The Ohio State University Synchronized Swimming Program, 1928-1995:

“The People. The Tradition. The Excellence.”

Dissertation

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By

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Abstract

The detailed study of everyday events and experiences that has been a hallmark of women’s sport history has included very little about the institutional histories and sport experiences of women who engage in sports organized exclusively for women (i.e., those that have no male counterpart at any level), such as synchronized swimming. Clearly, not all women have the same institutional histories or sporting experiences, nor do they have the same opportunity to share their voice, individually or collectively. Importantly, however, the histories, traditions and experiences of women who partake in female dominate sports often vary markedly from those who participate and compete in traditionally male sporting activities, especially at the collegiate level.

By investigating the institutional history and sporting experiences of the synchronized swimmers at Ohio State from 1928-1995 and incorporating those experiences into historical context, I attempted to discover and reveal the depth, variety, and complexities of these female sporting experience in a sport, organized solely for women. I examined the institutional history of this program from a variety of historical perspectives to better understand the significance the sport has had at Ohio State and in the lives of these collegiate women. I researched the following questions:
Why is it important to document the institutional history of the synchronized swimming program at Ohio State?

What is the significance of these sporting experiences to the larger body of Ohio State and women’s sport history scholarship?

Who were the pioneering women (and men) responsible for creating, developing, and maintaining one of the most extraordinary women’s collegiate sports program in the country?

How and why did these women get involved in the sport of synchronized swimming at Ohio State?

How and why has Ohio State become such a powerhouse in the sport?

These and other questions were designed to reveal and gain insight into a female sport that, for the most part, has been largely ignored. The purpose of this dissertation is to document the institutional history of this unique sport by supplementing Ohio State archival materials with information and personal stories provided by the participants and coaches of this remarkable program through surveys and interviews. This project will begin to allow synchronized swimmers at Ohio State to find their voices, to tell their stories, and to assert themselves as historical subjects, not only in Ohio State athletic history, but also in the larger milieu of women’s sport history.

The athletes who participated in the early years of the program did so because it was one of the few athletic programs offered for women; in the 1970’s, this began to change, as more athletic opportunities became available for women. Women were then
attracted to the sport for its increasing level of competition, and the administrative and coaching staffs were a large part of that improvement. The institution of Title IX and the forming of the AIAW were also instrumental in the sport’s growth at Ohio State; these were two important factors, along with staff efforts to develop and maintain the program that led to the ‘powerhouse’ we now see. The program’s leaders also exposed them to life lessons that they likely would have not experienced otherwise; surprising was the athletes’ appreciation for the historical significance of the program.
Dedication

This project is dedicated to my lovely wife Kelsey Logan. Without her love, support, patience, and guidance I would not have finished;

To my dad, Alfred Edward Housman, and my mom, Diana Lee Housman, for all of their love and support in my academic pursuits;

And, to all of the remarkable women who participated in the Ohio State synchronized swimming program.
Acknowledgements

I want to express my sincere gratitude to the many people who helped me complete this project. First and foremost, I would like to thank my advisor, Dr. Sarah Fields, for providing me with invaluable feedback, guidance, patience and moral support throughout this whole process. Without her encouragement and support I would still be working on chapter one. I would also like to thank Dr. Melvin Adelman for believing in me and telling me that it is, indeed, possible to pursue a doctoral degree while also working full-time. I must also extend a special thank you to Dr. Brian Turner who agreed to serve as a committee member on this project on fairly short notice.

I am also eternally grateful for all of the help given to me by Bertha Ignat in the Ohio State Archives and to all the former Ohio State synchronized swimmers who completed my survey and spent time telling me about their unique experiences as members of this remarkable sport program. Go Bucks!
Vita

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Fields of Study

Major Field:  Education
            Sport Humanities
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Chapter 1: Decades of Excellence

Few intercollegiate institutions can boast the overall history of athletic success that The Ohio State University Buckeyes have achieved over the past century. Each year, Ohio State varsity athletic teams claim numerous Big Ten championships, compete in various National Collegiate Athletic Association (NCAA) tournaments and vie for a number of national titles while producing countless individual, conference and national champions (Media Guide, 2007). In fact, some of the greatest athletes and teams in college sport history have donned the coveted Scarlet and Gray. Yet many Buckeye sport enthusiasts would be stunned to learn that the most decorated team in Ohio State athletic history is not the beloved football or basketball teams, nor a male varsity sports program for that matter. This distinction instead belongs to the women’s synchronized swimming program which has won an unprecedented twenty-seven national championship titles in its thirty-five year history as a collegiate varsity sport (Media Guide, 2012).

Mary Jo Ruggieri, the head coach of Ohio State’s synchronized swimming team from 1970 to 1995 (in addition to her successor Linda Lichter-Witter, 1995 to 2012, who is not covered in the scope of this dissertation), managed to piece together one of the most impressive dynasties in college sport history. In doing so Ruggieri and Lichter-Witter have collectively produced 94 All-Americans, 10 United States Synchronized.
Swimming Inc., (USSSI) Collegiate Athletes of the Year, 13 Olympians, 11 Pan American Game participants (plus one coach), and 60 National Team Members representing seven different countries (Media Guide, 2012). Until recently synchronized swimming was the only female varsity sport program at Ohio State to capture a national championship title, not to mention twenty-seven of them. What is even more impressive is the fact that the twenty-seven titles won by the synchronized swimming program account for nearly half the total number of national championship titles ever won by all thirty-six varsity sport programs combined in Ohio State’s illustrious athletic history (Media Guide, 2012).

Despite their remarkable success, the Ohio State synchronized swimming program continues to pursue its winning tradition in relative obscurity and remains at the margins of the Buckeyes’ sporting consciousness. In fact there have been no cars overturned on High Street nor couches set ablaze on south campus in celebration of the program’s national championship titles like that which occurred in 2002 when the Ohio State football team defeated the University of Miami for the Bowl Championship Series (BCS) title. And, very few if any synchronized swimmers are recognized, let alone stopped on campus for autographs, as they walk across the Oval to attend class like some of the football student-athletes experience on occasion. Even more disheartening however, is the fact that the Ohio State synchronized swimming program has only graced the front page of the school newspaper, The Lantern, a dozen or so times and the front page of the sports section in the local newspaper, The Columbus Dispatch, a handful of
times during the program’s thirty-five year history despite its extraordinary accomplishments.

So, why doesn’t the Ohio State synchronized swimming program, with its remarkable winning tradition, receive more support, attention and notoriety from the university and local communities, not to mention from the Ohio State athletic department which sponsors this program? Is the public’s apparent apathy toward synchronized swimming a result of the fact that our traditional catalog of major sports has a built in bias toward activities and physiological attributes that favor men such as speed, strength and size (English, 2001; Theberge, 1985)? Have we, as Jane English (2001) argues, created athletic programs in this society that institutionalize female inferiority, particularly in such female dominated sports as synchronized swimming where there is no parallel sporting activity for men at any level?

As an Ohio State alumna, a former collegiate student-athlete, a member of the Ohio State Women’s Varsity “O” Alumnae board of trustees, a long-time employee in the collegiate sports industry (at Ohio State), a doctoral candidate in the Ohio State Sport Humanities program and, most importantly, as a woman, one would assume that I have grappled with these questions for many years now. Unfortunately I am embarrassed to admit that despite my keen interest and background in Ohio State athletics these questions have not consumed my thought processes until relatively recently. In fact I was not terribly interested in writing about women’s sport history, let alone about the history of the Ohio State synchronized swimming program as a dissertation topic until I overheard a conversation at work one day that changed my perspective completely.
It was March 2005 and the Ohio State synchronized swimming team was vying for its first of several attempts at securing a twenty-fifth national title. I had just walked into the lobby of the student-athlete support services office (SASSO) on campus when I overheard a colleague of mine, who works directly with the synchronized swimming team, wish one of the synchro swimmers good luck on achieving the monumental goal of winning yet another national championship title. I remember the first thought that came to my mind after hearing this was why, after so many years and in so many different capacities within the Ohio State athletic department, had I not known or heard about this program’s ongoing success before now? Then I thought, was I just out of the “proverbial” loop or were there other Buckeye faithful like me who were ignorant of this remarkable fact?

But it was not until a football student-athlete, also in the SASSO lobby that morning, offered up his own commentary on the subject when he said, “Who cares about synchronized swimming…it’s not even a real sport….I didn’t even know we had a team on campus…,” that it dawned on me how little was known about this team in general. If a current student-athlete at Ohio State did not know or seem to care about his peer’s athletic triumphs or about the existence of the synchronized swimming team itself, and an avid Buckeye fan like me was unaware of the program’s continuing success, then what were the odds that others in the University and Columbus communities knew or took interest in this program’s extraordinary accomplishments? The look of shock and horror on the face of the synchronized swimmer in response to her peer’s disparaging remarks is something I will never forget.
As I walked back to my office following this incident, I could not help but imagine what it must feel like to be a member of the most decorated sports program in Ohio State athletic history and, arguably, one of the most impressive dynasties in college sport history, yet continue to compete in a sport that garners very little public interest and suffers from a perception that it is “not really a sport” (Adams, 2010; Boutilier & SanGiovanni, 1983; Grundy, 2001; Hargreaves, 1994 & 1996; Jones & Greer, 2011; Schweinbenz, 2010; Theberge, 1993 & 2000). Despite the fact that more women are participating in sports than ever before, and even though more feminist interventions are being included in the history and theory of sport scholarship, greater attention is still given to the role and importance that sport plays in men’s lives than in women’s lives (Birrell, 2000; Hargreaves, 1994; Park, 1983; Parratt, 1994; Theberge, 1987 & 2000). The aforementioned incident quite vividly illustrates the need and importance for someone like me, a woman and an avid Buckeye fan, to document the unique institutional history and sporting experiences of the elite female athletes who have competed in the sport of synchronized swimming at The Ohio State University.

Throughout the world there have been dramatic changes in the roles of women, in attitudes toward women and, most importantly, in women’s perceptions of themselves. In many areas of society women are gaining even more political, economic and social power than ever before, while feminist spirit continues to grow and spread (Costa & Guthrie, 1994; Hall, 1988; Scott, 1986; Struna, 2000; Theberge, 1995). Rapidly expanding opportunities for women in sport are also an important part of this context, as is the growing body of scholarship about women’s sporting experiences (Adelman, 1983;
Hall, 1988; Parratt, 1998; Scott, 1986; Struna, 1984; Vertinsky, 1994). As Nancy Struna once wrote, “one of the most important projects in feminist sport historiography is to tell women’s sporting stories and insist that they belong centrally in the body of sport history and sport studies scholarship” (Struna, 1985, p. 151). The purpose of this dissertation is to begin to do just that; to document the institutional history of this unique female sport program by supplementing Ohio State archival materials with information and personal stories provided by the participants and coaches of this remarkable program through their responses to survey questions (Appendix B) and personal interviews. This project provides an opportunity for synchronized swimmers at Ohio State to find their voices, to begin to tell their stories, and to start to assert themselves as historical subjects, not only in Ohio State athletic history, but also in the larger milieu of women’s sport history (Struna, 1985).

**Purpose and Rationale**

Historically modern sport at all levels has been defined and dominated by a male model, organized as a male preserve, and underpinned by masculine assumptions (Adams, 2010; Adelman, 1983 & 1986; Birrell, 2000; Guttman, 1991; Jones & Greer, 2011; Karmel, 2005; Lebel & Danylchuk, 2009; Lenskyj, 1986; Schweinbenz, 2010; Theberge, 1985, 1987 & 1993; Vertinsky, 1994). This arrangement is certainly reflected in sport history scholarship which, for the most part, has examined the history of man’s involvement in sport and men’s sporting experiences to the exclusion of serious attention to that of women (Hult, 1994; Messner, 1998; Theberge, 1985; Vertinsky, 1994). Over
the past quarter century however, sport historians have begun to devote more time and attention to the history of women’s involvement in sport as well as to their unique sporting experiences (Adams, 2010; Byrne, 2003; Cahn, 1994; Festle, 1996; Fields, 2005; Grundy, 2001; Hall, 2002; Jones & Greer, 2011; Lebel & Danylchuk, 2009; Schweinbenz, 2010; Struna, 2000; Theberge, 1985, 1987, 1995 & 2000; Vertinsky, 1994; Wushanley, 2004). Of particular interest to a number of scholars has been the rise and growth of women’s involvement and sporting experiences in collegiate sports (Byrne, 2003; Grundy, 2001; Grundy & Shackelford, 2005; Jones & Greer, 2011; Schweinbenz, 2010). In fact, over the past quarter century scholars have begun the process of tracing the history of women’s sport programs at a variety of colleges and universities and detailing the evolution and growth of specific women’s collegiate sporting activities (Adams, 2010; Byrne, 2003; Crothers, 2006; Grundy, 2001; Grundy & Shackelford, 2005; Jones & Greer, 2011; Karmel, 2005; Lebel & Danylchuk, 2009; Schweinbenz, 2010).

While the above statement is true, the lion’s share of information written about women’s collegiate athletics has largely detailed the sporting histories and sporting experiences of women who have participated and competed in traditionally male sporting activities (Adams, 2010; Byrne, 2003; Crothers, 2006; Grundy, 2001; Grundy & Shackelford, 2005; Jones & Greer, 2011; Karmel, 2005; Lebel & Danylchuk, 2009; Schweinbenz, 2010). Much of this scholarship has focused on the challenges that these sportswomen have either encountered within or presented to the gender boundaries of sport and the maintenance of sport as a male and masculine preserve (Adams, 2010;
Birrell, 2000; Boutilier & SanGiovanni, 1983; Jones & Greer, 2011; Messner, 1988; Schweinbenz, 2010; Theberge, 1985). Since male and masculine sporting activities have historically been valued by American society, it is not surprising that a number of scholars continue to concentrate on the histories and experiences of women in traditionally male sporting activities (Byrne, 2003; Crothers, 2006; Grundy, 2001; Grundy & Shackelford, 2005; Jones & Greer, 2011; Karmel, 2005; Lebel & Danylchuk, 2009; Schweinbenz, 2010). In fact, the detailed study of everyday events and experiences that has been a hallmark of women’s sport history (including women’s collegiate sport history) has included very little about the institutional histories and sporting experiences of women who partake in sports organized exclusively for women and those that have no male counterpart at any level, such as synchronized swimming.

Clearly, not all women have the same sport history or the same sporting experiences, nor do they have the same opportunity to give voice to their distinct histories and experiences (Holland & Oglesby, 1979; Hult, 1980; Jones & Greer, 2011; Karmel, 2005; Lebel & Danylchuk, 2009; Schweinbenz, 2010; Parrott, 1998; Schweinbenz, 2010; Struna, 1984; Theberge, 1985, 1987, 1995 & 2000; Vertinsky, 1994). In fact it could be argued that, the histories, traditions and experiences of women who partake in female dominate sports vary markedly from those who participate and compete in traditionally male sporting activities, especially at the collegiate level. By investigating the institutional history of the sport of synchronized swimming and the sporting experiences of the swimmers at Ohio State, I intend to discover and reveal the depth, variety, and complexities of females sporting experiences in sports organized solely for women. I
will examine the institutional history of this program from a variety of historical perspectives to better understand the significance that the sport has had at Ohio State and in the lives of these collegiate women. In doing so I will research the following questions:

- Why is it important to document the institutional history of the synchronized swimming program at Ohio State?
- What is the significance of these women’s sporting experiences to the larger body of Ohio State and women’s sport history scholarship?
- Who were the pioneering women (and men) responsible for creating, developing and maintaining one of the most extraordinary women’s collegiate sport programs in the country?
- How and why did these women get involved in the sport of synchronized swimming at Ohio State?
- How and why has Ohio State become such a powerhouse in the sport?

These and other questions are designed to reveal and gain insight from a history that, for the most part, has largely been ignored. The objective of this dissertation is to begin to fill a significant gap within Ohio State’s sport history, a scholarship that otherwise contains an extensive body of work.
Methods and Sources

M. Ann Hall so aptly notes in her book, The Girl and the Game: A History of Women’s Sport in Canada that, “History is never linear in that events and eras do not flow seamlessly from one to another; rather, history is complicated, messy, and difficult to reassemble even a partial story from the perspective of the present” (Hall, 2002, pp. 2-3). This is certainly the case for the institutional history of the synchronized swimming program at The Ohio State University. For this reason much like Hall, I have chosen to write the institutional history of this program in a chronological fashion (Hall, 2002). Since the full history of the Ohio State synchronized swimming program has never been told before, it is important to highlight what happened before and after particular eras and time periods in order to put this program’s history into the larger context of women’s sport history in general and Ohio State sport history in particular (Hall, 2002). Hopefully by doing this readers of the project will find it easier to follow in that the history flows through decades as well as some significant historical junctions in both women’s and Ohio State’s sport histories, rather than back and forth, or out of sequence, which would be the result if a thematic approach was taken instead (Hall, 2002).

In addition, I have tried to apply a somewhat broad brush in writing this institutional history for no other reason than so little has been written before on this topic (Byrne, 2003; Hall, 2002; Theberge, 1994). As many scholars have illustrated in the past, it is important to develop the big picture and allow others to fill in the gaps and details through more specific studies (Byrne, 2003; Grundy, 2001; Grundy & Shackelford, 2005; Hall, 2002; Theberge, 2000). This is particularly important in this
history as I am approaching it from an outsiders’ point of view. In other words, I have never participated or competed in the sport of synchronized swimming at any level, and certainly not at the elite level at Ohio State. Thus, others who have a background in the sport may be able to provide more in-depth insights into certain timeframes and/or specific events. In any case, using a chronological approach over a thematic approach makes it easier to see what is missing or what requires more in-depth study (Hall, 2002; Parratt, 1998; Struna, 1984).

Although this project seeks to complete a comprehensive historical overview of the Ohio State synchronized swimming program, from its inception in 1928 as one of the first club sports offered for women, the main focus of this study will concentrate on those groups of women (athletes, coaches, administrators, etc.) who were associated with the program from the years 1977 to 1995. This time frame was chosen for several reasons. First, the year 1977 was the initial year that the sport held collegiate national championships and it was also the year that the program became a true varsity sport at Ohio State. Second, during this time period the Ohio State program won all but two national titles in the sport (17 of 19). Finally, this particular time period allowed me, a current administrator of student-athletes at Ohio State, to work only with those athletes who have completed their athletic eligibility. Moreover by choosing this timeframe, I allow more significant events in women’s collegiate sport history to shape and define the eras around which the story of Ohio State synchronized swimming is told. My decisions as to which events should structure the narrative are based on the historical impact that
these events had on both the program and the swimmers (Byrne, 2003; Hall, 2002; Parratt, 1998; Theberge, 1994 & 2000).

After framing the project between 1928 and 1995, with an emphasis on 1977-1995, I collected lists of team members from rosters supplied by the former and current coaching staffs as well as the rosters published in *The Lantern, The Makio* yearbook, the Ohio State Media Guides and other printed sources. I then e-mailed a detailed survey (Appendix B) containing forty questions to more than one hundred and fifty women who participated, competed, coached and administered within the synchronized swimming program at Ohio State (Appendix C). Of the one hundred and fifty surveys e-mailed, I received eighty-eight surveys back (or approximately sixty-three percent of the surveys). I also conducted interviews with forty-five of the survey respondents either in person or by telephone (Appendix D & Appendix E). Additionally, I received personal letters, e-mails, memoirs, photographs, and mementos from some of the women which served to supplement the information gather from the surveys and interviews (Byrne, 2003; Theberge, 2000).

Much like Julie Byrne’s project covering the Immaculata women’s basketball program, I struggled with the question of whether to use the real names of individuals surveyed and interviewed for this dissertation (Byrne, 2003; Theberge, 1994 & 2000). Almost all of the participants of the study were enthusiastic about their collegiate synchronized swimming careers and about the project itself, so many of them said that they did not care about protecting their identity. In fact, my primary intention of doing this project was to give credit to and long-overdue recognition to the individuals.
responsible for creating, developing and maintaining this extraordinary program. But, I also wanted the participants of this project to feel safe in telling their personal stories and experiences. Consequently, I did as Byrne did in her study and ended up employing both methods (Byrne, 2003). Synchro swimmers who granted me permission to use their names in this work were cited by their real names and those who did not were listed anonymously, identified just as Byrne did in her work by graduation year (Byrne, 2003).

