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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

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 Aquanuts' 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."

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 Aquanut.

The Walnut Creek Aquanuts, 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 Aquanuts 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 routine 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, hashbrowns, 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

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