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Northwestern fencer Courtney Dumas hopes to compete for the United States at the 2016 Olympics.

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THREE WILDCAT FENCERS START PREPARATIONS FOR THE 2016 SUMMER GAMES.

With the 2016 Summer Games in Rio de Janeiro just two years away, the Northwestern fencing team has three fencers in contention for an Olympic bid. Senior Dina Bazarbayeva and junior Courtney Dumas are both training to make the U.S. squad. Sophomore Juliana Barrett aims to compete for South Africa.

Both Bazarbayeva, a two-time All-America épée fencer who finished 15th overall in her weapon at the 2014 NCAA Championships, and Dumas, who finished 20th in épée, returned home in the spring for extra training with their private coaches before beginning the qualification process. (Bazarbayeva is from Houston; Dumas from Cleveland.)

"It's definitely a lot more intensive," says Bazarbayeva. "Training requires so much time. All of your energy and emotions are put into the sport."

Last year Dumas got a taste of the big time, fencing for the United States at the 2013 World University Games in Kazan, Russia — a competition that is essentially the Olympics for college athletes.

Barrett, who grew up in New York City, holds dual U.S. and South African citizenship. Her father lives in Johannesburg, and when she considered fencing internationally, she decided to represent South Africa "to explore that side of my heritage," says Barrett, South Africa's senior national champion in épée and next year's épée squad captain for Northwestern. "It has opened so many doors for me not only to see the world but also to raise my fencing to a much more competitive level."