The surveys, interviews and other correspondences from the aforementioned group served as my primary sources (Appendix A-F). Additionally, I found other primary sources for this project in The Ohio State University Library Archives. Countless hours were spent searching archival collection boxes provided by Ohio State University Archivist Bertha Ignat in order to find pertinent information related to the institutional history of the synchronized swimming program. The archivist used the terms ‘swimming,’ ‘synchronized swimming,’ ‘synchro,’ ‘AIAW,’ ‘Title IX,’ ‘Phyllis Bailey,’ ‘Mary Jo Ruggieri,’ and ‘Swan Club’ to help locate information pertaining to this project. When the archivist searched these terms, any Ohio State document (e.g., Presidential letters, athletic committee meeting notes, etc.) that contained these terms was retrieved; however, Ohio State policy dictates that only the archivists have access to document retrieval, meaning I was not able to directly search for documents myself. While I had invaluable access to such items as issues of The Lantern, The Makio yearbook, athletic media guides, pamphlets, letters, trophies, photographs, mementos, scrapbooks, programs, etc., I also recognize the limits associated with having to trust and rely on archivists to select appropriate materials and documents for this project as well as on the
cataloging procedures of the University Archives which may have limited my access to other important information for this project.

My primary goal in telling this textured story is threefold: to get the story of this remarkable program “out there” to the University and Columbus communities, to fill a gap in women’s collegiate sport history in general and Ohio State institutional sport history in particular, and to convey the meaning of the women’s sporting experiences to all of the abovementioned audiences. In accomplishing this goal, I had to interpret experiences to make meaning (Byrne, 2003; Theberge, 1994 & 2000). Just as Byrne tried to do in her study, I also tried to foreground former synchro swimmer’s voices and not my own (Byrne, 2003; Theberge, 1994 & 2000). Many of my conclusions were based on patterns of voices and not singular opinions (Byrne, 2003; Theberge, 1994 & 2000). Likewise, I tried not to favor some voices over other and to respect the integrity of the women’s words (Byrne, 2003; Theberge, 1994 & 2000). But again like Byrne and others doing similar projects, I have also interpreted the women’s interpretations especially in the way I have applied quotes, framed arguments, and presented materials (Byrne, 2003; Grundy, 2001; Grundy & Shackelford, 2005; Hall, 2002; Theberge, 2000). In this way, I, too, have put my imprint on their story (Byrne, 2003; Grundy, 2001; Grundy & Shackelford, 2005; Hall, 2002; Theberge, 2000).

Chapters

Chapter Two, The Origins of Synchronized Swimming to 1969, traces the sport now known as synchronized swimming from the ancient Greek and Roman times through
to the 1930s when MGM musicals and Hollywood films featured the sport as popular entertainment. The chapter then discusses the emergence of sport for women within institutions of higher education and details that unique history through the end of the 1960s. Finally, the chapter records the evolution of collegiate synchronized swimming, and more specifically Ohio State synchronized swimming, from the early 1920s when the sport consisted of floatation patterns and maneuvers to the late-1960s when club sport programs began to transition to collegiate varsity sport teams.

Chapter Three, The Making of a Sport Dynasty, 1970-1979, discusses the affects that the women’s rights movement, Title IX and the AIAW had on the development and growth of the Ohio State women’s varsity sport programs, and in particular, its newly emerging synchronized swimming team. The chapter includes the battles fought by women (Mary Jo Ruggieri and Phyllis Bailey) to gain access to university facilities and resources as well as to gain the respect they deserved within the predominately male industry. Likewise, the chapter also details the making of a dynasty in the sport of synchronized swimming at Ohio State with the progressive leadership of Mary Jo Ruggieri. During this decade, the synchronized swimming program won three of the four national championship titles claimed by Ohio State varsity athletic teams.

Chapter Four, The Fight to Preserve a Sport Dynasty, 1980-1995, details the impact that a rising conservative tenor and an emerging New Right Movement had on Title IX and the AIAW. The chapter then traces how Ohio State women’s varsity athletics and its now successful synchronized swimming program fared among a weakening Title IX legislation and a dismantling AIAW national organization. It then
describes the fierce battle fought by Mary Jo Ruggieri and Phyllis Bailey to preserve the all-female sport of synchronized swimming as a varsity sport program within Ohio State’s athletic department.

Chapter Five, “The People. The Tradition. The Excellence.” explains how the popular Ohio State athletic department motto encompasses the reason behind why several decades’ worth of women chose to participate in the sport of synchronized swimming at Ohio State under the tutelage of Mary Jo Ruggieri. In their own words and from their personal stories, former Buckeye synchronized swimmers describe how “the people,” or the administrators of the synchronized swimming program, taught them valuable life lessons and served as their primary role models during their formative years as college students. Next, the former Buckeyes trace the rich traditional heritage of the synchronized swimming program, which dates back as far as 1928 when the program existed as the Swan Club. The women reveal some of the time-honored “traditions” of the program as well as those that emerged during their time as members of the team. Finally, the women disclose the secret to how their program achieved “excellence” over a twenty-five year period in collegiate sport history. The women’s personal stories allow them not only to find their collective voice but to tell readers their unique sporting stories.
Synchronized Swimming

Synchronized swimming, as we know it today, is the youngest of all water sports, but its predecessor “water ballet,” has a vast history that dates back to ancient Greek and Roman times (Bean, 2005; Curtis, 1942; Stoerker, 1956; Syndor, 1998). As early as the fourth century B.C. performers, referred to as nymphs or sea goddesses, were known to have performed stunts and figures in water filled arenas and lakes during public festivals. Water stunts and other related activities were also practiced in the Orient and the Middle East as evidenced by ancient woodblock prints and vases portraying swimmers under water executing somersaults and stunts similar to those implemented in figure competitions today (Bean, 2005; Curtis, 1942; Stoerker, 1956; Syndor, 1998).

By the late nineteenth century European countries were also executing floating formations and experimenting with competitions in tricks, stunts and figures (Bean, 2005; Curtis, 1942; Stoerker, 1956; Syndor, 1998). The first record of competition in ornamental or scientific swimming, as it was called then, did not occur until 1892 in Yorkshire, England (Bean, 2005; Syndor, 1998). Bob Derbyshire, who later represented England in the 1908 Olympics in swimming, performed front and back somersaults,
torpedoes and other water stunts to take home the victory (Bean, 2005). Derbyshire and a handful of other men competed in stunt competitions, while their female counterparts performed floating formations and pattern swimming during the intermission of the men’s stunt competitions (Bean, 2005; Curtis, 1942; Stoerker, 1956; Syndor, 1998).

While stunt competitions flourished in Europe, water pageantries and exhibitions gained popularity in the United States in the early twentieth century through vaudeville circuits, World Fair Aquacades and Hollywood films (Bean, 2005; Spears, 1966). Annette Kellerman, an Australian swimmer referred to as the “underwater ballerina,” was the first to introduce water ballet to Americans when she toured the country giving exhibitions in a glass tank in theaters as part of a regular vaudeville circuit (Bean, 2005; Spears, 1966). Described as a high diving and stunt swimming artiste, Kellerman performed stunts and dives that were forerunners to those found today in synchronized swimming and women’s platform diving (Bean, 2005, pp. 5-9).

From the vaudeville circuit, Kellerman went into the film industry. Her films attracted a great deal of attention from the American public and provided the initial impetus for people to imitate her water stunts. Some forty years later, Kellerman was again seen on screen when her life was portrayed by Esther Williams in the remake of Kellerman’s hit feature, Neptune’s Daughter (Bean, 2005). Although Kellerman introduced stunt swimming to the United States, it was Esther Williams who was credited with popularizing it through the MGM musicals and Hollywood films that featured her (Bean, 2005).
Water ballet and stunt swimming was further developed in the United States by Katherine “Kay” Curtis, who was credited with developing the athletic foundation behind changing water ballet into a sport (Bean, 2005). As a student at the University of Wisconsin in 1915, Curtis was described as a graceful and versatile swimmer; however she had neither the speed nor the interest necessary for competitive swimming (Bean, 2005, pp. 19-21). Instead, Curtis enjoyed creating and performing diving-like stunts in her swimming routines. She claimed that incorporating stunts into her routines added more excitement to her swimming and stimulated her imagination (Bean, 2005; Curtis, 1942).

Curtis brought her new found love for stunt and form swimming to the University of Chicago, where she created one of the first collegiate women’s swimming clubs, The Tarpon Club, in 1923 (Bean, 2005, pp. 19-21; Curtis, 1942; Schultz; 1965). Her team’s performance consisted of rhythmic swimming with added floating formations using transitional stroking and sculling maneuvers to move from one formation to another (Bean, 2005; Curtis, 1942; Lilly, 1964; Schultz; 1965). The Tarpon Club was the first of its kind to coordinate these stokes and moves to the rhythms of music played on the pool deck (Bean, 2005, pp. 19-21; Schultz; 1965). Curtis noted that, “at first the music was merely an accompaniment but later the movements in the water were synchronized exactly with the beat and measure of the music just as one would synchronize dance steps” (Bean, 2005, pp. 4). Because of their innovative techniques in rhythmic swimming Curtis and the members of her team, later dubbed the “Kay Curtis Modern Mermaids,”
were invited to perform at the 1934 Century of Progress World Fair in Chicago (Bean, 2005).

At the fair, the Mermaids performed their rhythmic swimming routines to a 12-piece band and, as a result, the first “water ballet” was born complete with musical synchronization (Bean, 2005). In fact, the term synchronized swimming was first used when announcer Norman Ross, himself a former swimmer, coined the term to describe the actions of Curtis’ Mermaids in their 1934 performance (Bean, 2005; Schultz, 1965). While water ballet, the predecessor to synchronized swimming, has a long history, the more characteristic combinations of strokes, figures and floating formations coordinated to musical rhythms and tempos as is seen in today’s synchronized swimming competitions evolved in the United States with Kay Curtis (Bean, 2005; Schultz, 1965).

Whether it was Annette Kellerman’s displays in the vaudeville circuits, the performances by Esther Williams in MGM musicals and Hollywood films, or the Aquacade performances by Kay Curtis’ Modern Mermaids, collegiate programs began to spring up in many different areas of the country in the 1920s, including the Swan Club at The Ohio State University. This trend was certainly not surprising given the fact that sport for women in higher education had emerged just three decades earlier under the heavy influence of Victorian ideals of womanhood (Cahn, 1994; Guttman, 1991; Lenskyj, 1986; Struna, 1994; Theberge, 1993; Theberge & Birrell, 2007; Vertinsky, 1994). Thus, to truly understand why synchronized swimming was such a popular sport for women in colleges and universities, we must first examine how sport in general and
synchronized swimming in particular evolved for women in higher education beginning in the late nineteenth century.

*Physical Education and the Rise of College Sport for Women (1870-1919)*

The wondrous story of sport for women in American higher education begins in the late nineteenth century (Costa & Guthrie, 1994; Vertinsky, 1994). For young middle-class women, college campuses became an important site for athletic experimentation, a place away from home where physical activity was one of the many ways in which young women explored their new-found independence and plotted a new generational course (Cahn, 1994; Costa & Guthrie, 1994). While female students enjoyed radical forms of freedom in college, such as physical activity and sport, they also suffered prejudice, opposition and setbacks, and were themselves sometimes ambivalent and contradictory about their novel role in society as “New Women” (Cahn, 1994; Grundy, 2001; Vertinsky, 1994).

During this time period sport was viewed by society as the “natural domain” of men and that to be good at sport was to be essentially masculine (Festle, 1996; Messner, 1998; Theberge, 1993). Men were characterized as naturally aggressive, competitive and incisive, thus well suited to the rigors of competitive physical activity and sport (Vertinsky, 1994). In contrast, women were viewed as inherently weak, emotional, cooperative and passive and, therefore, unsuited to partake in strenuous physical activities and competitive sport (Lenskyj, 1986; Vertinsky, 1994). Under this pretext, innate biological and psychological differences between the sexes were used to construct
social ideas about gender and to dictate the evolution of sport for women in higher education (Cahn, 1994; Hargreaves, 1994; Lenskyj, 1986; Vertinsky, 1990 & 1994).

Yet at the very time that women’s behavior in its most conservative form became explicitly stereotyped, and the burden of ill-health caused the dominant image of femininity to be essentially a negative concept, the start of a more positive attitude toward the female body was developing, linked to the idea of health and fitness through moderate exercise (Cahn, 1994; Guttman, 1991; Hargreaves, 1994; Lenskyj, 1986; Vertinsky, 1994). Innate biological and psychological differences among the sexes were not used as arguments against ALL forms of physical exercise for women, just the strenuous and competitive types (Cahn, 1994; Festle, 1996; Struna, 1994; Vertinsky, 1990 & 1994). In fact, an increasing number of medical experts took the view that gentle or moderate forms of physical activity, if taken in reasonable amounts, would aid women’s health and ability to bear healthy children (Cahn, 1994; Struna, 1994; Vertinsky, 1990 & 1994).

Although physical exercise for women in higher education became increasingly widespread and, in some cases, actually valued for its physiological and social benefits, there remained a strong feeling of unease and ambivalence toward strenuous and competitive forms of physical activity (Cahn, 1994; Struna, 1994; Vertinsky, 1982, 1990 & 1994). Concerned educators and medical experts feared that female students would succumb to the temptations of the male model of competitive sport and thus risk their modesty, mental health and physical well-being (Boutilier & SanGiovanni, 1983; Cahn, 1994; Hargreaves, 1994; Parks & Hult, 1993; Vertinsky, 1982, 1990 & 1994).
Consequently, female physical educators were hired from the outset to regulate the physical activities of women and, in doing so, they sought to protect the reputation and health of students by devising separate, less physically taxing versions of women’s sport (Cahn, 1994; Vertinsky, 1990 & 1994). Strengthened by their intellectual and institutional ties to medical science, female physical educators set forth to implement their “philosophy of moderation” for women’s physical education and sporting activities (Cahn, 1994; Parks & Hult, 1993; Vertinsky, 1982, 1990 & 1994).

Thus, the social acceptability of sport for women in higher education during the late nineteenth and early twentieth century’s was predicated on an ideal image of what a woman “should be,” an image modeled after the Victorian ideals of womanhood (Cahn, 1994; Struna, 1994; Vertinsky, 1982, 1990 & 1994). Sporting activities which stressed restricted motion, and minimal energy, exercise and sociability found acceptance much earlier than did sports which emphasized the opposite traits (Cahn, 1994; Vertinsky, 1994). Likewise, motivations of female sporting participants were legitimate only if they were “feminine.” Play, enjoyment, social contact (with other women), cooperation, physical fitness, and weight control were all deemed acceptable motivations for female participation in sport while competition, aggressiveness, physical mastery and “character building,” were defined as masculine and therefore unacceptable as motivations (Cahn, 1994; Vertinsky, 1982, 1990 & 1994).

Confident in their abilities to instruct women in good habits of exercise but leery of the masculine reputation associated with sporting competition, women physical educators tempered their support for competitive sport (Boutilier & SanGiovanni, 1983;
Cahn, 1994; Vertinsky, 1982, 1990 & 1994). In fact, by 1920 a conscious decision was made and implemented by physical educators to curtail intercollegiate competition for female students (Cahn, 1994). Instead, new modes of competitive situations were established and popularized. These included on-campus, intramural activities designed to limit physical strain, competitive zeal and public spectatorship while appealing to the masses of students of all ability levels and not just the talented few (Cahn, 1994; Vertinsky, 1990 & 1994). Thus, physical educators were successful in their attempts to limit competition for middle-class college students while still providing a significant degree of athletic opportunity through intramural sport programs founded on the principle of moderation (Cahn, 1994; Vertinsky, 1990 & 1994). It was hoped that through intramural programs, good sportsmanship would be fostered among women, new friends made, and fun and enjoyment shared by all those who took part (Cahn, 1994; Vertinsky, 1990 & 1994).

*Play Days (1920s)*

Like many other institutions of higher education across the country during the 1920s, Ohio State was beginning to develop its intramural program for women and was making a strong commitment to the furtherance of the idea of “sport for every girl and a girl for every sport” (Cahn, 1994; Couturier, 2008; Daniels, 1977; Festle, 1996; Gerber, 1982; Lucas & Smith, 1982). In fact, the completion of the Pomerene pool in the winter of 1927 marked the beginning of a rather extensive aquatics program for women at Ohio State (Daniels, 1977). It was against this backdrop that synchronized swimming became
a popular mode of physical activity for collegiate women across the country, but particularly for those women attending The Ohio State University (Crumley, 1982; Daniels, 1977).

One of the first sport clubs to form for women on Ohio State’s campus was the Swan Club, the predecessor to the synchronized swimming program which exists today (Crumley, 1982; Daniels, 1977). The Swan Club, created in March 1928 by thirty-four female students under the guidance of faculty advisor Helen Saum, formed in order to peak the interest of women in such water activities as swimming, diving, stunts, figures and water ballet (Crumley, 1982; Daniels, 1977). The activities associated with the Swan Club encompassed many of the components that physical educators were promoting within women’s sport and physical education in higher education during the 1920s (Cahn, 1994; Lucas & Smith, 1982; Vertinsky, 1990 & 1994).

First and foremost, synchronized swimming was an activity that epitomized the slogan, “a sport for all,” a concept of equal opportunity in play and enjoyment for every participant regardless of one’s skill and ability (Cahn, 1994; Couturier, 2008; Daniels, 1977; Gerber, 1982; Lucas & Smith, 1982). Second, women in synchronized swimming were taught basic water skills including balanced floating, bobbing, and treading water, all consistent with the “principle of moderation” espoused by women physical educators (Bean, 2005; Cahn, 1994; Curtis, 1942; Gerber, 1982; Vertinsky, 1994). Finally, synchronized swimming was an enjoyable and satisfying activity for women to partake in without competing against anyone else. Participants gained valuable experience in working cooperatively (a female trait), rather than competitively (a male trait) with her
peers (Bean, 2005; Cahn, 1994; Curtis, 1942; Gerber, 1982; Lucas & Smith, 1982; Vertinsky, 1994).

The Swan Club, strictly a women’s organization, initially met for open swimming where skill improvement and basic stunt instruction was the primary focus of the group (Daniels, 1977; H. Alkire, personal communication, June 2, 2010). As interest in the club increased however, requirements to join the club were established (Daniels, 1977; H. Alkire, personal communication, June 2, 2010). By the fall of 1928, the requirement to join the Swan Club included the ability to: swim 100 yards in the crawl and the side stroke in relatively good form, complete a half mile swim, perform three simple dives and pass the Red Cross life-savings test (Daniels, 1977). While the club initially met for open swimming and instruction, they held their first water pageant in the spring of 1928 entitled The Frog’s Victory (Crumley, 1982; Daniels, 1977). Although production of the pageants was temporarily suspended in 1931 and 1932 due to the affects of the Great Depression, these performances launched a tradition of annual water shows that continued at Ohio State until the early 1980s (Crumley, 1982; Daniels, 1977).

During the 1920s physical educators sought new ways to provide opportunities for their female students to participate in sport without subjecting them to societal ridicule as being “unfeminine,” and even more basic, protecting them from the evils of corruption and exploitation that was rampant in the male model of sport (Cahn, 1994; Gerber, 1982; Woolum, 1998). At the same time, there was tremendous social pressure from within the ranks of women physical educators during this era to reduce and even avoid sport competition among women (Cahn, 1994; Woolum, 1998). The challenge to
find appropriate sporting activities was met by the use of Play Days, where the primary objective was to offer play experiences to groups of collegiate women from different schools in a variety of sporting activities on a single day (Cahn, 1994; Gerber, 1982, Lucas & Smith, 1982; Woolum, 1998).

Without any practice or pre-organization, participants formed mixed teams comprising of players from the different schools so that individual institutions would not compete against each other (Cahn, 1994; Gerber, 1982; Woolum, 1998). Consequently, the perceived evil of encouraging team loyalty over the pure joy of participation was avoided. Other such problems were also avoided by female participation in Play Days. Play Days did not require coaches, merely chaperones and, as a result, students were not afforded the opportunity to train, practice, develop teamwork, have positive interactions with a coach or develop their skill over time (Cahn, 1994; Gerber, 1982; Woolum, 1998). Additionally, while all interested women could attend and participate in the Play Days, none of them would be recognized or receive special awards for skill or achievement because adulation for sport skill and achievement was deemed appropriate only for the men’s model of sport competition (Cahn, 1994; Gerber, 1982, Lucas & Smith, 1982; Woolum, 1998).

