

SPORTS LAMORINDA'S LOCAL SPORTS NEWS



Synchronized Swimming: An Inside Look

By Lou Fancher



A lift: Marisa Tashima launches off of Suying Rothrock, fellow WCA and 13-15 National Team member. Photo Miles Tashima

Marisa Tashima is a champion athlete. The Lafayette sophomore, a 14-year-old Acalanes student, trains four hours, five days

a week—and six hours on Saturdays. She's a swimmer/runner/gymnast/dancer/water polo player-equivalent and an all-around cardio queen: she's an Aquanaut.

The Walnut Creek Aquanauts, a nationally-ranked synchronized swimming team, has produced eight Gold Medal Olympians. Started in 1968 by Sue Alf, the team has won over 200 national and world titles. This August, at the Pan American UANA Age Group Synchronized Swimming Championship in Peru, the Aquanauts placed first in the team, combo and duet categories. Tashima swam in each of those events and also won the individual silver medal in the solo competition.

"When I was little, I wanted to do gymnastics, and swimming and soccer," Tashima says, demonstrating her enormous appetite for athletic competition. "My mom went online and found synchro."

Tashima remembers her first year in training as a chaotic one. "There were a lot of people and I didn't know what I was doing. My first routine was an alley cat rou-

tine in a bright green suit." It sounds cute, until you hear the team's weekly training regimen: running, stretching, strength training, sit-ups, pull-ups, push-ups, core work, and laps in the pool. And all of that followed by drilling routines and perfecting figures, the fundamental technical skills required for the sport.

"I have to have a big breakfast," Tashima says, when asked how she fuels the daily four hour work-outs. "I eat eggs, spam, bacon, rice, hash-browns, sausage—" she pauses. "I'm hungry all the time. I have lunch at school, then I have second lunch when I get home. And a big dinner after practice too. I'm into short ribs, steak, tri-tips."

She's also into flamingoes, a position in which one leg bends to the chest, while the other extends perpendicular to the water. "Flamingoes are worth the most in competition," she explains, "so you want to do well on them." Seated on a sunny bench in her backyard, she describes the movement, then

adds, "It would be easy, if it was fast, but you're supposed to go so slow that it's hard and be so high in the water that it hurts."

If slow speed and position height are two challenging aspects of the sport, it's lung capacity that pushes synchro-swimmers into the endurance category. "I don't think people think it's that hard, because it looks so easy. But it's supposed to look easy, or we wouldn't be good," Tashima says. Like ballet dancers, synchro swimmers perform miraculous physical feats; all masked with grace and absent the grunts allowed on a football field. "But our routines have intricate patterns, matching other bodies, and precision," she emphasizes.

Solid coaching is what Tashima says has led to the Aquanauts' success. "Tammy McGregor—she coached the 2008 Olympic team—she knows how to coach. She's always positive. For me, she says, 'It's just synchro,' when I'm at a big competition. She works with me on spinning and my posture in the water."

In 2009, Tashima went to

Serbia for the Comen Cup competition. "It was my first time out of the country," she says. And this year, the Peru competition provided another opportunity to meet swimmers from 13 different countries. "There's a big trading thing at the end of the meet, and because we got first, lots of people wanted our signatures, pictures and our warm-ups. I felt a sense of national pride, because they thought of us, not as a club, but as representing the U.S."

Tashima says synchro can lead to a job with Cirque de Soleil, or work in films, like the upcoming Pirates of the Caribbean movie. She's more likely to turn her attention to a career in math, science, or medicine, but that doesn't lessen her ambition for the coming year. She plans to work on her technique, and apply her formula for staying cool and collected in competition: "I take three calming breaths, and I have three messages I tell myself. It's just synchro. You can do it. And team. 'Cause even when I'm alone in the water, my team is all around me."

Equestrian Rider Participates in Junior Olympics

Submitted by Susan Loria



Kelly Loria has been riding horses since she was seven years old. She has been training as an equestrian rider with Heidi Riddle since she was ten.

This summer her hard work paid off and she qualified for the team (Area VI California & Hawaii) – Kelly went to Kentucky to compete in the North American Junior Young Rider Championships. In a Cinderella-type story she and her off-the-track thoroughbred, Lucy in the Sky With Diamonds, won both the Individual Gold and Team Gold medals. The Championship is recognized by the United States Olympic Committee as the Junior Olympics for riders ages 15-21.

Photo provided (source: Brant Gamma Photos)

Lafayette Equestrian Wins National Titles

Submitted by Shoshana Mark



Erica Mark completing her victory lap at the Canadian Nationals.

Photo provided

Erica Mark won a national title at the prestigious Arabian National Horse Show in Regina, Saskatchewan on August 17th. Erica won her title in the 13-and-under Hunter Pleasure discipline on her horse "A Time to Dance." She won another national title in a similar event and a reserve championship title (first runner-up) on her English Arabian horse, "Botox," winning against competitors in the

17-and-under class.

Mark progressed to the national level by earning local and regional qualifying points at equestrian events throughout the northwest region, the Arabian Horse Association, Region 3. Different rules and standards apply to each class of competition, depending on the event and age of rider. Mark qualified in the youth division.

Mark is a senior member of the show-team of "Earthquake Arabians," a competitive group of young equestrians located in Clayton. Although her three Arabian horses are trained and groomed by seasoned professionals, Mark spends her weekends riding, taking advanced lessons and caring for her horses.

Mark lives in Lafayette and is a freshman at Acalanes.

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