

PATTY THOMPSON

The following is an overview of the long and illustrious swimming career of Patty Thompson.

In order to better understand Patty's success as a swimmer, you need to know and appreciate her background. Patty is the daughter of Jimmy Thompson who came to be known as "Mr. Swimming" in Hamilton. Jimmy had a brilliant competitive swimming career highlighted by being a bronze medalist at the 1928 Olympics in Amsterdam, Holland, and a gold medalist at the British Empire Games held at the pool built specially for the Games in Hamilton, Ontario. After retirement from competition and before being asked to take over the Hamilton Aquatic Club, he taught swimming to underprivileged children in Toronto. Following that, in over 30 years at the municipal pool in Hamilton, which now bears his name, Jimmy taught an estimated 50,000 youngsters not only how to swim but sportsmanship and citizenship. During that time was the added responsibility of coaching the Hamilton Aquatic Club in which Jimmy helped to produce Provincial, National and International Champions in Swimming, Diving and Water Polo.

Jimmy's own children were thus destined to take to the water. For Patty though that was not automatic. She entered the world prematurely, weighing in at 3-1/2 pounds. She began swimming at age 5 but when she was 7 years of age she had to undergo major treatment for a tumor near one of her ears which kept her out of the water for 2 years. When she was allowed to swim again, such adversity just seemed to spur Patty on to work that much harder and she never looked back. Patty went on to EXCEL as a: COMPETITIVE SWIMMER, COACH, MARATHON SWIMMER, MASTERS SWIMMER and CONQUEROR OF LAKE ONTARIO.

Competitive Swimming:

Beginning in the 10 and under age group swimming, Patty started setting records and kept it up through each age division. She held more Ontario titles than any other female in the Province. In one year she held 19 Ontario records, showing not only the quality but the diversity of her swimming.

Patty was the finest long distance freestyle swimmer in Canada, holding Canadian records for distances of 220 and 440 yards and 800 and 1500 metres. In 1964, Patty became the first Canadian woman to break the 5-minute barrier for the 400 metre freestyle.

Internationally, Patty represented Canada at the 1962 British Empire & Commonwealth Games in Perth, Australia, where she placed second and third in relay events. She also represented Canada at the 1964 Olympic Games in Tokyo, Japan, where her relay team placed seventh.

Coaching:

After the death of her father, Patty took over the coaching of the Hamilton Aquatic Club where she remained for three years. She also coached with the Etobicoke Memorial Aquatic Club and the Alderwood Swim Club. Like her father, Patty not only imparted to her youngsters good swimming skills but long-lasting beneficial life skills.

In 1966, she was awarded an Ontario Achievement Award in recognition of her contribution to the field of Fitness and Amateur Sport.

Marathon Swimming:

The world of Marathon Swimming is a harsh one with its tests of human endurance and it conjures up images of athletes of large proportions, those able to withstand the long hours in rough and open water. It would seem the least likely environment for a 5' 3" female weighing just over 100 lbs, however, Patty not only took on marathon swimming but she excelled in it.

Patty's marathon swimming had actually begun when she was a youngster with her participation in swims in Hamilton Bay. Later, as a professional marathon swimmer, she competed in events such as the 17-mile Rhode Island Marathon, 12-Mile Man and His World Marathon and the 24-hour swim in Sante Fe, Argentina.

In 1969, Patty was named the "Women's World Professional Marathon Swimming Champion". This phase of her swimming career was celebrated in 1970 with her induction into the Swimming Hall of Fame in Ft. Lauderdale, Florida.

Masters Swimming:

Masters Swimming offers competition for athletes over the age of 25. Patty began Masters Swimming in the 40-45 age group and immediately began rewriting the record book. Just as she had done as youngster, Patty has excelled in a variety of events and continues to dominate the National Top Ten Ranking in Canada. Her records have set standards which will not easily

be broken. Patty has been a gold medalist at Canadian National, U.S. National and World Championships. Patty is highly respected by competitors who are part of her swimming past and present and is viewed with awe by those who are seeing her perform for the first time. Her diminutive stature belies the competitive spirit that lies within.

Lake Ontario:

In spite of all that Patty has accomplished in her swimming career, someone made the comment to her that it wasn't complete because she hadn't swum Lake Ontario. Hence Patty started training for the gruelling crossing.

In the summer of 1990 she and teammate, Ted Roach, attempted to become the oldest female and male to complete the 32-mile crossing of Lake Ontario. They proved themselves in the 10-mile compulsory trial swim and then began the waiting period for lake conditions to be perfect for the crossing. It was September before the weather looked favourable and Patty was able to set out from Niagara-on-the-Lake. Eight hours into the swim, however, strong winds and 5 foot waves called an end to the attempt. Undaunted, Patty continued training in 1991 and on August 14, 1991, she set off from Niagara-on-the-Lake. Hampered by a brace supporting her right wrist, Patty took 19 hours and 20 minutes to arrive at the Toronto shoreline, a respectable time for anyone but all the more remarkable since she was 45 years of age at the time.

In November, 1994, a monument was unveiled near the shoreline at Niagara-on-the-Lake commemorating those swimmers who took on Lake Ontario and won. Patty is the senior female and one of the special few to be listed on its plaque. Undoubtedly, those early swims in Hamilton Bay contributed to this later success.

Any one segment of Patty's swimming career is merit alone for her to be recognized as a "Wall of Famer", collectively they paint a picture of an amazing athlete and an individual of whom Hamiltonians can be truly proud.