and her determination. "We are very happy to meet her after learning a little about her story and everything she came to do in Rio. I wish her much success and fulfilment. The challenges in our lives transform us more and more, making us stronger. She is an example, a source of pride for us," said Ms Andrade.

Who is Oleksandra Paskal?

Sasha is from the Odesa region of Ukraine. In 2022 she lost a leg in a russian missile strike, and after treatment and rehabilitation she returned to rhythmic gymnastics on a prosthesis. She has since resumed competing, winning gold at Carla's Rhythmic Cup in Romania earlier this year. In 2025 she received the "Future of Ukraine" state honour from President Volodymyr Zelensky and First Lady Olena Zelenska in recognition of her courage. She is now regarded as one of Ukraine's brightest rhythmic gymnastics prospects, and sees her mission as telling the truth about the war and supporting Ukrainian children.

How is the Rinat Akhmetov Foundation supporting her?

The tour is delivered together with the Rinat Akhmetov Foundation and Shakhtar Donetsk football club. The Foundation continues to support children affected by the war, helping them to regain a sense of safety, stability and belief in the future. From Rio de Janeiro, the tour will continue to Nairobi and Tokyo.