Ohio State, in conjunction with nearby Ohio Wesleyan University, decided to sponsor its first Play Day for women in the winter of 1929 (Daniels, 1977; Woolum, 1998). The two institutions came together on Ohio State’s campus to participate in several different sporting activities including, but certainly not limited to, swimming and form swimming (Daniels, 1977; Woolum, 1998). Swimmers from both the Ohio State
Swan Club and those from Ohio Wesleyan came together in the Pomerene Pool to practice basic skill activities in the water. These activities were offered to improve swimming skills while also providing social interaction among women from different institutions. Following the games, the women mingled socially over tea and snacks in an atmosphere of “jolly sociability” (Cahn, 1994; Daniels, 1977, p.154).

**Sport Days and Telegraphic Meets (1930s)**

During the 1930s a much greater acceptance of non-varsity intercollegiate competition for women began to emerge on college campuses around the country. Educators decided to offer a more competitive alternative to Play Days in the form of “telegraphic meets” designed to provide an emotional outlet for those women with varsity sport aspirations (Cahn, 1994; Gerber, 1982, Lucas & Smith, 1982; Woolum, 1998). By the early to mid-1930s the Swan Club was participating in telegraphic meets as part of their club activities, while also performing water pageants in the Pomerene Pool for the university and surrounding communities as a regular part of the Intramural Festivals, which took place during all three academic quarters (fall, winter and spring) (Daniels, 1977; The Makio Yearbook, 1937).

The Swan Club’s first telegraphic meet occurred in the spring of 1936 and pitted Ohio State against both the clubs of Ohio University and Syracuse University (Daniels, 1977; The Makio Yearbook, 1937). In the telegraphic competition, the Swan Club members put forth their best efforts in the following swimming events (40 yard free style, the 40 yard breast stroke, the 20 yard back stroke, the 20 yard free style, and the 20 yard
side stroke) and then telegraphed the results of their top three finishers to the other competing schools (Daniels, 1977; H. Alkire, personal communication, June 2, 2010; The Makio Yearbook, 1937). The individuals with the best times from each school won the events and, those schools with the highest number of winners ultimately won the telegraphic meet (Cahn, 1994; The Makio Yearbook, 1937; Woolum, 1998). This type of sporting event allowed Swan Club members to engage in competition in a form that, by its very nature, was non-intensive and precluded emotions as well as spectators, and was thus deemed socially acceptable.

By the mid-to-late 1930s “Sports Days” gradually replaced Play Days and telegraphic meets (Cahn, 1994; Gerber, 1982, Lucas & Smith, 1982; Woolum, 1998). Sports Days involved students playing on a team with their own schoolmates rather than having their school identities erased by being mixed with students from other schools, like that which was done in Play Days. While the amount of competition in any form for women remained minimal, Susan Cahn explained that “Sports Days” allowed schools to form teams in advance, practice several times, and then gather to compete in a single day or weekend of competition (Cahn, 1994, p. 66). The difference between play days and sports days may not have seem significant, but at least in sports days female students were able to form a semblance of team identity and perhaps, from quarter to quarter, they were also able to develop the rudiments of team cohesion (Cahn, 1994; Gerber, 1982, Lucas & Smith, 1982; Woolum, 1998).

Some colleges and universities refused to condone sports days, however, for the very reason that female students competed for preselected teams that practiced prior to
the event and then vied against other college teams. Administrators from these schools argued that Sports Days resembled intercollegiate competition, especially the type of competition used in the male model of sport (Cahn, 1994). Other administrators, like those from Ohio State, argued that by allowing all interested female students to join a team and by limiting the competition to one day, Sports Days still offered an inclusive, “democratic” alternative to elite varsity teams that, by contrast, selected members on the basis of skill and then competed against other schools over a months-long season (Daniels, 1977).

In 1937 the Swan Club scheduled several Sports Days with other local colleges including Ohio University, Ohio Wesleyan, Wittenberg, Cincinnati, and Denison (The Makio Yearbook, 1938). Members of the Swan Club were often chosen to represent Ohio State in swim meets during Sports Day programming. These selected members along with women chosen from the other participating schools competed in swimming events such as the crawl, the side stroke, and the back stroke (The Makio Yearbook, 1938). The remaining Swan Club members, such as Helen Alkire who swam for the club from 1934-1936, performed in water carnivals, one of which featured Lenore Kight, a world champion women’s free style swimmer, and entertained at swim parties held after swimming competitions (H, Alkire, personal communication, June 2, 2010).

By the late 1930s Helen Alkire recalled that, “some of my peers who were more interested in speed and endurance swimming decided to break away from the Swan Club and create their own swimming club named the Silver Fish” (H, Alkire, personal communication, June 2, 2010; The Makio Yearbook, 1938). Others, including Alkire,
who preferred the creative aspects of swimming remained members of the Swan Club, which became solely a synchronized swimming club and focused primarily on form and rhythmic swimming (H, Alkire, personal communication, June 2, 2010). Emphasizing perfection and form, the Swan Club gave campus women the opportunity to develop techniques in rhythmic routines and precision ballet. But as Alkire explained,

The moves that we performed were more like circles, curves and angles performed on the top of the water…..we did not perform anything close to the stunts that the synchronized swimmers execute today. In fact, we wore bathing caps and did not dunk our heads under the water because the deepest portion of the Pomerene Pool, where we practiced and performed, was only six feet deep. (H, Alkire, personal communication, June 2, 2010)

_Synchronized Swimming: First Dual Meet and Sponsorship by AAU (1939-1940)_

The first dual meet competition ever held in synchronized swimming at the collegiate level occurred on May 27, 1939 at the Chicago Teacher’s College where Kay Curtis took a new position and organized a club similar to the Tarpon Club that she established at the University of Chicago in 1923 (Bean, 2005; Curtis, 1942). There was a natural rivalry that sprang up between Curtis’ former swimmers at Wright Junior College in Chicago and her current swimmers at the Chicago Teacher’s College. The competition was held as part of the annual Teachers’ Day Program and was designed “to give the
average swimmer a chance to perform in competition where speed was not the fundamental desire” (Bean, 2005, p. 33).

The events in this competition included the following: a floating routine involving a maximum of fourteen women performing synchronized floating formations to music for seven minutes (Bean, 2005, p. 33-37); a small routine consisting of two to four women performing the same floatation maneuvers except at a faster pace to music for up to four minutes; a large routine made up of eight to 12 women performing rhythmic moves to music at a swift pace for two and four minutes long; and finally a fancy stunt competition consisting of teams of two women executing four required and four optional stunts (Bean, 2005, p. 33-37; Curtis, 1942). Each routine was judged on timing, style, difficulty and composition, while each stunt was graded individually, as in diving, on ease, grace, form and rhythm (Bean, 2005, p. 33-37; Curtis, 1942).

Not only was the meet the first of its kind to be held at the collegiate level, but it was also the first of its kind to ever take place in the United States (Bean, 2005; Curtis, 1942; Spears, 1950; Stoerker, 1956). Kay Curtis often wondered, even as a student at the University of Wisconsin in 1915, “why competitive swimming was limited primarily to speed and diving events?” (Bean, 2005, p. 16; Curtis, 1942). “Why could we not center our interests upon grace and ease of movement in the water, developing the aesthetic values of swimming?” (Curtis, 1942, p. 12) Why not sponsor a figure swimming contest?” (Bean, 2005, p. 16; Curtis, 1942, p. 12). Curtis remarked that,
This new form of rhythmic swimming requires endurance, not speed; versatility in the use of all strokes, not specialization in one; a keen sense of rhythm; the specific development of the ability to adapt one’s strokes to the average strokes of the group in which the degree of difficulty in any performance can be adjusted to the individual’s ability; …. she can progress at her own rate of speed; her success depends not upon her strength, but upon her skill; and her creative interest finds a wide field in the development of the routines. (Bean, 2005, p. 16; Curtis, 1942, p. 12)

The dual collegiate meet prompted David Clark Leach, Central Association Chairman of the Amateur Athletic Union (AAU) Swimming Committee, to discuss with Curtis the possibility of establishing synchronized swimming as an AAU competitive event (Bean, 2005; Curtis, 1942; Spears, 1950; Stoerker, 1956). Curtis initially reacted negatively to this idea on the basis that it might defeat her purpose of reaching the great masses of “mediocre” swimmers (Bean, 2005, p. 36). But, after some thought, she reversed her stance and rationalized that competitive synchronized swimming might offer an outlet for the racing swimmer who did not have the skill to compete at a high level or who had lost interest in the mundane activity of swimming laps (Bean, 2005, p. 36; Stoerker, 1956). Synchronized swimming, instead, could offer a new and creative challenge to the “mediocre” swimmer Curtis reasoned (Bean, 2005, p. 36).
Leach enthusiastically set in motion the process of gaining approval for adding synchronized swimming to the AAU swimming program. He appointed Curtis to chair a rules preparation committee as well as a committee designed to establish methods of marking and grading particular stunts and events (Bean, 2005). Other committees were also formed to establish regulations for event and time requirements. Debate within these committees also ensued about whether costuming should be given any points and it was ultimately decided that scoring “the appropriateness” of the costuming should remain a component of the events (Bean, 2005; Curtis, 1942; Spears, 1950; Stoerker, 1956). The AAU finally adopted synchronized swimming as an official competitive sport in 1940 for duet and team national events, but it was not until the early 1950s that the Ohio State Swan Club participated in an AAU sponsored collegiate meet (Bean, 2005; Daniels, 1977).

*Intercollegiate Guidelines for Women at Ohio State (1940s)*

In the 1940s the Swan Club continued to perform water shows on a quarterly basis for the University and surrounding communities with a much larger show presented as a year-end finale during each spring quarter (Daniels, 1977; The Makio Yearbook, 1939). Much like Kay Curtis’ club at the Chicago Teacher’s College, the Swans also began to participate in some special events and several dual meets on an informal basis with other local schools (Daniels, 1977; The Makio Yearbook, 1939). Many of these events were held in concert with men’s intercollegiate swimming and diving competitions, particularly during times of intermission in the men’s meets in order to
provide entertainment for audience members (Daniels, 1977; The Makio Yearbook, 1939). These dual meets, like the one held in 1939 by Kay Curtis, involved floating routines and fancy stunt presentations by both participating schools (Daniels, 1977; The Makio Yearbook, 1939).

While the events were described as “competitions,” their true aim was to continue to provide the masses of “mediocre swimmers” with opportunities to partake in “friendly rivalry” in the relatively new activity of synchronized swimming (Daniels, 1977; The Makio Yearbook, 1939). Administrators from both participating schools hoped that, “participants, judges, officials, and auxiliary workers would enjoy their association together, meet new friends, and gain growing respect for the efforts and skills of others” (Daniels, 1977, p. 124; The Makio Yearbook, 1939). Not only did these meets provide the Swans with a chance to have fun and socialize with their fellow students, but they also provided these women with an opportunity to meet and socialize with female swimmers from other local institutions.

As interest in sport for women continued to develop, so too did the variety and levels of opportunity for participation. With the increase of interest and opportunity in sport, came the improvement of skill level of participants over time (Cahn, 1994; Woolum, 1998). While the subject of intercollegiate competition for women remained an extremely controversial topic with the majority of women physical educators expressing views against it, there was a growing contingency from within these ranks that began to plead for a loosening of restrictions on intercollegiate competition for women (Cahn, 1994; Daniels, 1977; Festle, 1996; Gerber, 1982; Lucas & Smith, 1982; Parratt, 1998;
Among this contingency were the Ohio State women’s physical educators who began to champion the cause of more rigorous competition for highly skilled female students (Daniels, 1977). This group, led by Gladys Palmer, called upon physical educators from around the country to replace the current Play and Sports Day models with a model that promoted “Excellence of Play” among women of higher skill ability (Daniels, 1977). The motto for this proposed new model was, “an admiration of excellence for its own sake” (Daniels, 1977, p. 145).

When Palmer and her staff proposed to host a women’s national golf tournament in order to implement their proposal, the Executive Committee of the American Association for Health, Physical Education and Recreation (AAHPER), rejected their proposal outright (Cahn, 1994; Daniels, 1977; Kearney, 1982). Palmer and her staffs’ firm conviction concerning the need for national level competition for highly skilled women, however, prompted them to launch the tournament in spite of their colleagues’ scorn (Cahn, 1994; Daniels, 1977; Kearney, 1982). Although the influence of Palmer and her allies grew very slowly, their actions reopened the issue of intercollegiate sport for women, and in the process, “gradually shifted the battleground from a rancorous conflict between educators and male sport officials to an internal struggle among women physical educators” (Cahn, 1994, p. 80). The battle among the women physical educators was no longer over whether women should participate in sports, but over precisely what kinds of sports they should participate in and, in some cases, at what level of play (Cahn, 1994; Gerber, 1982; Kearney, 1982; Smith & Lucas, 1982). With the exception of golf,
leaders of the field remained only minimally receptive to competitive intercollegiate sports for women (Cahn, 1994; Kearney, 1982).

The bold move made by Palmer and her colleagues to host a national golf tournament in spite of their peers disapproval marked a period in Ohio State’s physical education program when the staff members transformed their role in the field from that of “national trend supports” to that of “national trend setters” (Daniels, 1977, p. 176; Kearney, 1982). Palmer and her staff even went so far as to suggest the need for the development of a Women’s National Collegiate Athletic Association, but their idea never came to fruition (Cahn, 1994; Kearney, 1982). Instead, Palmer and the other Ohio State women physical educators worked on establishing the first set of policies for intercollegiate competition for women at Ohio State (Daniels, 1977; Kearney, 1982). Over a decade had passed before national thinking caught up to Ohio State’s position favoring national intercollegiate competition for women (Daniels, 1977; Kearney, 1982).

While the first official intercollegiate guidelines for competition were completed in 1947, it was not until 1949 that a competitive sport season was initiated for women at Ohio State (Daniels, 1977). This year marked the beginning of scheduled intercollegiate competitive seasons for women as we know them today, albeit on a very limited scale (Daniels, 1977). Until the late 1940s, individuals within the physical education profession were hesitant about taking a stand on supporting an intercollegiate program which consisted of more than an occasional play day or sports day encounter. Ohio State administrators, however, felt that it was finally time to endorse the philosophy of sound, continual exposure to intercollegiate competition for women without camouflaging it.
under some other more socially acceptable name (Daniels, 1977, p. 189). In the wake of this transition, the Swan Club began to undergo a decade of growth and expansion in the 1950s (Daniels, 1977).

Expansion and Growth (1950s)

The Swans at Ohio State were one of several Midwestern college synchronized swimming club teams that began to witness a significant growth in popularity among their female students during the conservative tenor of the 1950s (Crumley, 1982; Daniels, 1977). This development was not surprising given the popular post-war propaganda campaign which encouraged women to “re-embrace” their femininity following the war efforts (Cahn, 1994; Daniels, 1977; Festle, 1996). Physical educators, in accordance with societal norms of the time, espoused a clear ideology about what constituted the “right and wrong” sorts of sports for women in higher education. They focused their attention on those sport and skill activities that they thought would meet women’s leisure needs in their post-schooling years (Cahn, 1994; Daniels, 1977; Festle, 1996). Not coincidently, these sporting and skill activities were the ones considered most feminine and appropriate for women during the 1950s since these activities were performed at a less frantic pace, with less exertion and sweat, and with no physical contact between opponents (Cahn, 1994; Daniels, 1977; Festle, 1996; Gerber, 1982).

The significant growth in popularity of an activity such as synchronized swimming was also not unusual for women attending a Midwestern university considering the largest city in the Midwest, Chicago, was long known as the “cradle of
water ballet” and was home to the most active proponents of synchronized swimming (Bean, 2005, p. 8; Stoerker, 1956). At the same time, this period in history marked the rising stardom of Hollywood actress Esther Williams who popularized water ballet in her debut film, *Bathing Beauties*, and who was thereafter dubbed “America’s Swimming Sweetheart” (Bean, 2005). Even though rules for competition in national synchronized swimming events were adopted in 1940 before Williams’ immense popularity, her idolatry undoubtedly promoted popular acceptance and subsequent growth of the sport (Bean, 2005). Thus it was the conservative ideas about gender in the 1950s combined with sports’ historic association with masculinity that made feminine sporting activities such as synchronized swimming a popular and “acceptable” mode of physical activity for middle-class women attending institutions of higher education (Cahn, 1994; Festle, 1996; Kearney, 1982; Theberge, 1995).

In fact, the Swan Club became so popular among female students on Ohio State’s campus in the 1950s that newly appointed faculty advisor, Barbara Heller, had to create a sister club called the Cygnets, or “the baby swans” (B, Heller, personal communication, June 10, 2010; The Makio Yearbook, 1956). The Cygnets served to accommodate the increasing number of students interested in participating in synchronized swimming activities (B, Heller, personal communication, June 10, 2010; Twenty Girls Initiated into Signets, 1959). Heller noted that, “We had so many try out for the Swans and hated to lose the ones who were not quite skilled enough but whom we felt had the potential with a little more work, so we decided to create the Cygnets” (B, Heller, personal communication, June 10, 2010). While the Swans remained the advanced section of the
club and participated in the dual meets, special events and quarterly shows, the Cygnets became an apprentice group working to become future Swan Club members (B, Heller, personal communication, June 10, 2010).

Membership for the Cygnets was based on a coed’s ability to perform basic swimming skills, such as swimming the front and back crawl, the breast stroke, right and left side strokes, head first sculling, surface dives, and dives from the side of the pool (Daniels, 1977, p. 147; The Makio Yearbook, 1956). Meanwhile, the requirements to become a Swan were ratcheted up due to the fact that so many of the women trying out for the club had formal backgrounds in swimming and better skills than those who had tried out in previous years (Daniels, 1977). The new requirements for the Swans included the ability to perform torpedos, front tuck and back pike somersaults, dolphins, kips, ballet leg-alternates, foot-first dolphins, and any two stunts with a difficulty level of 1.7 or above (Daniels, 1977, p. 147; The Makio Yearbook, 1956). Throughout the 1950s the members of both the Swans and Cygnets met weekly on Wednesdays for practice and on a more regular basis prior to dual meets and the quarterly water performances (Daniels, 1977, p. 147; The Makio Yearbook, 1956).

_Women’s Sports and New Attitudes (1960s)_

By the 1960s, attitudes concerning women in general and their participation in sport began to change. The traditional anti-varsity, anti-competition model of women’s collegiate sport was finally beginning to give way under the leadership of a new, younger generation of physical educators (Cahn, 1994; Festle, 1996; Gerber, 1982). From the
beginning it was clear that the new leaders in the field had quite a different vision of women’s competitive sport programs than did the previous generation of physical educators. Much like their predecessors, the new, younger generation was still critical of the male athletic model, but they differed markedly in their thinking from the previous leaders in that they did not deem intercollegiate competition among female athletes as objectionable (Cahn, 1994; Festle, 1996).

Phyllis Bailey, the first Coordinator of Women’s Sports at Ohio State, was among this new, liberal vanguard of athletic leaders (Daniels, 1977). Much like her peers in the field of physical education Bailey faced the new challenge of expanding the athletic freedom of Ohio State female students while also trying to maintain control of the nature of their athleticism (Daniels, 1977). While Bailey remained sensitive to the fundamental goals espoused by earlier leaders, which included designing sport programs that were both “appropriate and beneficial” for collegiate women, she also embraced the younger generations’ shift in attitude regarding competitive sport opportunities for female athletes (Daniels, 1977). It was not surprising then that Bailey became a strong proponent of the Swan Club and their competitive aspirations in the sport of synchronized swimming (Daniels, 1997).

In fact, the relatively new competitive sport of synchronized swimming was growing rapidly during the decade of the 1960s due to what many believed was its “special appeal and suitability for the female competitor” (Bean, 2005, p. 56). The sport combined requirements for grace and rhythm with exacting body control while also offering the benefits of swimming strength and endurance (Bean, 2005, p. 36). Although
synchronized swimming required great physical conditioning, many educators believed that “muscular development” was more evenly balanced in synchronized swimming than in other sports and that the opportunity for creativity in the sport provided a greater attraction to the female athlete (Bean, 2005). Phyllis Bailey believed that synchronized swimming was one of the up and coming sports for women and that it was both an “appropriate and beneficial” sport for collegiate female athletes to partake in competitively (Crumley, 1982; Daniels, 1977). For this reason, Bailey made an early commitment to the sport and to its growth and development at The Ohio State University (Crumley, 1982).

