

History of Synchronized Swimming in Mount Pearl

Synchronized swimming is an Olympic sport that combines swimming, dance and gymnastics. The sport demands speed, strength, endurance, flexibility, power, grace, precise timing, as well as exceptional breath control. There are two distinctive levels of synchronized swimming; the “A” competitive program is for elite athletes who have full time every day training that train for the Canada Games and Newfoundland Games, whereas the “B” program is geared for anybody.

Synchronized swimming in Mount Pearl has developed into the organization it is today with the outstanding dedication of several devoted individuals, most importantly an individual by the name of Joan Burry. Joan, a Mount Pearl Sports Hall of Fame member, has always been a swimmer, but has never, ever done ANY synchronized swimming. After replacing a synchro coach that was on maternity leave, Joan fell in love with the sport. From then on she went to coaching clinics, and read every book there was on synchro and watched every video there was. The athletes then flocked to Joan to start swimming. Indeed, to attract more athletes Joan claims that the first 4-5 kids in the program would put on 2 hour demonstrations at summer camps at the pool. Moreover, “ every year we would hold a full week of synchro camp and we would recruit, recruit and recruit from there...and with a swimming session after our synchro practice, we grabbed the attention of those who were there early”. Having little for resources, Mount Pearl Synchro started off as hosting “B” programs but no “A” programs. They lost a lot of their athletes to other facilities because they could not accommodate their skill level. This is not the case today, Mount Pearl Synchro accommodates both programs. In fact, when synchro in Mount Pearl first started athletes had to officially tested for their skill levels (as is the case today as well). But, at that time the athletes did not have the finances to have themselves tested so Joan paid for their registration so the athletes could get tested for their stars. They put together a Newfoundland Winter Games Team and went to Gander in 1978-1979; “ It was our first fun outing and we started competing in everything we could in Newfoundland.”

The pool in Mount Pearl is $\frac{3}{4}$ shallow and $\frac{1}{4}$ deep, as is the pool in CBS. The synchro teams from Mount Pearl had to think outside the box when creating their routines; “ We did a lot of pattern changes under the shallow end [ballet legs, etc]. The underwater patterns are immensely complex. When synchro first started in Mount Pearl “ we had to fundraise to get [underwater] speakers. We contacted other clubs in Atlantic Canada to find out where they got their [technology]”. The speakers provide a means for the swimmers to hear their coaches underwater very clearly. This helps them work of the critical timing of movements in their routines. Joan states that one of her Newfoundland Games teams did “6 lengths of the pool and 27 pattern changes... they were phenomenal”.

Costumes are also very important in synchro. Joan states that teams used to design their own bathing suits; “ Your team all had to be the same and trying to get eight bathing suits alike, in the sizes that you needed them [was impossible]. So we used to design our own and go to Tuckmore [no longer in existence] and they would make them. They would make our Track

suits and they would make our swim suits. Then we would design and put sequence on them ourselves. I remember sitting on a plane with a whole package of sequence year after year with a needle and thread making [several identical] headpieces.”

Judging of competitions has changed as well. In the earlier years teams were judged once, now they are judged on both choreography and skill. Figures are compulsory and are added to the overall score as well; “ So you may come first in teams, but you may come third overall because your figure marks are not up there...everything is equal...everything is important.”

An event that Joan will never forget is the winning of the gold medal in the 1988 Summer Games hosted by Mount Pearl; “ You know, they walked on water. I will remember it to this day, even though that wasn’t yesterday... Heather Strong, Deborah Hillier, Karen Rossiter, Kelly Kiley, Jennifer Nash... Karen Collingwood [and others were some of our swimmers]. They were over the moon! That was the year Mount Pearl got the most golds for sports in the Summer Games. It was that one I remember the most, other people in the dressing room were saying ‘why are we getting in the water, sure Mount Pearls out there!’...[It was such a great feeling for us] because we come from [a small town].[When we started] we said we would build it, so we could get there, so synchro could be there. And off we went, never looked back.”

Mount Pearl Synchro believes it is important to provide a nurturing yet disciplined environment where swimmers can develop into confident well-rounded athletes. The Mount Pearl Synchro Club focuses on team routines; they also have opportunities for Solos and Duets.

Source:

Joan Burry, founder of Mount Pearl Synchronized Swimming.