

Editorial No. 1, October 08, 2005

Bruce Davis

The United States Gymnastics Federation was founded on December 8, 1962, when I was in my first semester at Southern Connecticut State College (now known as Southern Connecticut State University). I had been enrolled at Indiana University Normal College, a physical education college located in the Athenaeum Turners building in downtown Indianapolis. I transferred to the University of Illinois my second term when my Father was recovering from mental illness. Muriel Grossfeld, my sister, became my legal guardian. Muriel and I were enrolled in the under graduate school at Illinois while Abie Grossfeld, Muriel's husband, was completing his Master's degree. I had a gymnastics background from a lifetime of acrobatic, ballet and tap dancing lessons as well as instruction at Athenaeum under Walt Lienert; but, at that time I was more interested in playing college basketball and/or baseball. After all, Oscar Robertson was my basketball idol from local Crispus Attucks High School; and, being a left-handed pitcher, I loved Warren Spann's leg kick, but wondered if it would work for me.

After completing the winter term at Illinois I had a decision to make! I could stay at Illinois, return to "Indy" to Normal College or follow Muriel and Abie to Connecticut. Muriel was going to Southern to be coached by Dick Zuber and Abie took the head men's gymnastics coaching job at the Coast Guard Academy. Muriel and Abie, both two time Olympians (Melbourne and Rome), were at the height of their competitive careers. I decided to follow Muriel and Abie to Connecticut. I was commuting to SCSU from New London (50+ miles everyday and back). I was a red shirt athletic transfer majoring in physical education and working out every afternoon with the freshman basketball team under Coach Lloyd Barrow. I would go into the small gym after basketball practice and began working rings to gain strength. The men's varsity gymnastics team worked out in the afternoon and the international gymnasts took over at night. What a sight! Muriel Grossfeld, Abie Grossfeld, Olympian Don Tonry, 9-time NAAU Tumbling Champion Barbara Galleher-Tonry, 3-time Olympian Doris Fuchs Brause, NCAA PH Champion Russell Mills and 3-time Pan Am Games gold medalist Jamile Ashmore all working out in a small gym room while I was observing and doing my muscle ups to press handstands on the rings!

Things changed quickly at Southern! Dick Zuber followed Olympian Sharon Richardson to Texas and left his coaching position and his wife. Jamile Ashmore took over as head coach while continuing graduate studies. I moved to New Haven and quit basketball to do gymnastics full time and began working out with the varsity in the afternoon. Abie left the Coast Guard Academy the following fall to become head gymnastics coach at SCSC. Muriel made her third Olympic team (Tokyo). I completed my bachelor's in Health and Physical Education; and, my two years of intercollegiate gymnastics competition along with a year on the baseball team pitching and a year playing tennis. Then it was off to

graduate school at Ohio University to get my master's degree with a return to New Haven to complete my thesis called "A Cinematographic Study of Floor Exercise Skills". Using an eight shot Polaroid camera, skills were demonstrated by Abie Grossfeld, Don Tonry, Arno Lascari, Jim Amerine and other collegiate gymnasts.

I worked all-around in college with the idea of learning more about coaching gymnastics. I had started late to have "Olympic" aspirations. With Abie as a role model, I decided that I wanted to be a collegiate coach in a college on the East coast. I took the job at Miami Dade Junior College in 1966, thinking that I would move to a Northeast college when an opening was available. I was also going to work for Nissen Corp. until I found out that I would lose my teaching deferment and be shipped off to Nam!

Muriel, in the meantime, established one of the first private gymnastics schools in the country in 1967. Upon visiting her gym school, I got the itch to try it too. I wanted to train high level gymnasts and you could not do a complete job in a two year college. In November 1969 I opened the Muriel Grossfeld School of Gymnastics of North Miami Beach. We changed the name a couple years later to alleviate name confusion with her school and we became Gymiami.

The year 1969 was eventful with opening a gym school while still teaching college fulltime, winning the Men's NJCAA Gymnastics Championship and getting an FIG judges brevet at the Penn State international judges course. The year 1970 brought more! I directed the 1970 NAAU at the Miami Beach Convention Center. FDR's son, Elliot, was the administrator from the Tourist Development Authority who staked us the money for the meet. Jackie Gleason was right next door filming the Jackie Gleason Show and Linda Metheny-Mulvihill and Cathy Rigby, 1968 Olympians and two of our greatest Olympic gymnasts were competing for the national championship.

In October of 1970 the United States won its first medal in the World Championships when Cathy Rigby placed second on the balance beam in Ljubljana, Yugoslavia. At the FIG Congress held in conjunction with the World Championships, the General Assembly of the FIG voted the United States Gymnastics Federation the official ruling body for gymnastics in the United States. Yes, a political power struggle of many years was officially over.

Why didn't I just tell you that it took over eight years for the USGF to assume control of gymnastics from the AAU and have done with it? Well, I wanted to tell you a little about my background and what I was doing while the USGF struggled for gymnastics control. At the time it was happening, I really didn't have the right perspective and I couldn't look at it historically even though the struggle was all around me due to what I was doing for work and career in my lifetime. Now my perspective is keen in hindsight and I have spent much time considering the events and the individuals involved that have created a fifty-five year history of USGF/USAG beginning with the creation of the National Association

of Gymnastic Coaches (NAGC) in 1950 until now. I want you to realize what a long struggle it was for gymnastics to become independent from a self-serving organization that was not in the sport's best interest. I want you to consider and remember the individuals who gave you what you have and why it is worth protecting. I want you to realize why it is important to be vigilant and make certain that the administrative power brokers of gymnastics direct the sport in the interest of all and not just some. I plan to do this with continuing and timely editorials and historical articles about your sport. I need feedback from you. Guest editorials will be invited. E-mail your reactions and responses to me.

Compare the USGF/AAU power struggle to the American Revolution. Some naïve Americans may think there were a few little skirmishes in Concord and Lexington and then the British nicely went home to let Americans like us rule ourselves. Some American Revolution stories, reports and documentaries reach fairy tale dimensions. The carnage and suffering of the Revolution has somehow been dismissed or barely mentioned from many of our school systems textbooks perhaps to protect the children. The economic recession and infighting between the states for power went on for years. The Declaration of Independence was signed on July 4th, 1776; but, we did not have a constitution with the correct powers until 1787 and we have been debating and adjusting ever since in a democratic process. How about the leaders who gave it their all to win independence! We talk about our "founding fathers" all the time in today's politics. What would George Washington, Ben Franklin, James Madison, Alexander Hamilton, Tom Jefferson, John Adams, Samuel Adams and others think of how today's government leadership is handling this issue or that issue in the best interest of the country? Let's ask the same question as it pertains to the sport of gymnastics, the USAG and the FIG. What would the founding fathers of the USGF (Hal Frey, Jacob Geier, Chester Phillips, Charlie Pond, Lyle Welser, Gene Wettstone, Donald Boydston, Glenn Sundby, Frank Farkas, Dick Clausen, Frank Bare, Sam Bailie, Chick Warner and others) think of how today's USAG and FIG leadership is handling the sport of gymnastics in the best interest of all people involved in the sport of gymnastics? My answer is, "Not very well." You may agree or disagree, so. . . Let's Talk Gymnastics.

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