In her effort to establish a competitive synchronized swimming team at Ohio State, Bailey appointed the first faculty advisor to the Swan Club, Ann Lilly, who had previous experience both as a participant and as an advisor in the sport (A. Lilly, personal communication, May 12, 2010). Lilly attended West Virginia University where she was first introduced to the sport in her physical education classes (A. Lilly, personal communication, May 12, 2010). Following graduation, she secured a teaching position in the Columbus Public School District and also served, for several years, as a volunteer advisor to the AAU Columbus Coralinas synchronized swimming club team under the tutelage of Edna Hines (A. Lilly, personal communication, May 12, 2010). In 1961 Lilly accepted a teaching position in the women’s physical education department at Ohio State and assumed the role of faculty advisor for the Swan Club (A. Lilly, personal communication, May 12, 2010). Her knowledge and prior experience working with the Columbus Coralinas was invaluable to the early development of the Swan Club as a
competitive synchronized swimming team at Ohio State (A. Lilly, personal communication, May 12, 2010).

Under Lilly’s direction the Swans began practicing twice weekly and more often throughout the weeks prior to water shows and competitions (A. Lilly, personal communication, May 12, 2010; The Makio Yearbook, 1962). Practices no longer focused solely on the basic skills involved in synchronized swimming. Instead, each practice session concentrated on establishing routines for local and regional competitions (The Makio Yearbook, 1962; Water show starts, 1961). In creating competitive routines Lilly explained that, “You had to consider the outside of the pool as a picture frame and, like an artist, you tried to fill the space with creative athletic movements that captured the attention of both the judges and the audience members…and this is exactly what we worked on each time we met for practice” (Williams, 1962).

By 1961 not only had the Swan Club witnessed an increase in the number of practice sessions held per week, but they also experienced a growth in the number of meets offered on their annual competitive schedule (A. Lilly, personal communication, May 12, 2010). The Swans schedule expanded from one to two local, dual meets offered in the 1940s and 1950s to that of three to four regional, multi-team competitions offered in the 1960s (The Makio Yearbook, 1961; Water show starts, 1961). The top 12 performers in the Swan Club were selected to represent Ohio State in both the local and regional synchronized swimming competitions and were, in effect, considered the ‘girls varsity synchronized swimming team’ by the late 1960s (A. Lilly, personal communication, May 12, 2010; The Makio Yearbook, 1961). While many universities at
that time had an unwritten rule that “girls” should not travel more than 50 miles from campus for athletics events, the 12 Swans were permitted to travel “where they could find the best competition,” which at that time meant all throughout the Midwest region (A. Lilly, personal communication, May 12, 2010; The Makio Yearbook, 1961).

In the spring of 1961 the Swan Club participated in the first annual Midwest Intercollegiate Synchronized Swimming (M.I.S.S) competition which featured more than 11 schools from Ohio and other surrounding Midwestern states (Meet Results, 1961; Coeds compete, 1966; The Makio Yearbook, 1961). Attendance at this meet, which was hosted by the University of Illinois Terrapin Club, was so great that the competing schools were limited to three routines each (Bean, 2005; Coeds compete, 1966; The Makio Yearbook, 1961). While the Swan Club finished seventh in the overall team competition, several Swans were honored in the Columbus Sunday Magazine for their outstanding individual performances (A. Lilly, personal communication, May 12, 2010; The Makio Yearbook, 1966). Honoring such sporting performances was also a new development for female athletes in the 1960s since the earlier generation of physical educators deemed adulation for sport achievements more appropriate in the male model of sport competition than the female model of sport participation (Cahn, 1994; Festle, 1996; Gerber, 1982).

Throughout the early-to-mid 1960s synchronized swimming continued to grow and flourish as a competitive collegiate sport for women in the Midwest. Ann Lilly and the Ohio State Swan Club hosted the fifth annual Midwest Intercollegiate Synchronized Swimming meet in 1966 which, by that time, was moved to the end of the competitive
season and became the most prestigious meet for women competing in collegiate synchronized swimming (A. Lilly, personal communication, May 12, 2010; Meet Results, 1966; The Makio Yearbook, 1966). More than 150 coeds competed in the stunt competition held in the Pomerene Hall Pool while the seventeen schools competing in the overall team competition performed their routines in the local Upper Arlington High School swimming pool (Coeds compete, 1966; The Makio Yearbook, 1966). Although the Michigan clubs dominated the competition and secured the top three team positions, (with the University of Michigan placing first, Central Michigan taking second and Michigan State University capturing third), the Swan Club finished a respectable sixth place overall in the team standings (Coeds compete, 1966; Meet Results, 1966).

**Changing Societal Attitudes (Mid-to-Late 1960s)**

By the mid-to-late 1960s new societal attitudes toward women in general, prompted women’s collegiate sport to enter a dramatically new era, a period of tremendous gains and even higher hopes for female athletes (Cahn, 1994; Festle, 1996). At the national level the Division of Girls and Women’s Sports (DGWS), the first nationally recognized collegiate organization for women’s athletics, began to expand the definition of proper competition and became energetic advocates for highly skilled female athletes (Cahn, 1994; Festle, 1996). Likewise, the gradual loosening of society’s traditional gender arrangements over time provided the impetus for the DGWS to subsequently create the Commission on Intercollegiate Athletics for Women (CIAW) in 1966, the forerunner to the Association for Intercollegiate Athletics for Women (AIAW)
This organization’s primary role was to govern and promote major intercollegiate athletic tournaments for female athletes and sponsor national championship events in selected women’s sports. At the same time however, the CIAW remained consistent with DGWS’s philosophy of encouraging participants to be students before athletes and discouraging too much emphasis being placed on developing “stars” (Cahn, 1994; Festle, 1996; Gerber, 1982; Kearney, 1982).

At the institutional level, Ohio State continued to recognize women’s sport club teams as competitive intercollegiate teams and began the initial stages of transitioning these programs out of the academic unit of physical education and into the extracurricular-oriented Office of Student Services (Daniels, 1977; The Ohio State Monthly, 1979). This change prompted administrative restructuring, resulting in the creation of several new departments (Daniels, 1977). As part of this restructuring initiative, Ann Lilly was offered an administrative position on campus in the newly created department of dance (A. Lilly, personal communication, May 12, 2010). Lilly accepted the administrative promotion and subsequently relinquished her position as the Swan Club faculty advisor (A. Lilly, personal communication, May 12, 2010).

Although Lilly was instrumental in transforming the Swan Club from an exhibition squad to that of a competitive team, Phyllis Bailey sought to gain an even greater competitive advantage over the Swans’ Midwestern rivals by recruiting yet another Swan Club faculty advisor who possessed both a proven record and a solid background in the sport of synchronized swimming (A. Lilly, personal communication,
May 12, 2010; Daniels, 1977). Bailey accomplished this goal when she appointed Annie Clement to the Swan Club faculty advisor position in 1967 (A. Lilly, personal communication, May 12, 2010; Daniels, 1977). Clement a native of Hibbing Minnesota, a town known for its long history and rich tradition in synchronized swimming, participated in the sport throughout her junior high and high school years (A. Clement, personal communication, June 15, 2010). While she decided to compete in tennis at the University of Minnesota Duluth, Clement never stopped participating in synchronized swimming club performances during her collegiate career (A. Clement, personal communication, June 15, 2010).

After college, Clement returned to Hibbing, Minnesota to teach physical education and coach synchronized swimming at her former high school (A. Clement, personal communication, June 15, 2010). In 1962 Gladys Scott, the chair of the women’s physical education department at the University of Iowa, recruited Clement to enroll in the biomechanics doctoral program at Iowa and serve as the new faculty advisor to the Seal’s Club, Iowa’s synchronized swimming club team (A. Clement, personal communication, June 15, 2010). For the next four years Clement applied the lessons she learned in the classroom to those that she gained from her high school coaching experience to modify and improve the Seal’s technical and artistic skills in the water (A. Clement, personal communication, June 15, 2010). Combining her education with her previous coaching experience proved effective as Clement turned a decent Iowa synchronized swimming club team into a top three team in the nation (A. Clement, personal communication, June 15, 2010). She learned early on in her coaching career that
to be an effective synchronized swimming coach, “[one] needed to be a good scientist of sorts” (A. Clement, personal communication, June 15, 2010). This epiphany proved critical for the role that Clement would later play in her efforts to help Phyllis Bailey identify a permanent coach for the synchronized swimming program at Ohio State.

Upon completion of her doctoral degree, Clement accepted a full-time faculty teaching position in the women’s physical education department at The Ohio State University (A. Clement, personal communication, June 15, 2010). Soon after arriving on campus, Clement was enlisted to replace Lilly as the new Swan Club faculty advisor (A. Clement, personal communication, June 15, 2010). Phyllis Bailey selected Clement for this position because she had extensive knowledge and previous coaching experience in the sport at both the high school and collegiate levels (A. Clement, personal communication, June 15, 2010). Bailey’s recognition of synchronized swimming as a serious sport at that time gave the program at Ohio State a decided advantage over area competitors who had only recently gained acknowledgement of the sport’s potential. In fact it was Bailey’s overarching goal as Coordinator of Women’s Sport to build a premiere intercollegiate varsity athletic program for women at Ohio State and she vowed to do so by, first, establishing a top-notch synchronized swimming program, a sport she deemed “up and coming” in the burgeoning field of women’s competitive athletics (A. Clement, personal communication, June 15, 2010). Consequently, Bailey sought to appoint a new club advisor who had the skill set and experience necessary to accomplish this lofty goal (A. Clement, personal communication, June 15, 2010).
Annie Clement once again utilized her training in biomechanics, this time, to help tweak the Swans technical and artistic skills in the water (A. Clement, personal communication, June 15, 2010). She noted that, “the Swans were very strong swimmers when [she] began advising the team, but that they lacked the skills and conditioning necessary to excel in the aquatic art portion of the competition” (A. Clement, personal communication, June 15, 2010). In order to fix this problem, Clement decided to divide each practice session into three separate parts, each of which would focus on a particular skill set (A. Clement, personal communication, June 15, 2010). The first part consisted of listening to music and selecting movements and skills that best corresponded to the rhythm and beat of the music. The next section involved practicing the selected moves and skills by the poolside in dry runs until each was executed flawlessly. The final section was devoted to practicing the team’s competitive routine in the water repeatedly until the Swans’ overall performance was perfected (A. Clement, personal communication, June 15, 2010; The Makio Yearbook, 1968; Walker, 1968). According to Clement, “Judges based their scoring on flow, stunt selection, complexity, appropriateness to music and showmanship, so this is exactly what [we] concentrated on during each practice” (A. Clement, personal communication, June 15, 2010; Walker, 1968).

Clement’s new and improved practice sessions paid off as the Swans rebounded from a seventh place finish in the M.I.S.S. Championship competition a year earlier to that of a third place finish in 1968 (Meet Results, 1968). By as early as 1969 Clement coached the Swans to their first M.I.S.S Championship victory in school history (A.
Clement, personal communication, June 15, 2010; Meet Results, 1969). Led by the Ballinger twins, Kathy and Kris, the Swans outclassed the other 15 competing schools by taking first place in all but two events and by winning the overall competition by a 32 point margin over the second place finisher Kent State University (Meet Results, 1969). Each entrant in the competition was judged on style and execution of such routines as the kip, dolphin, and somersault and all the routines except for the stunt classes were performed to music (Meet Results, 1969). Donna Fosco, a senior on the Swans’ victorious team noted that, “It was our intense desire to win and long months of practice that really resulted in our success” (Meet Results, 1969). The Swans victory at the 1969 M.I.S.S. Championship capped off the first win in what would soon be an eight year winning streak for the Club, a record that has yet to be duplicated by any other sport program in Ohio State athletic history.

With her success as a coach and her leadership in the field of physical education, it was no surprise that Annie Clement was offered a new position as the chair of the women’s physical education department at Bowling Green State University in the fall of 1970 (A. Clement, personal correspondence, June 15, 2010). Once again, Phyllis Bailey was left with the responsibility of finding a replacement for the Swan Club faculty advisor position (A. Clement, personal correspondence, June 15, 2010). This time, however, Bailey solicited Clement’s help in finding a suitable and more permanent faculty advisor to work with the Swans and help them continue to develop as a top team in the country (A. Clement, personal correspondence, June 15, 2010). Amid the swirl of change in women’s sport in the late 1960s and the ensuing effort made by Phyllis Bailey
to transition the women’s competitive sport club teams into a comprehensive and elite intercollegiate athletic program, it was critical for Bailey to use all of her resources to help find a knowledgeable and experienced coach to take over and continue the winning momentum that Annie Clement initially brought to the Swan Club (A. Clement, personal correspondence, June 15, 2010).

Clement agreed to help Bailey in her search for a new faculty advisor and began by looking for a woman who, like Clement, had a similar academic background in biomechanics as well as one who possessed both the courage and the fortitude necessary to build, coach and nurture a championship caliber synchronized swimming program in an athletic environment dominated by men and governed by the old boys’ network (A. Clement, personal correspondence, June 15, 2010). Clement need not search far as she found the perfect fit in Mary Jo Ruggieri, a successful physical education instructor and synchronized swimming coach in Cincinnati, Ohio (A. Clement, personal correspondence, June 15, 2010).

**Conclusion**

Within limits, by the late-1960s collegiate female athletes experienced greater tolerance and approval, as well as new opportunities to compete within the institution of sport (Cahn, 1994; Festle, 1996). These changes proved significant for the development of women’s intercollegiate athletics in general, but even more so for the Swan Club at Ohio State. Significant as the changes were, they were minor compared to those that were still to come in the 1970s. To truly understand how Ohio State’s Swan Club grew
from obscurity to that of national prominence beginning in the 1970s, we must first examine the social and political changes that occurred during this same time period and the affects that these changes had on the development of women’s intercollegiate athletics in general and the Ohio State synchronized swimming program in particular.
Chapter 3: The Making of a Sport Dynasty, 1970-1979

The Women’s Rights Movement, Title IX and the AIAW

While it took the heroic efforts of a young generation of athletes, instructors and administrators in the 1960s to gradually liberalize the long-standing ban on women’s intercollegiate athletic competition, their combined efforts received unanticipated help from forces outside the insular world of women’s physical education (Cahn, 1994; Festle, 1996). In fact the pace of change in women’s intercollegiate athletics increased dramatically as it became swept up in the larger winds of social change that characterized American society in the late-1960s and early 1970s (Cahn, 1994; Festle, 1996). With the women’s liberation movement exerting its influence in almost every corner of American life by the 1970s, the demand for equality in the institution of sport also gained tremendous momentum (Cahn, 1994; Festle, 1996). Women in sport, particularly at the collegiate level, saw the mounting social movement as an opportunity to approach the issue of athletic resources and opportunity from an explicitly political perspective, one aided by organized feminism (Cahn, 1994; Festle, 1996).

At the same time increasing political reform at the national level also fostered a renewed excitement about women’s sport and an awareness of its feminist implications.
During the early 1970s the disputed concept of a woman’s right to athletic enjoyment finally became codified in law (Cahn, 1994; Carpenter & Acosta, 2005; Festle, 1996; Fields, 2005). Congress passed the Educational Act of 1972 which included a section in its legislation addressing the issue of sex discrimination. Title IX of the act stated that, “No person in the United States shall, on the basis of sex, be excluded from participation in, be denied the benefits of, or be subjected to discrimination under any educational programs or activities receiving federal financial assistance” (Cahn, 1994, p. 250; Carpenter & Acosta, 2005; Festle, 1996; Fields, 2005). While women in physical education had cautiously increased competitive sporting opportunities for collegiate female athletes prior to the passage of Title IX, the new political context accelerated this process (Cahn, 1994; Festle, 1996; Fields, 2005). In fact without ever mentioning the word athletics, Title IX ushered in what many believed to be a revolution in women’s sports (Cahn, 1994; Festle, 1996; Fields, 2005).

Without a doubt the new social and political context of the 1970s furnished women’s physical educators’ with a new lens through which to view the pervasive gender inequalities that existed within college athletics (Cahn, 1994; Festle, 1996). As the social and political climate began to liberalize so too did the comfort level of these women in moving beyond their traditional insistence on sex separation in sport to their new, more progressive agenda of offering females separate but equal sports conducted under the newly organized women’s national athletic governing body, the AIAW (Byrne, 2003; Cahn, 1994; Festle, 1996; Wushanley, 2004). As the sole sponsor and chief advocate of women’s intercollegiate athletics the AIAW much like the NCAA, its male-counterpart,
assumed responsibility for publishing eligibility rules, representing member schools, and conducting national championships exclusively for female collegiate athletes during the 1970s and early 1980s (Wushanley, 2004). By giving females a chance to compete athletically in an association governed by women administrators, the AIAW provided a vehicle for chipping away at male domination of sport, for promoting women’s athletic priorities, and for empowering female athletes to pursue more competitive and highly-skilled sporting opportunities (Cahn, 1994; Festle, 1996; Wushanley, 2004).

Although federal intervention and growing organizational efforts provided an opening for reform to occur within sport, it was the courageous political and ideological battles waged by women on individual college campuses nationwide that eventually provided the impetus for change to take place within the historically male bastion of college athletics (Cahn, 1994; Festle, 1996). Risky though advocacy was, most women realized early on that activism did make a difference in bringing about greater opportunities and resources for female athletes (Cahn, 1994; Festle, 1996; Wushanley, 2004). It was against this backdrop that women’s varsity athletics, in general, and the sport of synchronized swimming, in particular, began to grow and prosper at The Ohio State University.

A New Era in Ohio State Women’s Athletics

By 1970 Ohio State officials had completed the process of transitioning women’s sports out of the academic unit of physical education and into the extracurricular-oriented office of Student Services (Bailey, 1983; Schneider, 1973). Housed in its new
department, the women’s sports program was provided an annual operating budget of $9,000 (triple the amount from the previous year) and was now administered on a permanent basis by a female administrator, Phyllis Bailey, who was promoted to Assistant Director of University Recreation, Intramural and Women’s Intercollegiate Sports (Bailey, 1983; Schneider, 1973). In her new role, Bailey was afforded considerable latitude in both the decision-making and planning process of the newly organized women’s sports program at Ohio State (Daniels, 1977; Schneider, 1973). This latitude, according to Bailey, was due in large part to the fact that there was very little institutional support or excitement about the development of a separate women’s athletic program (Daniels, 1977; Schneider, 1973). In fact the common sentiment among Ohio State officials at that time was, “as long as Ohio State women’s athletics remains a relatively low-key, non-recruited, non-subsidized venture, Bailey is free to do as she pleased with the program” (Daniels, 1977, p. 138).

As the sole proprietor of women’s athletics Bailey’s first order of business was to hire a Swan Club faculty advisor to fill the vacancy left by Annie Clement in May of 1970 (A. Clement, personal communication, June 15, 2010). In her effort to build a strong synchronized swimming program at Ohio State, Bailey recognized the need to hire a knowledgeable and experienced advisor who could step in quickly and continue the winning momentum that Clement brought to the Swans in the late 1960s (A. Clement, personal communication, June 15, 2010; Daniels, 1977). She also knew that in order for the Swans to continue to develop both technically and artistically, as well as physically, she needed to hire an advisor, who like Clement, had an academic background in both the
function and performance of the human body (A. Clement, personal communication, June 15, 2010). Moreover, Bailey understood the importance of hiring a woman who possessed both the courage and fortitude necessary to build, coach and nurture a championship caliber synchronized swimming program in a collegiate athletic environment that was dominated by men and governed by the old boys’ network (A. Clement, personal communication, June 15, 2010). Bailey need not search far for Clement’s replacement, however, as she found the perfect match in Mary Jo Ruggieri, a native of Ravenna, Ohio who was both a pioneer in the sport of synchronized swimming and a trailblazer in the burgeoning women’s rights movement (A. Clement, personal communication, June 15, 2010).

Ruggieri, an avid swimmer since she was young, coached speed swimming and taught physical education at Anderson High School in Cincinnati, Ohio, for five years after graduating from Kent State University in 1965 with a degree in exercise physiology (Media Guide, 1970). While working at Anderson High, Ruggieri also helped coach the AAU Pepsi Marlins speed swimming team and founded Cincinnati’s first AAU synchronized swimming club program (Media Guide, 1970). Like Clement, Ruggieri was a scientist of sorts who used her academic background in exercise physiology “to hone her swimmers’ skills and make their bodies function like well-oiled machines” (A. Clement, personal communication, June 15, 2010; Media Guide, 1970). In fact over the five year period that Ruggieri coached synchronized swimming in Cincinnati, her swimmers’ skills and physical conditioning improved so much so that her team became one of the top AAU synchronized swimming club programs in the country (Media Guide,
1970). Even more impressive, however, was Ruggieri’s desire and ability to teach her young female athletes important values such as confidence, self-esteem and leadership qualities through their participation and competition in the sport of synchronized swimming (Media Guide, 1970). It was the combination of these qualities and attributes that prompted Phyllis Bailey to hire Mary Jo Ruggieri as the new Ohio State Swan Club faculty advisor in the summer of 1970 (A. Clement, personal communication, June 15, 2010).

