



Marilyn Does It All

Delaware *Judge Emeritus* Marilyn Schnaars can pull up a lot of stories from her 55- year judging career. One of her favorites is when she arrived to judge the 1967 AAU Nationals in New Orleans. Meet director Vannie Edwards expressed concern that the judges would not be familiar enough with the new compulsory routines, but Muriel Davis (Grossfeld), told him, “Oh, don’t worry, Marilyn is here! She can go out and walk through the routines!” And after dropping her suitcases, that’s exactly what she did.

Marilyn has truly done it all, coaching and judging at the international level since she began her gymnastics career back in the late 50’s at West Chester State Teachers College in Pennsylvania. Trained as an acrobat, dancer, swimmer and diver (she was a national diving champion both in college and AAU), she reaped the rewards when the West Chester athletic department bought the equipment after hosting a gymnastics women’s team trials in 1959. “I could tumble, but I had to learn the other events,” Marilyn says. “I justified switching over to gymnastics because as a future teacher, most schools would have a gym, but not many would have a pool.”

Marilyn’s future husband, Dick, was the captain of the gymnastics team. She performed with Gym-Karma, an exhibition group, to promote women’s gymnastics in the area, and later competed at AAU meets. She even competed against Muriel. “She always won, but I was right behind her!” she laughs.

A teaching career at Roslyn High School beckoned. “My father took me up to Long Island so I could interview with Dr. Jack George. He wanted me to start a girls’ gymnastics program, so I took the job.”

After four years of teaching and coaching at Roslyn, Marilyn accepted a position at Carle Place, Long Island. She spent the next 30 years not only teaching school but also enhancing their girls’ gymnastics program (she retired in 1997).

In 1964, Marilyn and Richard were married, and they moved to Bethpage, Long Island. It wasn’t long before Marilyn took advantage of the beautiful new Lutheran High School facilities in the evening to become the head coach for the Metropolitan Athletic Club, starting a team called the Lu Hiettes.

Eventually, she and Dick opened one of the first gymnastics clubs on Long Island, which became the home of The Pirouettes. “You were not allowed to use your last name in AAU,” she recalls, “So it couldn’t be Schnaars Gymnastics Center.”

Encouraged to judge by Don Wilderoter (the father of gymnastics on Long Island), Marilyn met other prestigious gymnastics people in the area, like Marilyn Cross, Audrey Schweyer, Kitty Kjeldsen and Cheryl Hamilton, and earned her FIG rating. She judged many AAU National Meets as well as the National Sports Festivals. At the same time, she and Dick took their Pirouettes gymnasts over to international meets in Germany, Mexico, France, Yugoslavia and Romania. She also accompanied two gymnasts to China in 1982 with USGF’s Gary Goodsen.

Her other accomplishments include serving as the Metropolitan Area AAU Chairman from 1969-mid 80's, and helping to start the Empire Games in New York in 1978, which was held for 22 years. She assisted at international workshops and meets held in the NY area, including one at Madison Square Garden. She also attended the Olympic games in Montreal and Los Angeles, and many world championships. She served as the JO Chairperson in Region 6, earning the Regional service award in 1990. A Marilyn Schnaars Gymnastics Award was established by the Nassau County High School Association on Long Island to recognize outstanding contributions to gymnastics. She also received the Sports Crown Trophy Award from Stony Brook University.

Marilyn remembers attending the second NAWGJ Symposium in Santa Barbara, California (1978). "That was fun! You could look out and see the ocean and then run in to study." She has attended most of the Symposiums since then, and will attend the 2019 Symposium in Ft. Worth this summer.

When Marilyn and Dick retired to Delaware, she got to know RTC Myra Elfenbein, nearby Pennsylvania judges Marcy Blitz and Terry McGirk (now co-SJD's), as well as Barb Cutillo; she also reconnected with Cheryl Hamilton. Dick stays home with the dogs, and Marilyn, now a National judge, still judges a lot - even three day meets. In fact, she goes to the gym regularly to make sure she is fit to judge.

"When I started this, well, I had no idea!" she laughs. "I got in at the grass roots level at West Chester. I just wanted to be part of this sport. I love to see the kids, their parents and especially all the judges I have gotten to know and mentor throughout my career. Life is good!"

Marilyn had one more thing to do: she had never been to Kansas, so when Marcy and Terry asked her if she wanted to attend the 2019 National Judges Cup in Kansas City in January, she pulled on her red boots and got on the plane. "I clicked them together three times at the Kansas City airport!"