

‘Everybody Was There’: A Historic Moment in Aquatics

> **J**ane Katz couldn't help but feel a bit devilish at the 1965 opening of the International Swimming Hall of Fame in Fort Lauderdale, Fla. After all, she was about to perform a synchronized solo swim to "Dance Macabre" before a who's-who-in-swimming audience that included none other than swimming (and Hollywood) stars Buster Crabbe and Johnny Weissmuller.

"Everybody was there—all the big names in swimming—Esther Williams, everybody! What a hoot," exclaims Katz, with her characteristic enthusiasm. "At the time, you just do your best—you don't think about it being a really historic moment in aquatics."

Forty-two years later, the ISHOF opening ceremony remains a favorite memory for Katz, who came to love the sport under the tutelage of her coach and father, Leon. "I learned all this from him—he taught me to swim," she says. As an AAU swimmer in the New York metropolitan region, Katz excelled at distance freestyle, winning junior national events and getting her first taste of international competition at the 1957 Maccabiah Games in Israel.

But in that era, the end of high school meant the end of swimming for women. "You had to hang up your suit—there was no place to go," Katz recalls. As an undergrad majoring in physical education at City University of New York, her fortune turned when she met a Hungarian professor and skilled synchronized swimmer. "She taught me synchro—I love dance and music, it was a natural fit."

So much so that Katz was

picked for the 1964 U.S. Synchronized Swimming Performance Team at the Tokyo games. She recalls that the three-month exhibition tour, which started in Europe that summer, and the experience of teaching and performing internationally was "second to none." At 21 years of age, Katz allows she was "ancient" in the company of her mostly teenage teammates. But her swimming prowess soon proved out, and the 1964 tour launched what would become a 20-year effort by Katz and others to gain acceptance for synchronized swimming as an Olympic event in 1984.

Throughout those years and continuing to present day, Katz found other outlets for her

swimming talent—open water events and U.S. Masters. A USMS All-American in 2004 and 2005, Katz also won three World Senior Games Championships in 2004. As a professor and head women's swimming coach at John Jay College of Criminal Justice of City University of New York, Katz has won myriad awards, written several books on swimming and aquatic exercise, served as a consultant to the President's Council on Physical Fitness and Sport and was elected a member of the ISHOF Board of Directors—all while continuing to swim and perform synchro routines.

"I've always said that swimming is about fun, recreation and fitness for all," she says. <<<



HALL(MARKS) OF FAME

>>> Just back from an international exhibition tour for synchronized swimming, Jane Katz was among the featured performers at the grand opening of the International Swimming Hall of Fame in 1965.

>>> Although they didn't swim at the ISHOF grand opening, Buster Crabbe and Johnny Weissmuller were on hand to celebrate. Weissmuller, winner of five Olympic gold medals, 67 world and 52 national titles, had gone on to Hollywood fame as Tarzan and Jungle Jim. The story goes that Hollywood writer Cyril Hume, working on the adaptation of *Tarzan the Ape Man* (1932), noticed Weissmuller swimming in the pool at his hotel and suggested him for the part.

>>> Buster Crabbe, who won the 1932 Olympic title in the 400-meter freestyle, also found success in Hollywood, starring in one Tarzan film and in the highly successful Flash Gordon and Buck Rogers sci-fi serials. In later life, he resumed swimming at Masters meets.

>>> Fort Lauderdale's competitive swimming heritage dates back 79 years to the grand opening of the Casino Pool on Jan. 29, 1928. As the first pool of Olympic size (50 x 50 meters) in Florida, it remained at the forefront of the swimming scene for nearly half a century.

>>> Since opening its doors, Fort Lauderdale's Hall of Fame has served as host to hundreds of national and international meets, including the YMCA National Swimming & Diving Championships for 28 years.

Sources: June Krauser, Florida Gold Coast Masters; The Internet Movie Database

BUSTER CRABBE, JANE KATZ and JOHNNY WEISSMULLER at the 1965 opening of the International Swimming Hall of Fame in Fort Lauderdale, Fla.