A New Era in the Swan Club

When Ruggieri took over as the new Swan Club faculty advisor her first task was to evaluate the status of the current program (Media Guide, 1970; M.J. Ruggieri, personal communication, May 31, 2010). She began by scrutinizing every aspect of the Club including the practice and competition schedule, the swimming pool and training facilities, the operating budget and workout regimen, as well as the team’s most up-to-date roster (M.J. Ruggieri, personal communication, May 31, 2010). While Ruggieri was fortunate to have inherited a talented group of swimmers who had just won the Midwest Intercollegiate Synchronized Swimming (M.I.S.S.) Championship title during the previous season, it did not take long for Ruggieri to realize that her new team was forced to operate on a shoestring budget, train in a subpar facility and compete with very little university support or encouragement (M.J. Ruggieri, personal communication, May 31, 2010). Although many of the older generation of physical educators at Ohio State and elsewhere had grown accustomed to the meager resources delegated to women’s sports
and had rarely questioned the shabby treatment of female athletes at their schools, Mary Jo Ruggieri was a product of the new, younger generation of coaches and administrators who demanded better resources and treatment for all female athletes (Cahn, 1994; Festle, 1996; M.J. Ruggieri, personal communication, May 31, 2010).

In fact, unlike most of her mentors and peers in the field of physical education Ruggieri was fortunate to have secured her first job out of college working for a high school and an AAU swimming program that were both well ahead of their time in that they provided the very best for all of their athletes, including their female athletes (M.J. Ruggieri, personal communication, May 31, 2010). Her positive experience working for Anderson High and the AAU swimming program in Cincinnati set a precedent that Ruggieri expected all other academic institutions and athletic authorities to adhere to (M.J. Ruggieri, personal communication, May 31, 2010). Unfortunately, when Ruggieri left her former teaching and coaching positions in Cincinnati to work as a physical educator and a faculty advisor for the Ohio State Swan Club in 1970, she was disappointed to learn that her new employer, one of the largest state institutions in the country with one of the biggest athletic budgets, offered so little in the way of resources, facilities and support to its female athletes (M.J. Ruggieri, personal communication, May 31, 2010). Indeed Ruggieri learned quickly that in order to build a top-notch synchronized swimming program at Ohio State, she would not only have to fight restrictive rules and male opponents, but also prevailing attitudes about female athletes (M.J. Ruggieri, personal communication, May 31, 2010).
Ruggieri did, in fact, admit that her transition to coaching the Swans at Ohio State in the early 1970s was anything but easy. She explained that, “Training my new team was extremely difficult when I first arrived on campus because we were prohibited from using the full-size varsity swimming pool which, at that time, was reserved exclusively for use by the men’s swimming and diving programs as well as by the male faculty and staff members on campus” (M.J. Ruggieri, personal communication, May 31, 2010). Instead, Ruggieri and her team were forced to train in the nearly fifty year old Pomerene Hall pool which had four lanes, twenty yards in length, with only ten yards of water deep enough for the Swans to practice some of the basic underwater moves required in intercollegiate synchronized swimming competitions. “I could not believe the discrimination between men and women in the use of facilities at Ohio State,” lamented Ruggieri (M.J. Ruggieri, personal communication, May 31, 2010). Having just left a program that offered superior facilities and resources to all of its students, Ruggieri was having trouble understanding why her team at Ohio State was restricted to practicing and competing in the Pomerene Hall pool, which she equated to the size of her bathtub, when the full-size varsity natatorium was often unoccupied during many daytime and evening hours (M.J. Ruggieri, personal communication, May 31, 2010).

“This is how it has always been done at Ohio State,” was the explanation that Ruggieri frequently heard from her female colleagues in response to her inquiries (M.J. Ruggieri, personal communication, May 31, 2010). Stunned and frustrated by this response, Ruggieri decided to challenge “the norm” by asking the men if her team could practice in the varsity pool when it was not in use (M.J. Ruggieri, personal
communication, May 31, 2010). Unaccustomed to taking women’s sports seriously, male athletic administrators at Ohio State were astonished by Ruggieri’s request to hold her practice in the full-size varsity natatorium when it was unoccupied by the men (M.J. Ruggieri, personal communication, May 31, 2010). Her request was quickly denied on account that “the men would have to put bathing trunks on if the Swans were permitted to practice in their facility” (Daniels, 1977; M.J. Ruggieri, personal communication, May 31, 2010). According to Ruggieri, “the men treated the varsity natatorium like it was their own private country club and could not fathom allowing women to use their male-only facility” (M.J. Ruggieri, personal communication, May 31, 2010). Despite being denied access to the varsity swimming pool and regardless of the limitations associated with training in the Pomerene Hall pool, Ruggieri remained positive and continued to push forward with her first project as the new faculty advisor of the Swans which included restructuring the team’s current practice schedule and revamping the existing training program (M.J. Ruggieri, personal communication, May 31, 2010).

Restructuring and Revamping the Swan Club

Ruggieri was a staunch believer in the philosophy that, “practice, and lots of it, makes perfect” (M.J. Ruggieri, personal communication, May 31, 2010). Therefore, as part of her restructuring plan Ruggieri required the Swans to report for practice on the first day of autumn quarter classes, a full quarter earlier than ever before (M.J. Ruggieri, personal communication, May 31, 2010). She also increased the number of practice days per week to three and extended each practice sessions to two hours per day, thus doubling
the Swans total practice time per week (M.J. Ruggieri, personal communication, May 31, 2010). The purpose of her autumn quarter training regimen was to improve the Swans’ overall physical conditioning through interval training and dry land exercises, a recent innovation introduced into the Swans training program by Ruggieri (M.J. Ruggieri, personal communication, May 31, 2010). Interval training in the pool involved practicing different swim strokes, kicking and pulling drills, as well as over-distance swimming, or swimming with the purpose of feeling fatigued (Media Guide, 1970-1972; M.J. Ruggieri, personal communication, May 31, 2010). Dry land exercises, on the other hand, included jumping rope, jogging long distances, lifting weights and running stadium stairs, exercises not usually associated with female sports at that time, not to mention a feminine, graceful, ballet-like sport such as synchronized swimming (M.J. Ruggieri, personal communication, May 31, 2010). In fact, Ruggieri’s autumn quarter training regimen was considered so rigorous and unconventional for female athletes during the early 1970s that a writer for The Lantern remarked in an article that, “the Swans, under the direction of new faculty advisor Mary Jo Ruggieri, often resemble boxers training for title fights more than they do synchronized swimmers” (Pierron, 1978).

In addition to continuing the rigorous physical conditioning program that began during the fall quarter, Ruggieri’s winter and spring quarter practices also included developing routines for local and regional competitions (M.J. Ruggieri, personal communication, May 31, 2010; Pierron, 1978). Each Swan member, whether she competed in solo, duet, trio and/or team events, worked collaboratively with her teammates to write competitive routines, select music to accompany those routines and
create costumes appropriate for each performance (Media Guide, 1970-1972; M.J. Ruggieri, personal communication, May 31, 2010). Likewise, each Swan was responsible for working on figure events, which were individual stunt competitions and were, thus, practiced as such (Media Guide, 1970-1972). Once the routines and figures were designed and fine-tuned, Ruggieri had the Swans practice all of their competitive events at the local Upper Arlington High School swimming pool (M.J. Ruggieri, personal communication, May 31, 2010). Because Ruggieri and her team were prohibited from using the men’s full-size varsity natatorium on campus, they were forced to find another local pool that offered water deep enough for the women to safely practice their underwater routines and one that actually permitted the Swans to reserve and use their facility (M.J. Ruggieri, personal communication, May 31, 2010).

Ruggieri’s new training program paid off as the Swan Club successfully defended its 1970 title in the 1971 M.I.S.S. Championships, placing among the top three winners in each of the six classes and winning the overall title by a narrow three point margin over rival Kent State University (Albrecht, 1971; Meet Results, 1971). The two-day competition which was held at the University of Michigan included teams from 15 different schools located throughout the Midwest and Mid-Atlantic regions (Albrecht, 1971; Meet Results, 1971). The 12 Swans who competed for Ohio State placed first in the trio and team events, second in the duet and senior figures and third in the solo and junior stunt classes to take home the team’s second consecutive M.I.S.S. Championship trophy (Albrecht, 1971; Meet Results, 1971). “The meet was our roughest competition yet, noted senior Swan Club president Donna Fosco, especially since every team at the
Championships was out to beat us after our victory last year” (Albrecht, 1971, p. 8). But as teammates Kathy and Kris Ballinger, Nikki Mann and Vicky Weir agreed, “It was the team’s intense desire to win and the long months of rigorous training under our new faculty advisor Mary Jo Ruggieri that resulted in our success” (Albrecht, 1971, p. 8).

The following year in an unprecedented move, one made in response to Ruggieri’s constant badgering, the male athletic administrators at Ohio State agreed to grant special permission for Ruggieri and her two-time defending M.I.S.S. Championship Swans to host the 1972 Midwest Championship title event in the men’s varsity swimming pool on campus (Media Guide, 1972; M.J. Ruggieri, personal communication, May 31, 2010). The only other time the Swan Club hosted the M.I.S.S. Championships was in 1966 when former faculty advisor Ann Lilly was prohibited from holding any portion of the event in the men’s natatorium. Instead, Lilly and the Swans were forced to reserve time at the Upper Arlington High School swimming pool in order to accommodate the deep water performances required in the team routines (A. Lilly, personal communication, May 12, 2010; M.J. Ruggieri, personal communication, May 31, 2010). All other performances from that title meet, including the solo, duet, and trio contests as well as the junior and senior figure events, were held in the Pomerene Hall pool (A. Lilly, personal communication, May 12, 2010; Coeds compete in swim meet, 1996). Although Ruggieri and her squad were granted special permission to hold the 1972 M.I.S.S. Championships in the men’s natatorium, they were quickly reminded that they would have to resume practicing and competing in the Pomerene Hall pool on a full-time basis
once the 1972 championship event concluded (M.J. Ruggieri, personal communication, May 31, 2010).

While Lilly and her squad captured sixth place as the host of the 1966 M.I.S.S. Championship meet, Ruggieri’s team easily retained its third consecutive M.I.S.S. title after earning 58 points in the 3-day competition which featured more than 350 competitors representing 25 different schools from Ohio, Indiana, Illinois, Iowa, Pennsylvania, New York and Connecticut (Keagy, 1972; Media Guide, 1972). With 6 of 12 returners from last year’s championship team, Ruggieri’s Swans were able to capture first place in both the trio and team events, while placing second in the solo and duet classes and third in the junior and senior figure events (Keagy, 1972; Media Guide, 1972). For the second year in a row Kent State University finished in second place scoring 45 points while the University of Michigan finished in third place with 22 points (Keagy, 1972; Media Guide, 1972). Following the competition Ruggieri, in an article published in the Ohio State Lantern, described her squad as “the best team I have coached thus far in my career” and used such adjectives as “precision, grace, control and discipline” to characterize her team’s performances in the championship event (Keagy, 1972; Media Guide, 1972). Not only did the Swans secure their third consecutive M.I.S.S. Championship title with their victory in 1972, but that win also marked the second straight perfect season for the club under the leadership of Mary Jo Ruggieri and their third consecutive undefeated season for the program overall since 1969 (Keagy, 1972; Media Guide, 1972).
The passage of Title IX in June of 1972 and the Department of Health, Education and Welfare’s (HEW) inclusion of athletics in the law’s coverage finally convinced college and university officials that some degree of change was inevitable within college athletics (Cahn, 1994; Carpenter & Acosta, 2005; Festle, 1996; Wushanley, 2004). Indeed, the new regulations promised to offer more athletic teams, increased funding, as well as better facilities and equipment for females participating in college athletics across the country (Cahn, 1994; Carpenter & Acosta, 2005; Festle, 1996; Wushanley, 2004). But acquiring these new rights within the traditionally male domain of athletics would not happen without a fight as Mary Jo Ruggieri learned early on in her tenure at Ohio State. As is usually the case with paternalism, noted sport historian Mary Jo Festle, “at its root is an attitude of superiority and the desire to maintain power relations” (Festle, 1996, p. 175). Because most educational institutions, including Ohio State, gave almost nothing to their women’s athletic teams (women’s share of athletic budgets averaged less than 2% in 1974), the regulations set forth in Title IX appeared to mandate radical change according to male athletic administrators, many of whom resented being told how to divvy up the funds they possessed especially for what they viewed as an extra, unnecessary expenditure (Festle, 1996, pp. 127 & 175). For this reason, the fight to acquire the rights granted to women through Title IX would require a great deal of courage and stamina on the part of female athletic administrators, coaches and student-athletes nationwide (Cahn, 1994; Festle, 1996).
While the enactment of Title IX meant that athletic leaders’ would have to spend more money on women than they ever had in the past, their athletic departments’ already possessed two of the most expensive ingredients in facilities and equipment (Festle, 1996). In most cases, the men would merely have to share these resources with the women (Festle, 1996). But such change was not readily accepted among men in collegiate athletics during the early 1970s. In fact, many men wanted slower, less drastic change including—nothing that would hurt men’s teams’, cost much money, or altered male control (Cahn, 1994; Festle, 1996). This was certainly the case at Ohio State as the male athletic leaders continued to deny Ruggieri and the Swans access to the full-size varsity swimming pool on campus even though the new Title IX regulations specifically earmarked these athletic resources as areas in which federally funded institutions were expected to make available to women (M.J. Ruggieri, personal interview, May 31, 2010). Indeed, it was precisely because of women’s lack of power and access to such resources on college campuses that outside assistance was needed in the form of Title IX (Cahn, 1994; Festle, 1996).

Despite the fact that athletic officials were given a generous timeline in which to comply with the newly instituted regulations of Title IX, Mary Jo Ruggieri was quickly becoming frustrated by the fact that Ohio State athletic administrators were dragging their feet in making the changes necessary to meet the terms specified in the new law (M.J. Ruggieri, personal communication, May 31, 2010). During one of her routine practice sessions in late-1973, Ruggieri became so enraged with her team’s “pitiful practice conditions in a facility that should have been condemned long ago by the University,”
that she instructed her team to march over to the men’s natatorium and jump into the pool during the men’s swim team practice in order to protest the fact that they were not permitted to share the full-size varsity swimming facility on campus (M.J. Ruggieri, personal communication, May 31, 2010). Unbeknownst to Ruggieri and the Swans at that time however, the men’s swim team often practiced in the nude at the natatorium since the facility was restricted for use by men only (M.J. Ruggieri, personal communication, May 31, 2010). Ruggieri recounted, “When the lifeguard on duty called campus security to remove us from the facility I told all of my swimmers to scatter so that they wouldn’t get arrested for protesting” (M.J. Ruggieri, personal communication, May 31, 2010). Instead, Ruggieri took full responsibility for the demonstration and, as a result, was summons to the Ohio State President’s Office to discuss the incident with President Harold Enarson (M.J. Ruggieri, personal communication, May 31, 2010).

Ruggieri, with the help of her ally and superior Phyllis Bailey, crafted a list of grievances to present to President Enarson regarding the appalling conditions experienced by all Ohio State female athletes, in general, and the Swan Club participants, in particular (M.J. Ruggieri, personal communication, May 31, 2010). These grievances included, but were not limited to, subpar training facilities, inadequate locker room space, and lack of financial support and encouragement from the University community (M.J. Ruggieri, personal communication, May 31, 2010). President Enarson, recognizing that change in collegiate athletics was inevitable due to the implementation of Title IX, responded to Ruggieri’s facility grievance by stating that, “It would be folly to build another pool just for women, but I do not see a reason why the men can’t seek out ways to share their
facility with the Swans” (Irwin, 1974). Although the men’s aquatic coaches disagreed with the President’s decision, they reluctantly acquiesced and arranged for the Swans to have access to the varsity natatorium from 5:30 a.m. to 7:30 a.m. or from 9:00 p.m. to 11:00 pm; hours chosen to discourage all but the most determined athletes from using the facility (M.J. Ruggieri, personal communication, May 31, 2010). While Ruggieri acknowledged that the practice times were certainly not ideal, she also felt as though the decision to allow her team to practice in the varsity swimming pool at all constituted a qualified political victory for the Swans and laid the foundation for even more change in the future (Irwin, 1974).

Indeed Ruggieri and the rest of the female coaches at Ohio State did have reason for some optimism since their grievances were finally receiving attention from University officials (M.J. Ruggieri, personal communication, May 31, 2010). Shortly after the passage of Title IX, President Enarson announced a new incremental plan to incorporate women’s sports into the Department of Athletics at Ohio State which, until this time, was exclusively a male department (Master Plan-Women’s Athletics, 1980). Even though women’s athletics would remain housed temporarily in the Student Services building (until renovations were completed in St. John arena to include the women), 11 of the existing female sport teams including the Swan Club, now referred to as the synchronized swimming team, were officially recognized by the University as the Ohio State women’s varsity intercollegiate athletic program (Master Plan-Women’s Athletics, 1980). In addition to its new varsity status, the women’s athletic program would also receive a significant increase in its annual operating budget over the next several years beginning
in 1975 with a budget of $95,000 (Master Plan-Women’s Athletics, 1980). Furthermore, Phyllis Bailey would continue to serve as the primary administrator for the women’s sports program, but she would now do so as a member of the Department of Athletics in the newly created position of Women’s Assistant Director of Athletics (Master Plan-Women’s Athletics, 1980). “These were the first steps taken by Ohio State officials to implement the regulations set forth in Title IX,” noted Bailey (Schneider, 1973).

**Gradual Change and Optimism**

Despite the sizeable increase in the women’s athletic operating budget and the fact that the AIAW had recently revoked its ban on awarding athletic scholarships to females following a lawsuit in 1973, Bailey, in her new role as the Women’s Assistant Director of Athletics, decided against spending any portion of the newly allocated operating budget on scholarships for Ohio State female athletes (Cahn, 1994; Festle, 1996; Schneider, 1973). By the end of 1973 only 32 Division I schools offered scholarships to female athletes, and Bailey, similar to a number of her peers in the AIAW, believed that adequate funding for a comprehensive women’s athletic program should take priority over spending money on financial aid for individual female athletes (Cahn, 1994; Festle, 1996; Schneider, 1973). Upon accepting her new position in the Department of Athletics Bailey announced that,

> We are going to take time to build a solid and comprehensive athletic program for women; therefore scholarships for female athletes are not in
the foreseeable future since we would prefer to spend our money on two hundred female athletes rather than just twenty. We will, however, grant scholarships to women when it gets to the point where we have to compete with other schools for talent. (Schneider, 1973, p. 8)

Until this time arrived though, Bailey decided to spend the additional operating budget funds on providing more opportunities for competition and on improving access to such resources as food, lodging, officials, coaches and equipment for all 11 women’s varsity athletic teams (Schneider, 1973; Master Plan Women’s Athletics, 1980). Without a doubt, Bailey’s decision to delay the granting of athletic scholarships to females reflected her understanding that change within college athletics during the 1970s was far more likely to succeed if it was done on a relatively conservative and gradual basis (Festle, 1996).

Thus, Bailey’s decision to refrain from granting athletic scholarships to Ohio State female athletes coupled with the graduation of several top Ohio State synchronized swimmers forced Mary Jo Ruggieri to rely heavily on growing AAU regional synchronized swimming programs (a group dedicated to developing synchronized swimmers for the Pan American Games and future Olympic competitions) to attract young, new talent to Ohio State’s program (M.J. Ruggieri, personal communication, May 31, 2010). In an effort to maintain her team’s winning tradition and to overcome strict AIAW recruiting policies, which only permitted written communication between coaches and athletes, Ruggieri passed several examinations to become certified as a regional
judge in the junior division of AAU synchronized swimming (Cahn, 1994; M.J. Ruggieri, personal communication, May 31, 2010; Spolter, 1972). As a certified regional judge, Ruggieri was able to observe and communicate directly with the new flood of young, talented synchronized swimmers who would be eligible to attend college in the next several years (Cahn, 1994; M.J. Ruggieri, personal communication, May 31, 2010; Spolter, 1972). Ruggieri recalled, “I met nearly every top synchronized swimmer in the Midwest and Mid-Atlantic regions as an AAU regional judge and I was able to establish relationships with these swimmers in ways that other college coaches could not” (M.J. Ruggieri, personal communication, May 31, 2010). Moreover, Ruggieri utilized her newfound access to the varsity swimming pool on campus to host several AAU regional synchronized swimming championship meets which attracted more than three hundred of the most gifted synchronized swimmers, ranging in ages from 5 to 17, to Ohio State’s campus (Cahn, 1994; M.J. Ruggieri, personal communication, May 31, 2010; Spolter, 1972).

Ruggieri’s creativity in the recruiting process paid off as talented swimmers from the rapidly growing AAU ranks were drawn to Ohio State’s synchronized swimming program, not just for its new varsity status and its recently acquired access to one of the best swimming facilities in the country, but also for Ruggieri’s innovative and unconventional training techniques which helped the team win three M.I.S.S. Championship titles in a row and remain undefeated for three consecutive seasons (M.J. Ruggieri, personal communication, May 31, 2010). As young talent filtered into Ohio State from regional AAU synchronized swimming programs, Ruggieri’s team continued
its winning tradition. In 1973 and 1974 the Ohio State synchronized swimming program, once again, captured the M.I.S.S. Championship titles and preserved its undefeated streak (Davies, 1973; Media Guide, 1973 & 1974; Squad Captures 5th Midwest Title, 1974). In fact, the 1974 M.I.S.S. title event was a “championship of firsts” for Ohio State’s team. The team took first place honors in all six divisions of the competition for the first time ever (Davies, 1973; Media Guide, 1973 & 1974; Squad Captures 5th Midwest Title, 1974). They achieved this milestone with the help of their four new outstanding freshmen who decided to swim for Mary Jo Ruggieri and the Ohio State synchronized swimming program after having attended several AAU regional synchronized swimming championship events at Ohio State’s varsity natatorium (Davies, 1973; Media Guide, 1973 & 1974; Squad Captures 5th Midwest Title, 1974).

**Strong Sense of Promise**

The strong sense of promise that characterized women’s intercollegiate athletics in the early 1970s seemed to be borne out as the decade advanced (Cahn, 1994; Festle, 1996). At the national level women had deflected a number of efforts made by men to defeat Title IX, and Congress had approved the regulations necessary to implement the new law (Cahn, 1994; Festle, 1996). As a result, equal opportunity in education now appeared to be the law of the land bringing with it government legitimization to women’s athletic goals and the promise for more change in the future (Cahn, 1994; Festle, 1996). At the same time, the AIAW was thriving. Not only had the organization grown from 280 members in 1971 to 659 member colleges in 1975, but it was now offering 15
separate national championship competitions for collegiate female athletes and could now support itself financially (Festle, 1996; Wushanley, 2004). Meanwhile, societal attitudes in general were changing. By 1975 public opinion polls showed greater sympathy for women’s rights and a small but growing number of men began to join the ranks of those who supported the advancement of women in sport (Festle, 1996). These remarkable developments at the national level—the government backing of Title IX, the expansion of the AIAW, and the recent shift in societal attitudes—combined to make the mid-to-late 1970s a promising time for women in intercollegiate athletics (Cahn, 1994; Festle, 1996).

The same also held true at the institutional level. Women’s athletic leaders, once a timid and marginalized group, had more power than ever before and were enjoying the unique opportunity to promote their own traditions of propriety and woman-centeredness in college sports (Cahn, 1994; Festle, 1996). Like many other female athletic programs across the country now run by women sport administrators with women’s priorities leading the way, Ohio State’s program began to grow and flourish under the leadership of Phyllis Bailey. No female sports program benefitted more with Bailey at the helm than did the synchronized swimming team (M.J. Ruggieri, personal communication, May 31, 2010). Bailey’s support for the team over the years and her recognition of synchronized swimming as a serious and beneficial sport for women gave the program at Ohio State a decided advantage (M.J. Ruggieri, personal communication, May 31, 2010). With her newfound authority as the Women’s Assistant Director of Athletics, the backing of her female colleagues in the AIAW, and the legislative support from Title IX, Bailey began the process of constructing a comprehensive women’s varsity athletic program beginning
with the development of a strong synchronized swimming team (Master Plan-Women’s Athletics, 1980; M.J. Ruggieri, personal communication, May 31, 2010). Once again, Bailey’s decision to develop the sport of synchronized swimming at Ohio State was quite deliberate considering she understood that change within the institution of intercollegiate athletics was far more likely to succeed in the 1970s if it was first approached in a traditionally more acceptable female sport (M.J. Ruggieri, personal communication, May 31, 2010).

It was not surprising, then, that the mid-to-late 1970s marked the beginning of a new era for the Ohio State synchronized swimming program. With the significant increase to the women’s overall athletic budget in 1975, Phyllis Bailey was able to provide a generous boost in funds to the synchronized swimming operating budget which, in turn, allowed head coach Mary Jo Ruggieri to purchase new costumes, uniforms and equipment for her team as well as provide them with the occasional services of an athletic trainer, a sport psychologist and a nutritional counselor (M.J. Ruggieri, personal communication, May 31, 2010). In addition to this, Bailey’s decision to allot a sizeable increase to the program’s travel budget that same year allowed Ruggieri to schedule more meets per season (eight or nine verses four or five during the previous season) and to travel distance much farther than ever before in search of better competition for her team (including a trip out West and a three week trip to Florida’s College of Boca Raton over the winter holiday vacation) (Media Guide, 1975; M.J. Ruggieri, personal communication, May 31, 2010). “I’m extremely positive about the progress we’ve made as a team since the athletic department took over women’s sports
programs,” remarked Ruggieri in a 1975 Lantern article (Ludwig, 1975). “Thanks to Title IX and the support of Phyllis Bailey, added Ruggieri, we now provide our synchronized swimmers as well as our other female athletes with many of the same resources and services that have long been available to male athletes at Ohio State and elsewhere” (Ludwig, 1975).

**Collegiate Synchronized Swimming Flourishes**

By the mid-1970s other collegiate synchronized swimming programs around the country were also beginning to flourish under the auspices of the AIAW and women’s athletic leaders (Bean, 2005). In fact, many top swimmers who might otherwise have devoted several more years to their AAU club teams while attending close-by, synchro-less colleges could now attend a number of institutions of higher education that offered synchronized swimming as a varsity collegiate sport (Bean, 2005). The new influx of top AAU competitors into the collegiate ranks not only increased the competitive intensity among leading university teams, but it also forced many coaches to revise and enhance their training regimens in order to maintain a competitive advantage in the ever growing sport of collegiate synchronized swimming. This was certainly the case for Mary Jo Ruggieri who now required her team to report to practice five days a week for three hours a day, and who also altered her training program to include a unique blend of physical and metaphysical exercises to improve her team’s tempo and quality of performance in the water (Brail, 1975; M.J. Ruggieri, personal correspondence, May 31, 2010). Now added to the team’s customary training program of water intervals and dry land exercises
was ballet, yoga, meditation, nautilus weight training, physiological testing, nutritional guidance and psychological counseling (Brail, 1975; M.J. Ruggieri, personal correspondence, May 31, 2010).

Ruggieri’s new “holistic” training program, as she referred to it, was quite progressive for the 1970s and included techniques from many of the latest and innovative disciplines (Brail, 1975; M.J. Ruggieri, personal correspondence, May 31, 2010). From yoga, Ruggieri took exercises that increased body control, concentration, flexibility and relaxation. Her team met periodically with Guru Kahleas of Astram who took them through a series of relaxation and meditation exercises. From ballet, Ruggieri used techniques for body positioning, balance and movement control. Her background in kinesiology led her to develop an activity called synchro-ballet which involved performing ballet-like movements in the water. From nautilus weight training, Ruggieri chose exercises that were designed to build strength and endurance. Her team lifted two hours a week to lose inches, tone muscles and gain. For psychological counseling, Ruggieri’s team met with Karen Kahn, assistant professor of psychology, to work on goal setting, mental imagery and stress management. Finally, for nutritional counseling, Ruggieri’s team met with a nutritionist to plan out daily dietary programs. Body fat tests were also performed four times a year, and swimmers whose fat exceeded 18 percent of their body weight were put on weight-loss diets (Brail, 1975; M.J. Ruggieri, personal correspondence, May 31, 2010). “Coach Ruggieri is way ahead of all the other synchronized swimming coaches in her training methods and she has had the best program in the country for years now to prove it,” remarked Tara Cameron, a native of
San Mateo, California, who chose to swim at Ohio State because of Ruggieri’s reputation as an outstanding coach and for her innovative training techniques (Pierron, 1978).

Indeed, Ruggieri’s new training program paid off as her team completed its seventh consecutive undefeated season with its seventh straight victory at the M.I.S.S. Championship title event in 1975 (Kramer, 1975; Media Guide, 1975). The three day competition, which took place at the University of Pittsburgh, included teams from 27 different schools located throughout the Midwest, Mid-Atlantic and East Coast regions (Kramer, 1975; Media Guide, 1975). The Ohio State squad not only took first place honors in all six divisions of the contest for the second year in a row, but the women who competed in the team event, including Kay Connelly, Donna Burian, Lynn Smith, Debby Beran, Lynne MacEwan, Heather Bruce, Ann McCarraher and Terry Edwards, also scored the highest point total ever in the history of the M.I.S.S. Championship team division title (Kramer, 1975; Media Guide, 1975). Four-year veteran Kay Connelly lamented in an article recapping the Buckeye’s victory that, “It’s too bad there isn’t some type of intercollegiate national championship event in synchronized swimming because I strongly believe that if there had been a national meet this year we would have done exceptionally well” (Kramer, 1975; Media Guide, 1975). Unfortunately, the Ohio State synchronized swimming team would have to wait two more years before they could showcase their talent at the national level.
Positive Momentum

While significant improvements had been made in women’s sports by the mid-1970s, and more men supported some degree of women’s athletic opportunity at the collegiate level, plenty of opposition still remained (Festle, 1996). This was evident at Ohio State as Mary Jo Ruggieri continued to battle with male coaches and administrators to secure more reasonable access to the practice facilities on campus for her team. Despite the fact that her team was beginning to receive some notoriety for its seven year winning streak, the longest in Ohio State sport history at that time, the women were still forced to practice in the varsity natatorium from 8:00pm to 11:00pm, when the facility was empty, and they had permission to do so from the male aquatic coaches (M.J. Ruggieri, personal communication, May 31, 2010). Ruggieri recalled, “Although I was pleased that we finally had access to the varsity natatorium, I was also very frustrated by the fact that we were only permitted to use the facility at certain unappealing times as dictated by the men” (M.J. Ruggieri, personal communication, May 31, 2010). When Ruggieri approached the male coaches to ask for a change in her team’s Thursday evening practice time—due to the fact that her team was only permitted to use the Larkin’s weight room on Friday mornings at 6:00am thus not allowing for sufficient rest between practice sessions—her request was quickly denied (M.J. Ruggieri, personal communication, May 31, 2010). The men responded to Ruggieri’s request by stating that, “allowing your team to practice in the varsity pool at any other time than your assigned times would cause a gross deterioration in the training environment for our male
Angered by the men’s response, Ruggieri approached Phyllis Bailey and asked for her assistance in this matter (M.J. Ruggieri, personal communication, May 31, 2010). She explained to Bailey that she felt as though this was an important battle to wage with the men in order to teach her female athletes how to advocate for themselves and how to fight for what they wanted, and quite frankly, what they deserved (M.J. Ruggieri, personal communication, May 31, 2010). Together the two women met with the Athletic Director, J. Edward Weaver, to discuss the possibility of moving the women’s regularly scheduled practice time on Thursday evenings back to 6:00pm-9:00pm (M.J. Ruggieri, personal communication, May 31, 2010). Following that meeting, as well as another one held by the Athletic Director and all of the other parties concerned, Weaver wrote a formal letter stating:

In consultation this morning with staff members directly involved with the problem that your practices seem to present, I am submitting a new practice schedule for the balance of this term….It is anticipated that the same schedule will be followed during the remainder of the year [and that] the full cooperation of each of you is expected. (Weaver Letter, 1977)

In his letter, Weaver not only changed the women’s practice time on Thursdays to 3:00pm-6:00pm, but he also designated that same timeslot on Tuesday afternoons for the
women to practice in the varsity natatorium (Weaver Letter, 1997). Clearly the atmosphere in college athletic was beginning to change given the fact that now sometimes when women asked for something, they actually had a chance of getting it thanks, in large part, to Title IX (Cahn, 1994; Festle, 1996).

Although enforcement of Title IX was not scheduled to begin until December 1978, collegiate institutions were warned early on that the adjustment period was not to be used as a waiting period (Cahn, 1994; Festle, 1996). Instead, colleges were required to conduct evaluations of their athletic programs and begin bringing them in line with the new regulations (Cahn, 1994; Festle, 1996). By the spring of 1976 Ohio State officials began doing just that by increasing the women’s athletic operating budget by another 78% from the previous year (to that of $171,000), and by joining their 173 Division I counterparts in making arrangements to provide their female athletes with athletic grant-in-aids (Master Plan-Women’s Athletics, 1980). Beginning in the 1976-77 academic year the Ohio State women’s sports program was scheduled to receive a total of 30 full athletic scholarships to be disbursed among the 11 women’s varsity sport teams as deemed appropriate by Phyllis Bailey (Master Plan-Women’s Athletics, 1980). Of those 30 full grant-in-aids, Bailey earmarked 8 to go to the synchronized swimming program, the maximum number permitted in that sport by the AIAW (Master Plan- Women’s Athletics, 1980; M.J. Ruggieri, personal communication, May 31, 2010). Mary Jo Ruggieri responded to this news by exclaiming, “We now have the total environment for our female athletes……Not only do we offer females many of the same resources and
services that have long been available to male athletes, but we now offer them financial support too” (Shar, 1977).

*First OSU Women’s National Collegiate Championship Title*

With her advanced training program in place and her new access to eight athletic scholarships, Ruggieri was now able to lure several top-ranked recruits from the West Coast, an AAU synchronized swimming stronghold, to Ohio State’s program (M.J. Ruggieri, personal communication, May 31, 2010). “It used to be seven years ago I had to go looking for swimmers Ruggieri said, but now I have recruits coming out of my ears” (Shar, 1977). Ohio State was one of the first collegiate sports programs to offer athletic grant-in-aids to synchronized swimmers, and as a result, Ruggieri was able to start recruiting swimmers from all over the country who already had between four to six years of competitive experience in the sport before they even arrived on campus (M.J. Ruggieri, personal communication, May 31, 2010). In fact by 1977 Ruggieri boasted one of the best squads in the country with 8 of her swimmers hailing from the top AAU programs located throughout Ohio and Michigan, two other states also known for their prowess in the sport (M.J. Ruggieri, personal communication, May 31, 2010). Ruggieri explained, “It’s generally believed that the most advanced synchronized swimming programs and swimmers are located in the west, but I personally believe that the Midwest is the strongest region and produces some of the finest swimmers in the sport” (Shar, 1977). With the introduction of the first annual AIAW synchronized swimming national collegiate championship event into the 1977 competitive schedule, Ruggieri and her team
would finally have an opportunity to match up against the western powers and prove that they did, indeed, have the best collegiate program in the country.

The inaugural AIAW synchronized swimming national collegiate championship event held at Michigan State from April 15-17, 1977 not only confirmed Ruggieri’s thought that her team was the best in the country, but it also proved her suspicion that the Midwest was the most dominant region in the sport at that time (Lawrence, 1977). Competing against a national field of 37 teams, Ruggieri’s squad took first place honors in four out of the six competitive divisions of the contest (Lawrence, 1977; Media Guide, 1977; Meet Results, 1977). Jane McGorum finished first in the junior figures event while Cindy Ott and Cory Lamb took home a victory in the duet category, and then teamed up with Jill Vincent in the trio event to secure Ohio State’s third divisional win (Lawrence, 1977; Media Guide, 1977; Meet Results, 1977). The final Buckeye victory came from Donna Burian, Heather Bruce, Joanmarie Barris, Terri Edwards, Cory Lamb, Jane McGorum, Jill Vincent and Cindy Ott in the team division. In addition to winning the team division, all eight swimmers were also recognized as the first All-Americans in the sport, an honor only bestowed upon the top 16 collegiate synchronized swimmers (Lawrence, 1977; Media Guide, 1977; Meet Results, 1977). Despite early rumblings from western schools, the Midwestern region proved its dominance by taking four of the top five places in the overall team standings (Lawrence, 1977; Media Guide, 1977; Meet Results, 1977). Ohio State finished first with 76 points followed by Michigan (51), Arizona (34), Western Illinois (24), and Miami of Ohio (14) (Lawrence, 1977; Media Guide, 1977; Meet Results, 1977). The win not only gave Ohio State its first ever
national collegiate championship title in women’s sports, but it also qualified the team for the Guinness Book of World Records for its unparalleled 9-year winning streak, a record that still exists in Ohio State’s sport history (Lawrence, 1977; Media Guide, 1977; Meet Results, 1977).

While there was no ticker tape parade in Columbus welcoming the first ever Ohio State women’s national championship team home from its illustrious victory or hardly any note of the team’s accomplishment in newspapers beyond the Ohio State Lantern, several members of the 1977 championship team remarked that this was not only one of the greatest moments in their collegiate careers but that it was also one of the best moments in their lives. Cory Lamb explained that, “even though there wasn’t much notoriety given to the team after our national championship victory in 1977, I felt as though I held my head up higher and walked with greater confidence in my stride on campus after that win” (Sullivan, 1977, p. 8). Jill Vincent echoed that same sentiment and added that, “the victory gave me more confidence and pride than anything else” (Sullivan, 1977, p. 8). One Swimmer noted that, besides her wedding day and the birth of her children, the 1977 national championship victory was the best day of her life (Anonymous 1, 1977, personal correspondence, June 1, 2010). She said, “I left that competition thinking and believing that I could do or accomplish anything in life and have continued to feel this way ever since then” (Anonymous 1, 1977, personal correspondence, June 1, 2010). For the first time in many of these women’s lives, they were given an opportunity to excel at the national level in their sport and they began to
reap the benefits that frequently accompany success in sports in general, namely confidence, self-esteem, and pride.

More Depth, More Difficult Routines

By 1978 over 500 colleges and universities awarded scholarships to female athletes (Cahn, 1994; Festle, 1996). Nearly 30 of those institutions provided some athletic aid to synchronized swimmers, while five others including Arizona, Arizona State, Stanford, San Jose State and Michigan joined Ohio State in offering their synchronized swimming programs’ the equivalent of eight full athletic grant-in-aids (M.J. Ruggieri, personal communication, May 31, 2010). “Competition among the new, fully-funded programs began to stiffen considerably, and as a result many of the fast improving teams were beginning to challenge our dominance in the sport” (M.J. Ruggieri, personal communication, May 31, 2010). This became readily apparent to the Buckeyes as they suffered their first loss in nine years as a program to arch-rival Michigan by a slim one point margin in the opening meet of the 1978 season (Pierron, 1978). Although devastated by the loss, the Buckeyes rebounded by winning the remainder of their meets that season and by dominating virtually every division in the 1978 AIAW national championship title event which took place at Oberlin College from April 14-16, 1978 (Forsbach, 1978; Media Guide, 1978; Meet Results, 1978; Pierron, 1978).

The Buckeyes led throughout the entire national championship competition as they combined outstanding individual performances with team depth to defeat the field of 28 teams (Forsbach, 1978; Media Guide, 1978; Meet Results, 1978). In the junior
figures, Ohio State grabbed five of the top seven places with Martha Boss, Laurette Longmire and Karen Murphy finishing in the top three spots, respectively (Forsbach, 1978; Media Guide, 1978; Meet Results, 1978). Sophomore All-Americans Cory Lamb, Jill Vincent and Cindy Ott repeated their championship performance from the previous year by grabbing top honors in the trio event, while Lamb and Ott also recaptured the title in the duet category (Forsbach, 1978; Media Guide, 1978). Moreover, for the second year in a row the Buckeyes won the team division title with the combined efforts of Myfawny Borel, Martha Boss, Heather Bruce, Kerrie Hein, Cory Lamb, Laurette Longmire, Cindy Ott and Jill Vincent (Forsbach, 1978; Media Guide, 1978; Meet Results, 1978). Mary Jo Ruggieri’s 18-member squad secured the overall victory with a final team score of 79 points, 29 points ahead of their closest competitor, the University of Michigan. Trailing Michigan was Arizona (30), San Jose State (15), and Trinity University of Texas (10) (Forsbach, 1978; Media Guide, 1978; Meet Results, 1978).

Noting what separated her team from the others in the 1978 national championship contest Ruggieri stated, “We had more depth, more difficult routines and we just basically out swam the competition” (Forsbach, 1978, p. 1; Media Guide, 1978). In addition to winning their second consecutive national championship title, nine Buckeyes were named to the 16-member All American squad including second year recipients Heather Bruce, Cory Lamb, Cindy Ott, and Jill Vincent as well as first timers Myfawny Borel, Martha Boss, Kerrie Hein, Laurette Longmire and Luanne Saas (Forsbach, 1978; Media Guide, 1978). Furthermore, five of the aforementioned swimmers (Borel, Lamb, Ott, Longmire and Vincent) were selected to compete at the
Olympic Sports Festival that summer based on their outstanding performances at the national championship event (Forsbach, 1978; Media Guide, 1978). “These swimmers deserve the national title and all of the other honors and accolades that have accompanied this win because they’re extremely dedicated, they work hard and they train hard,” commented Ruggieri (Forsbach, 1978; Media Guide, 1978; Meet Results, 1978). “Not since 1969 has Ohio State won a national championship title in any sport, let alone back-to-back national titles in the same sport,” Ruggieri added proudly (Forsbach, 1978; Media Guide, 1978). With just one senior (Captain Heather Bruce) graduating from her 1978 squad and four of the top recruits in the country joining her team in the fall of 1979 on scholarship, Ruggieri predicted that her Buckeyes would have a good shot at winning their third straight national collegiate championship title (Forsbach, 1978; Media Guide, 1978).

Ruggieri’s prediction, indeed, proved true as her team successfully defended its national championship title for the third consecutive time in March 1979, winning the overall competition by a seven point margin over Arizona (Media Guide, 1979; Meet Results, 1979; Ohio State Monthly, 1979). While Arizona collected slim victories over Ohio State in both the duet and trio categories and tied for first place with the Buckeyes in the team division, Ohio State eventually overpowered Arizona with its team depth by claiming six of the top seven spots in the junior figures and three of the top six positions in the senior figures (Media Guide, 1979; Meet Results, 1979; Ohio State Monthly, 1979). “It was close all the way through the final competition, noted sophomore Laurette Longmire, but we shook off the pressure to win” (Ohio State Monthly, 1979). Echoing
Longmire’s point Ruggieri noted that, “My swimmers responded well to the pressure of defending their national title and really earned their laurels this year against the toughest competition we’ve ever faced” (Ohio State Monthly, 1979). In the final team score, Ohio State edged Arizona 74-67, while Michigan finished a distant third with 38 points (Media Guide, 1979; Meet Results, 1979; Ohio State Monthly, 1979).

Following the competition, six Buckeyes were named All-Americans including three-time recipient Cindy Ott, two-time recipient Myfawny Borel, and first-timers Karen Callahan, Tara Cameron, Dawn Nelsen, and Kathy Rankin (Media Guide, 1979; Meet Results, 1979; Ohio State Monthly, 1979). In addition to their All-American accolades, freshman Karan Callahan and Tara Cameron were selected to compete as part of the first U.S. National Team in the Pan American games held later that summer in Puerto Rico, an honor awarded to only 11 of the top American synchronized swimmers (Media Guide, 1979; Meet Results, 1979; Ohio State Monthly, 1979). When asked about her proudest accomplishment while swimming for Ohio State, Karen Callaghan identified her 1979 selection to the U.S. National Team stating:

The AAU teams were historically the best in the United States and therefore their swimmers earned automatic bids to the U.S. National Team. But then in 1979, organizers of the U.S. National Team began selecting members based on overall talent and Tara and I were the first to ever be selected from the collegiate ranks. It was quite an honor. (K. Callaghan, personal communication, February 9, 2010)
Conclusion

By the late 1970s the revolution in women’s sport had reached new heights bringing with it a sea change—not only in activities, but in attitudes as well (Cahn, 1994, Festle, 1996). Against more established, wealthy and powerful opponents, women’s athletic leaders around the country were able to carve out their own “athletic niche” within the historically male-bastion of intercollegiate athletics (Cahn, 1994, Festle, 1996). This was certainly true at Ohio State not only for the women’s athletic program in general, but also for the synchronized swimming program in particular. Under the progressive leadership of Mary Jo Ruggieri and the administrative support of Phyllis Bailey, the Ohio State synchronized swimming program grew from obscurity to that of a national power. By the end of the 1970s the synchronized swimming program had evolved into a varsity sport, gained access to the varsity natatorium, acquired eight full athletic scholarships and brought home three of the four national collegiate championships titles won by Ohio State (Media Guide, 1979). Without a doubt, Ohio State’s synchronized swimming program could not have enjoyed a better decade than the 1970s. The overarching question for the 1980s and 1990s was whether women in general and Ohio State synchronized swimming in particular could maintain or even build upon their overall gains.
Chapter 4: The Fight to Preserve a Sport Dynasty, 1980-1995

The Weakening of Title IX and the Demise of the AIAW

By the end of the 1970s, advocates of women’s intercollegiate athletics celebrated another victory in the governmental arena. In December 1979, the Department of Health, Education, and Welfare (HEW) issued a strong policy interpretation of Title IX and announced its intention to enforce compliance reviews in schools across the country (Cahn, 1994; Carpenter & Acosta, 2005; Festle, 1996). Although delighted by HEW’s decree, women’s athletic leaders tempered their enthusiasm because having the rules on the books did not necessarily guarantee the federal government would actually penalize Title IX offenders (Cahn, 1994). Still, preserving the regulations and reaching the point where there was hope for enforcement was a tremendous victory for women in sports during the 1970s. Unfortunately, however, their triumph would be shorted lived. The enthusiasm and belief in “inevitable” progress that characterized the 1970s was quickly mitigated in the 1980s by a strong anti-feminist backlash waged by a rising “New Right Movement” and supported by a newly-elected, more conservative, political administration (Cahn, 1994; Festle, 1996). This “New Right” backlash, which favored old-fashioned morality, proved especially powerful in the institution of sport. In fact by the early 1980s, the once rhetorical “battle of the sexes” became a real one as social and
political forces converged to create the perfect storm within intercollegiate athletics (Cahn, 1994; Festle, 1996).

As it turned out, having HEW issue a strong policy interpretation of Title IX regulations in the late 1970s was not the complete success for sportswomen that it had first seemed. The outcome, in fact, was a pyrrhic victory for women’s athletic leaders, who suddenly realized that they could win Title IX and, as a direct result, lose the AIAW (Cahn, 1994; Festle, 1996). Indeed just after it became certain that the federal government would enforce Title IX regulations, which required college athletic departments to significantly increase their support for women’s sports, the NCAA made its most decisive move to incorporate women into its historically male organization (Cahn, 1994; Festle, 1996; Wushanley, 2004). In 1980, NCAA officials revealed their plan to offer collegiate championships to women in a variety of sports, even though the AIAW already offered 41 championship contests for women in 19 different sports (Cahn, 1994; Festle, 1996; Wushanley, 2004). While AIAW leaders interpreted the NCAA’s plan as an opportunistic and aggressive takeover attempt, NCAA officials contended that the move was necessitated by Title IX (Cahn, 1994; Festle, 1996; Wushanley, 2004). Despite the fact that women’s athletic leaders were successful in protecting both the law (Title IX) and their organization (AIAW) from attacks by male opponents during the 1970s, they found that their success in protecting both institutions was rapidly diminishing in the new conservative tenor of the 1980s (Cahn, 1994; Festle, 1996; Wushanley, 2004).
To make matter worse, the chances for progress in women’s sports grew even dimmer in the new decade as Republicans cut government funding for social programs and weakened enforcement of federal policies, such as Title IX, which were established to protect oppressed groups and redress egregious inequalities from the past (Cahn, 1994; Festle 1996). In fact by the early 1980s, under the direction of the Reagan administration, HEW officials had already begun to slacken the pace and rigor at which they were enforcing Title IX (Cahn, 1994; Festle 1996). Women’s sports advocates watched anxiously as HEW dropped more than eight hundred Title IX complaint investigations and compliance reviews (Cahn, 1994; Festle 1996). At stake for sportswomen was the potential reversal of more than a decade of anticipated and actual gains in anti-discrimination laws (Cahn, 1994; Festle 1996). While the projected disaster did not materialize, prevented in part by subsequent congressional action, women’s athletic leaders again faced an uphill battle as they fought to protect both the law that gave women equal rights to athletic enjoyment and the organization that served as the vehicle to promote women’s autonomy and advance women’s unique athletic priorities (Cahn, 1994; Festle 1996; Wushanley, 2004).

The fierce struggle that ensued between the AIAW and the NCAA, and between women’s sports advocates and the courts foreshadowed the battles that would erupt within college athletic departments during the 1980s (Cahn, 1994; Festle 1996). At the heart of the issue was whether those directly involved with women’s athletics would continue to have the right to develop women’s programs, or if a system designed to serve men’s athletic programs would be forcibly imposed on women (Cahn, 1994; Festle 1996;
What, then, would this mean for the development of collegiate synchronized swimming in general—an exclusively female sport—and for the now nationally prominent synchronized swimming program at Ohio State?

A Share of the National Championship Title

In 1980 Ohio State officials responded to HEW’s strong policy interpretation of Title IX and its intention to enforce the law by, first, expanding the number of women’s varsity sport teams from 11 to 12; second, by increasing the women’s athletic operating budget by 88% from the previous year to $927,997; and finally, by providing ten additional full scholarships (for a total of 95) to female athletes (Bailey, 1983). At the same time the Ohio State athletic administration, with prompting from Conference officials, determined that some consideration and action to bring its women’s athletic program under the scope of the Big Ten Conference was called for by the latest interpretation of Title IX (Bailey, 1983; Haidle, 1980). Without delay, Athletic Director Hugh Hindman instructed the Ohio State Athletic Council to vote in favor of expanding the Big Ten Conference to include women’s intercollegiate athletics (Bailey, 1983; Haidle, 1980). While many of the athletic council members applauded the administration’s decision noting that, “the move was long overdue,” others expressed grave reservations (Haidle, 1980). Margaret Hines, for instance, feared that women would not be adequately or equally represented within the traditionally male conference (Haidle, 1980). She opposed the move stating that, “Women have fought too long and hard to get where they are today to lose it all” (Haidle, 1980). Echoing Hines’ concerns,
Phyllis Bailey, now the Women’s Associate Director of Athletics, expressed her apprehension about having to rebuild an already established women’s championship structure (Haidle, 1980). Despite their misgivings however, the Conference office released a statement affirming that all ten institutions voted to include women’s programs into the Big Ten Conference beginning in August 1982 (Bailey, 1983; Haidle, 1980).

Although the decision to incorporate women’s athletics into the Big Ten Conference spelled eventual doom for many strong Midwestern synchronized swimming programs, given that the all female sport was not sponsored by the traditionally male Conference, the Ohio State program continued to flourish. With her entire 1979 national championship team returning in 1980 and the addition of freshman Janet Tope, an AAU standout, to her roster, Mary Jo Ruggieri felt confident that her team would bring home its fourth consecutive national title (Toney, 1980). In addition to augmenting the team’s training regimen, Ruggieri’s strategy for success in the 1980 title contest included reinvigorating the creativity of her team’s routines (Smythe, 1980; Toney, 1980). Ruggieri explained that, “With Tara Cameron and Karen Callaghan having trained throughout the summer with the Pan American team and with six additional Buckeyes having participated on the [Ruggieri-coached] Midwest National Olympic Sports Festival squad, the conditioning of the women [was] ahead of schedule so I [felt] we [could] afford to flirt with new and creative routines” (Synchers Win 4th National Title, 1980). In past years, Ruggieri choreographed all the routines herself (Houze Gerber, 1980). But lately, the choreography had become a group project with her swimmers (Houze Gerber, 1980). “Having women from a variety of different AAU swimming backgrounds on our
team allowed us to combine our knowledge and experience to come up with creative movements that distinguished us from our competitors,” explained Karen Callaghan, one of several Ohio State swimmers originally from the California area (K. Callaghan, personal communication, February 9, 2010).

Ruggieri’s strategy proved successful as her Buckeyes captured their fourth straight national title in late April at the University of Michigan’s natatorium—although this time they shared the title with a much improved Arizona squad (Kilburger, 1980; Meet Results, 1980; Synchers Win 4th National Title, 1980). Among the field of 38 participating teams, the Buckeyes and Wildcats each scored 62 points to secure a share of the title, while Michigan finished third with 38 points (Kanopsic, 1980; Kilburger, 1980; Meet Results, 1980; Synchers Win 4th National Title, 1980). Ohio State’s Pan American representatives—Karen Callaghan and Tara Cameron—joined forces to defeat the former national champion duet combination of Michele Beaulieu and Pamela Tryon from Arizona (Kilburger, 1980). Afterwards, both swimmers combined efforts with Janet Tope to win the trio contest (Kilburger, 1980). Next, the Buckeyes illustrated their dominance in the team event as Callaghan, Cameron, Tope, Myfanwy Borel, Dawn Nelsen, Kathy Rankin, Carrie Ruehl and Jill Vincent performed a virtually flawless team routine to capture first place (Kanopsic, 1980; Kilburger, 1980). Lastly although Tara Cameron dominated the solo competition, she was unable to claim the title because swimmers were not permitted to score points in more than three events (Kilburger, 1980). Nonetheless, Cameron secured a second consecutive All-American award for her exceptional performances in Ann Arbor. Joining Cameron as two-time All-Americans
were teammates Karen Callaghan and Dawn Nelsen. Also achieving All-American
distinctions for the third straight year was Myfanwy Borel, while teammates Carrie Ruehl
and Janet Tope both received the coveted accolade for the first time (Media Guide, 1980;
Meet Results, 1980). In addition to the aforementioned awards, four Buckeyes
(Callaghan, Cameron, Tope and Rankin) also earned the right to represent the United
States in international competition as members of the 1980 U.S. National Team, an honor
granted exclusively to the top 15 synchronized swimmers in the nation (Kanopsic, 1980;
Media Guide, 1980; Meet Results, 1980).

A Loss to Rival Arizona

In January 1981 NCAA officials assembled at their annual convention to vote on
a proposal to change the organization’s governance structure to incorporate women
(Carpenter & Acosta, 2005; Wushanley, 2004). The proposal passed quickly with little
opposition, most likely, because many NCAA officials feared that HEW might enforce
Title IX and ask why schools in some instances applied different rules to their male and
female athletes, thus placing the NCAA procedures at risk (Cahn, 1994; Festle, 1996;
Wushanley, 2004). Perhaps however, few objected because only 11 out of the 886
delegates were females (Cahn, 1994; Festle, 1996; Wushanley, 2004). Nevertheless, the
announcement was made that the NCAA would begin offering five collegiate
championships to women in Division II and Division III schools beginning in the 1981-
82 academic year (Bailey, 1983; Cahn, 1994; Festle, 1996; Wushanley, 2004). Soon after
its initial announcement, the NCAA also declared that it would begin conducting
collegiate championships for women in Division I schools starting in 1982 (Cahn, 1994; Festle, 1996; Wushanley, 2004). While many women’s athletic leaders urged schools to maintain their allegiance to the AIAW, the NCAA offered several perks to institutions that the AIAW could not, such as money and television exposure (Cahn, 1994; Festle, 1996; Wushanley, 2004). Most colleges deemed the incentives too attractive to turn down and began steadily switching their women’s athletic program affiliations to the NCAA (Cahn, 1994; Festle, 1996; Wushanley, 2004). Ohio State, however, decided to remain committed to the AIAW, at least early on (Bailey, 1983; Roenigk, 1981). The University’s response to the NCAA’s actions came from an ad hoc committee on the “Future Direction of Women’s Athletics,” chaired by Professor Lonnie Wagstaff. On behalf of the ad hoc committee Wagstaff stated that,

Full commitment [by Ohio State] [would] not be made to the NCAA because the NCAA had no experience with women’s tournaments and championships. Until the NCAA clarifies what is involved with joining that governing organization we would be better prepared to go with both [the NCAA and the AIAW]. (Bailey, 1983; Roenigk, 1981)

Mary Jo Ruggieri was pleased by the ad hoc committee’s decision knowing that her team would likely be the hardest hit if the women’s athletic program at Ohio State was forced to make the transition to NCAA governance (M.J. Ruggieri, personal communication, May 31, 2010). Dropping the synchronized swimming program to the
club level would minimize the issue of having to reduce the number of scholarships awarded to Ohio State female athletes since the NCAA permitted 10 fewer scholarships for women than did the AIAW (Cahn, 1994; Festle, 1996; Wushanley, 2004). Moreover, demoting the exclusively female sport to club status appeared most logical for the simple fact that the NCAA, an all male organization, did not sponsor the sport of synchronized swimming. In addition to this, Ruggieri had already begun to witness the downgrading or discontinuation of a number of varsity synchronized swimming programs across the country with just the initial discussions associated with the NCAA’s intention to assume leadership of women’s intercollegiate athletics (M.J. personal communication, May 31, 2010). Despite lingering concerns over the long-term prospects of her program’s continued varsity status, Ruggieri and her four-time AIAW national championship team conducted business as usual, as they prepared for a new season and a chance at capturing their fifth consecutive AIAW title, albeit this time without having to share the laurels with rival Arizona.

Losing only one member of the 1980 national championship team (Jill Vincent) to graduation, while adding several experienced newcomers to her squad, Ruggieri was confident that her 1981 team would fare well in the upcoming AIAW title contest, which was scheduled to take place in late March at Stanford University. “We have no big gaps this year” said Ruggieri (Schuholz, 1981). “The team is very strong and has a great deal of talent, but I’m looking for a better showing from this year’s juniors and seniors because they are stronger and more experienced,” she added (Schuholz, 1981). Indeed, all six of Ruggieri’s 1980 AIAW All-Americans returned for the 1981 season, including
members of the 1980 national champion trio (Callahan, Cameron, Tope) and duet
Also joining the Buckeye squad in 1981 was junior newcomer Marie White, a 1979 All-
American transfer from Arizona, who would replace Jill Vincent in both the figure and
however, in spite of their vast experience, extensive depth and extraordinary talent, the
Ohio State synchronized swimming program suffered its first loss (and only its third
competitive loss since 1970) in the five year history of the AIAW collegiate national

The Buckeyes were dethroned by perennial rival, Arizona, by a narrow five point
margin, 64 to 59; while Michigan finished in third place with 35 points, followed by the
“Arizona is a great program and has some of the top swimmers in the world so we knew
that this would be a tight battle for first place,” remarked Ruggieri after the competition
(Spring Results Vary, 1981). Ohio State finished the meet with four second place
divisional finishes (in the duet and trio events as well as the junior and senior figures)
behind Arizona (Media Guide, 1981; Meet Results, 1981). Although Tara Cameron and
Arizona’s Pamela Tryon tied for first place in the solo contest, the Buckeyes’ only
outright divisional win came in the team event as the eight-member team of Callaghan,
Cameron, Tope, Nelsen, Rankin, White, Borel and Ruehl edged Arizona’s top squad by a
tenth of a point (Media Guide, 1981; Meet Results, 1981). Even with Ohio States’
disappointing second place overall finish in the AIAW title contest, six Buckeyes
garnered All-American accolades including Karen Callaghan, Tara Cameron and Dawn Nelsen for a third consecutive year and Kathy Rankin, Janet Tope and Marie White for a second time (Media Guide, 1981; Meet Results, 1981). Additionally, three Buckeyes were selected as members of the 1981 U.S. National Team including, Kathy Rankin, Marie White and Tara Cameron (Galipault, 1981; Media Guide, 1981). Finally the 1981 Broderick Award, the highest honor bestowed to collegiate-level female athletes in each sponsored sport for their superior athletic skill, leadership abilities and academic excellence, was presented to Ohio State’s Tara Cameron, the high point performer in the 1981 AIAW national championship meet (Media Guide, 1981).

*Transition from the AIAW to the NCAA*

When the NCAA sponsored its first set of women’s championships in the 1981-82 school year, the vast majority of women’s athletic programs had already begun to make their affiliation switch to the NCAA (Cahn, 1996; Festle, 1996). Because of a financial short-fall, and because conducting two championships in many sports was weakening women’s competition at the highest level, the AIAW “voluntarily” closed down operations in June 1982 and, then, ultimately conceded defeat in 1984 when the organization lost an antitrust lawsuit against the NCAA in a last-ditch effort to use the courts to halt the takeover (Cahn, 1996; Festle, 1996; Wushanley, 2004). In anticipation of this development, the Big Ten institutional representatives voted to accept the NCAA regulations as the governing rules for women’s intercollegiate athletics (Bailey, 1983). Subsequently in August 1982, Ohio State formally declared that their women’s athletic
program would operate under NCAA rules and regulations beginning immediately (Bailey, 1983). With the final AIAW synchronized swimming national championships (later renamed the National Collegiate Synchronized Swimming Championships) slated to take place in late March 1982 at Ohio State’s Peppe Aquatic Center, Mary Jo Ruggieri and her swimmers were determined not only to reclaim the national title, but also to preserve their 12 year undefeated streak at home (Bucks Hope to be in Sync, 1982). The Buckeyes, however, would have to accomplish this difficult feat while facing their stiffest competition yet from defending national champions, Arizona, and from a more resolute Michigan team, who just two weeks prior to the 1981 AIAW meet learned that their program would change back to club status following the title event (Lindeman Letter, 1982).

Despite the loss of several top swimmers from last year’s team to graduation, Mary Jo Ruggieri declared that her 1982 recruiting class was the strongest she had ever amassed in her 12 year coaching career (Media Guide, 1982). With the deregulation of AIAW recruiting rules in the late-1970s, Ruggieri promptly launched an international recruiting program, the first ever in the sport, which brought two of the top Canadian swimmers (Manon Cote and Missy Morlock) to her 1982 squad (Media Guide, 1982; Conley, 1982). As a Canadian National Team member, Manon Cote competed in the Pan Pacific games as well as the American and World Cup Championships before leaving her home town of Sainte Foy, Quebec to attend Ohio State (Conley, 1982). “I had heard many stories about Coach Ruggieri and how her training style made the Buckeyes consistent national champions, so I knew I wanted to swim for her and become a
Buckeye,” explained Cote in a 1982 *Lantern* article (Conley, 1982). On the domestic side, Ruggieri was also successful in recruiting one of the best American duet combinations from Bristol, Connecticut in Karen and Sarah Josephson, identical twins and potential 1984 Olympic duet contenders (the first time the sport would be represented in the Olympics) (Hone, 1982). Ruggieri recalled, “Whether or not the pair had an advantage of the mystical bonds that supposedly exist between identical twins was open for debate, but their natural ability in the water was not” (Ackley, 1983). With the addition of these three highly skilled swimmers to an already talented group, Ruggieri felt certain that her 1982 team would have a “good shot” at reclaiming the national title (Media Guide, 1982).

While it proved to be one of the closest national championship races between the top three teams in the six year history of the event, the Ohio State Buckeyes prevailed as the 1982 AIAW national champions for the fifth time in six years, beating the defending champions, Arizona, by five points and neighboring rival, Michigan, by nine points (Weiss, 1982). The Buckeyes placed in one of the top three positions in all six divisional events of the competition, including first place finishes in both the trio and team contests (Weiss, 1982). Senior Karen Callaghan teamed up with freshman twins, Karen and Sarah Josephson, to outscore the reigning trio national champions from Arizona by more than a point (Media Guide, 1982; Meet Results, 1982; Weiss, 1982). Meanwhile, the team event proved particularly exciting as the Ohio State team of Callaghan, K. Josephson, S. Josephson, Manon Cote, Dawn Nelsen, Cheryl Muth, Holly Vargo and Luanne Saas inched past Arizona’s top-rated squad by a scant two-hundredths of a point to claim the
victory (Media Guide, 1982; Meet Results, 1982; Weiss, 1982). “It was a close contest and I doubted at times that we would win,” said a jubilant Ruggieri after her team’s victory (Weiss, 1982). “In fact added Ruggieri, before the meet Arizona’s team appeared to be the stronger of the two schools since seven of their swimmers were members of the U.S. National Team compared to just three of our swimmers” (Weiss, 1982). Nonetheless, the Buckeyes defeated all 24 participating schools in their home pool to reclaim the AIAW national championship title and to secure their 12 year unbeaten streak at home (Media Guide, 1982; Meet Results, 1982; Weiss, 1982).

Following the 1982 title contest, six Buckeyes were awarded AIAW All-American honors including, Karen Callaghan and Dawn Nelsen for a fourth consecutive time, Luanne Saas for the second time, and Manon Cote as well as Karen and Sarah Josephson for the first time (Media Guide, 1982; Meet Results, 1982). Additionally, three of the abovementioned Ohio State swimmers, (K. Josephson, S. Josephson, and Callaghan) were named to the 1982 U.S. National Team, while one additional Buckeye, freshman Missy Morlock, secured a position on the Canadian National Team (Media Guide, 1982; Stull, 1982). Lastly for a second year in a row, an Ohio State synchronized swimmer—this time senior captain Karen Callaghan—was awarded the prestigious 1982 Broderick Award for her excellence both in the pool and in the classroom (Media Guide, 1982).
With the demise of the AIAW, many schools began the process of merging their separate men’s and women’s athletic departments. In almost every instance, schools named men as department heads and appointed men to most of the administrative positions, thus diminishing what little power women’s athletic leaders had on college campuses (Cahn, 1994; Festle, 1996). While most women’s sports did not suffer terrible setbacks in the NCAA, neither did they flourish. Competitive opportunities remained relatively unchanged, as the number of NCAA women’s championships gradually increased to nearly as many as those that were offered by the AIAW (Cahn, 1994; Festle, 1996). One of the few exceptions was the sport of synchronized swimming. After the announcement was made that women’s athletics would operate under the NCAA, many schools with varsity synchronized swimming programs began to scrutinize the varsity ranking of the all-female sport (M.J. Ruggieri, personal communication, May 31, 2010). Among those schools were several Big Ten Conference members, including Michigan, Michigan State, and Minnesota (M.J. Ruggieri, personal communication, May 31, 2010). All three schools claimed to have similar institutional policies that prohibited varsity teams from competing in intercollegiate sports other than those conducted by their conference and/or national governing bodies (M.J. Ruggieri, personal communication, May 31, 2010). Upon downgrading their synchronized swimming program Michigan’s athletic administration stated that, “Inasmuch as the Big Ten and the NCAA do not sponsor synchronized swimming, the varsity sport [at Michigan] will revert back to a
club sport once the school’s membership in both organizations is made official in late 1982” (Lindeman Letter, 1982).

Although three of the Buckeyes’ regional synchronized swimming opponents lost their varsity ranking during their recent affiliation switch to the Big Ten and NCAA governing bodies, Ohio State’s synchronized swimming varsity status remained intact, as their women’s athletic program underwent those same membership changes. In fact, Ohio State’s varsity program continued its dominance in the sport with another victory in the 1983 National Collegiate Synchronized Swimming Championship event, which was held at Swarthmore College in late March (Media Guide, 1983; Meet Results, 1983). With first place finishes in the duet (Karen and Sara Josephson) and trio (the Josephson twins and Manon Cote) contests as well as first and second place finishes (Sarah and Karen Josephson, respectively) in the senior figures, the Buckeyes were able to defeat their constant challenger, Arizona, by nearly nine points for the national title (Ackley, 1983; Media Guide, 1983; Meet Results, 1983). Despite their recent demotion to club status, Michigan captured third place overall, continuing the traditional triad of unbeatable collegiate programs (Ackley, 1983; Media Guide, 1983; Meet Results, 1983).

After the collegiate nationals, five Buckeyes earned All-American honors for their outstanding performances, including two-time recipients Manon Cote, Karen Josephson and Sarah Josephson, as well as first-time award winners Missy Morlock and Cheryl Muth (Ackley, 1983; Media Guide, 1983; Meet Results, 1983). Lastly, Karen and Sarah Josephson as well as Karen Callaghan, a 1982 graduate of Ohio State, were selected as members of the U.S. National Team and would represent the United States in the 1983
Pan American games scheduled to take place that summer in Caracas, Venezuela (Media Guide, 1983).

One year later, the Buckeye program had its two-year national championship reign snapped by host team, Arizona, at the 1984 National Collegiate Synchronized Swimming Championships (only their fourth competitive loss in 14 years) by a scant one point margin, 101 to 100, while Michigan, once again, finished a distant third with 67 points (Media Guide, 1984; Meet Results, 1984; Synch swimmers lose by a point, 1984). Sarah and Karen Josephson led the Buckeyes, capturing first and second places, respectively, in both the solo event and senior figures, while they also teamed up to claim the victory in the duet final (Media Guide, 1984; Meet Results, 1984). Although Ohio State held top positions in three of five divisional contests and tied for first in the team routine, all event finishes were extremely close, with Arizona narrowly pulling ahead of the Buckeyes in the overall team score with two strong performances in the trio competition (Media Guide, 1984; Meet Results, 1984). Following the championship meet, three Buckeyes earned All-American accolades for the third consecutive year, including Sarah and Karen Josephson and Manon Cote, while teammate Missy Morlock garnered the distinction for the second time and seniors Holly Vargo and Linda Edwards earned the coveted honor for the first time (Media Guide, 1984; Meet Results, 1984). The addition of Vargo and Edwards to Ohio State’s All-American list boosted the Buckeye total to an unprecedented 28 recipients in the 8 year history of the award (Media Guide, 1984; Meet Results, 1984). Lastly, for the fourth time in their swimming careers the Josephson twins were selected to serve as members of the 1984 U.S. National Team
(including, their selection as high school seniors), while Buckeye head coach, Mary Jo Ruggieri was also chosen to serve as a member of the National Team coaching staff that same year (Media Guide, 1984; Meet Results, 1984).

Two weeks after the 1984 collegiate nationals the Josephson twins, ranked second in the nation in the duet event, competed against the top-rated American duet pair (Tracy Ruiz and Candy Costie, former University of Arizona national champions) for the right to represent the United States in the 1984 Olympic Games, the first time the sport of synchronized swimming (the duet event only) was to debut in the Olympics (Morris, 1984). Unfortunately, after losing to the top duet team by two-tenths of a point, only one Josephson, Sarah, was selected to represent the USA team, as an alternate, in the 1984 Olympics (Morris, 1984). While the Josephsons’ were disappointed that they narrowly missed representing the United States in the duet event of the Olympic Games, Ohio State synchronized swimming head coach Mary Jo Ruggieri commented afterwards in an article that:

This experience was the most exciting thing for me and for OSU. Ohio State has gotten a lot of mileage from all of the exposure and it deserves to since the school has really supported the synchronized swimming program. Although not many colleges and universities offer synchronized swimming as a varsity-level intercollegiate sport, we are lucky because Ohio State’s philosophy has been one of strong support for a sport that is unique to women. (Morris, 1984)
Bringing the Crown Home Again

After losing the 1984 title event to their perennial foe Arizona by a mere one point margin (their second title loss to the Wildcats in a four year period), the Buckeyes were more determined than ever to bring the crown back to Ohio State in the 1985 National Collegiate Championships. “It is not something we hope to do, it is something we are going to do,” promised junior swimmer Kathy Augenstein before the competition (Freudenthal, 1985). But achieving this goal would require the Buckeyes to add more flair and creativity to their routines and to take more calculated risks in their overall performances to outshine the reigning champions (Freudenthal, 1985; Media Guide, 1985). “We’ve been known for trying something original in our routines each year, but this year,” noted Ruggieri, “we plan on thrilling the audience with our new elements in the upcoming title contest” (Freudenthal, 1985). The three-day competition which was held at Indianapolis’ Indiana University-Purdue University natatorium in late March proved to be the Buckeyes most audacious showing in the nine year history of the Championship event (Dumbacher, 1985; Media Guide, 1985; Meet Results, 1985). With Ruggieri’s passion for originality and her team’s fervor for innovative choreography, it was no surprise that the Buckeyes new acrobatic and aerial stunts, which literally involved throwing four swimmers out of the water, brought the crowd to its feet and propelled Ohio State to a three point victory over defending champions Arizona (Dumbacher, 1985; Media Guide, 1985).
Swimming in their final collegiate competition, Karen and Sarah Josephson placed first and second, respectively, in both the solo and figure contests, while they also joined forces to claim the duet title for an unprecedented third consecutive year (Dumbacher, 1985; Media Guide, 1985; Meet Results, 1985). The twins, then, collaborated with teammate Manon Cote to win first place in the trio division. “It was our last chance to win for Ohio State and bring the national title back to Columbus, so we were excited to accomplish this goal,” said Sarah Josephson (Dumbacher, 1985). After the title event 15 women were named to the All-American team including eight swimmers from Ohio State, the highest total in the national synchronized swimming tournament’s history (Media Guide, 1985; Meet Results, 1985). Karen and Sarah Josephson as well as Manon Cote earned the distinction for the fourth year in a row, while Missy Morlock collected the honor for a third time (Media Guide, 1985; Meet Results, 1985). Rounding out the list of recipients for the Buckeyes were first-year honorees Ana Amicarella, Adrienne Lehman, Anne Schulte, and Betsy Visniski (Media Guide, 1985; Meet Results, 1985). Finally in the 1985 United States Synchronized Swimming, Inc., (USSSI) awards ceremony, Ohio State came away with three of the top honors awarded to synchronized swimmers (Media Guide, 1985; Meet Results, 1985). Karen and Sarah Josephson were named Co-Collegiate Athletes of the Year, while Sarah Josephson was honored as the top U.S. Synchronized Swimming Athlete of the Year (Media Guide, 1985; Meet Results, 1985). Lastly, head coach Mary Jo Ruggieri was honored with the MacKellar Distinguished Service Award, presented annually to an individual, “who has given unselfishly of oneself for synchronized swimming without
thought of personal gain and with a particular emphasis on working for the benefit of the athlete” (Bean, 2005, p. 112; Media Guide, 1985; Meet Results, 1985).

After reclaiming the coveted national title in 1985 and avenging their previous year’s one point loss to Arizona, Mary Jo Ruggieri boldly proclaimed that her team would never let the title get away from them again (M.J. Ruggieri, personal communication, May 31, 2010). True to her word, Ruggieri’s squad captured its eighth title in 10 years at the 1986 National Collegiate Synchronized Swimming Championships held in Tuscaloosa, Alabama (Kelch, 1986; Media Guide, 1986; Meet Results, 1986). Strong performances in their last two events helped the Buckeyes overcome a slow start to defeat runner-up Arizona by four points (Kelch, 1986, Media Guide, 1986; Meet Results, 1986). Meanwhile, for the first time in the ten year history of the title event Ohio State’s neighboring rival, Michigan, failed to finish among the top three teams, as they were outperformed by an emerging Stanford program that scored 65 points to secure third place (Kelch, 1986, Media Guide, 1986; Meet Results, 1986). Falling behind both Arizona and Stanford after the first day of competition, the Buckeyes rebounded with victories in the trio and team events (Kelch, 1986, Media Guide, 1986; Meet Results, 1986). Seniors Adrienne Lehman and Betsy Visniski combined efforts with junior Karen Miele to maintain Ohio State’s six-year hold on the trio title (Kelch, 1986, Media Guide, 1986; Meet Results, 1986). Then, the victorious trio united with five other teammates including, Ana Amicarella, Kathy Augenstein, Cathy Cramer, Denise Sawicki and Kathy Zittel, to win the team routine by a tenth of a point (Kelch, 1986, Media Guide, 1986; Meet Results, 1986). Following the team’s overall victory, five Buckeyes were named
1986 All-Americans including, first-time recipients Augenstein, Cramer and Zittel and second-time award winners Amicarella and Visniski (Kelch, 1986, Media Guide, 1986; Meet Results, 1986). Although her upper-class swimmers gave strong performances, Ruggieri attributed the championship to the team’s wealth of quality freshmen and sophomores who added valuable points to help secure Ohio State’s overall victory (Kelch, 1986, Media Guide, 1986; Meet Results, 1986).

**Weakening Of Title IX**

By the mid-to-late 1980s women’s intercollegiate athletics was dealt a powerful blow. Most significantly, Title IX had been riddled with holes, leaving many women to wonder whether the legislation they worked so hard to obtain would ever be restored to full strength (Cahn, 1994; Festle, 1996; Fields, 2005). The aftermath of a weakened Title IX was that many schools began gradually reducing or even abruptly halting the expansion of their women’s varsity sport programs (Cahn, 1994; Festle, 1996). In addition to no longer having a strong law in place to protect women’s athletic interests, the AIAW no longer existed thus further eroding the female voice in women’s sports on college campuses (Cahn, 1994; Festle, 1996). Unlike other women’s sport programs across the country, Ohio State’s women’s athletics, and its synchronized swimming program in particular, remained virtually unscathed by the initial transition to both the Big Ten Conference and NCAA governing bodies (M.J. Ruggieri, personal communication, May 31, 2010). Their good fortune, however, was about to change in mid-1986 when Ohio State’s Athletic Director, Richard Bay, announced his
administration’s proposal to eliminate eight varsity sport programs, including the eight-time defending national championship synchronized swimming team (Durk, 1986; Hayden, 1986). With its proposal, the athletic administration planned to make more than $400,000 available each year to augment the remaining 23 varsity sport programs’ budgets (Durk, 1986; Hayden, 1986). Ultimately the teams’ fate would rest in the hands of a five-member Program Review Committee, made up of representatives from the Ohio State Athletic Council, who were set to cast their final vote on the issue later that year (Durk, 1986; Hayden, 1986).

Mary Jo Ruggieri could still remember the day like it was yesterday. “I will never forget the dejected looks on my swimmers’ faces when they learned that the athletic administration planned on relegating our program to a club sport status, despite the fact that we had brought such positive national and international recognition to the department and the University,” said Ruggieri in an interview 25 years after the fact (M.J. Ruggieri, personal communication, May 31, 2010). “I knew at that moment,” she added vehemently, “that I had to do whatever it took to save the program for my swimmers” (M.J. Ruggieri, personal communication, May 31, 2010). Much like her reaction to adversity in the 1970s, Ruggieri once again sought the help of her ally and superior, Phyllis Bailey. Together Ruggieri and Bailey began campaigning tirelessly to preserve a program that both women had spent years trying to build and cultivate. “I can remember Mary Jo and Phyllis telling the team that if anyone asked us how we felt about the fact that our sport may be cut, we were all supposed to be very positive,” recalled Kathy Zittel, a junior at the time (K. Zittel, personal communication, February 9, 2010). “There
was even a script for us to follow,” added then junior Sharon Dillon, “and it went like this—We are confident the University will make the right decision and keep a sport that has had such great success and that has been such a great ambassador for the University” (S. Dillon, personal communication, March 16, 2010). After meeting with the team, Ruggieri and Bailey encouraged both current and former Ohio State synchronized swimmers to begin canvassing the campus and surrounding Columbus communities for support in saving their varsity sport (M.J. Ruggieri, personal communication, May 31, 2010). Meanwhile, they too began garnering support for the program through their many University and City connections (M.J. Ruggieri, personal communication, May 31, 2010).

As an active participant in state government, Mary Jo Ruggieri called upon her many influential friends to contact the President’s Office, on behalf of the synchronized swimming team, to convey their profound disappointment in the Athletic Department’s recent proposal to eliminate a sport program that had just been awarded a “Citation of Excellence” for their remarkable winning tradition by Columbus City Council members (Kelch, 1986; M.J. Ruggieri, personal communication, May 31, 2010). She then persuaded her close friend’s husband, who just happened to be Ohio Governor Richard Celeste, to call President Edward Jennings directly to express his staunch support for the team (M.J. Ruggieri, personal communication, May 31, 2010; M.K. Kretschmer, personal communication, February 9, 2010). Finally, both Ruggieri and Bailey reached out to several sports media outlets in the Columbus area, including Ruggieri’s friend Jimmy Crum, the Sports Director at WCMH Channel 4, and requested that they broadcast and
publish the many testimonials given on behalf of the team (M.J. Ruggieri, personal
communication, May 31, 2010). “Mary Jo and Phyllis spoke to anyone and everyone
about how they thought it would be a categorical mistake to cut a sport program that was
10 years ahead of its time and one that had been such an ambassador for the institution,”
recalled former swimmer and assistant coach Mary Kay Kretschmer (M.K. Kretschmer,
personal communication, February 9, 2010). “In fact their relentless lobbying,” she
added, “generated such a public outcry that the Athletic Department was basically forced
to keep the program intact” (M.K. Kretschmer, personal communication, February 9,
2010).

The final decision regarding the status of the varsity sport programs would be
based on a set of criteria formulated by the Program Review Committee (Durk, 1986).
The criteria included, “National and Big Ten participation rates, financial savings
achieved by eliminating the sport, visibility of the sport and its importance to the athletic
department” (Durk, 1986, p. 4; Hayden, 1986, p. 1). Several factors weighing heavily
against the synchronized swimming team were discussed briefly in the Ohio State
Lantern by Athletic Council Chairperson Lena Bailey. She stated the following about the
sport,

It is the only Ohio State team with varsity status that competes
mainly against club teams. Plus, it [the sport] is not sponsored by
either the Big Ten or the NCAA. Nevertheless, the overwhelming
success of the team poses a difficult dilemma for those of us in the
decision making process. (Durk, 1986, p. 4; Hayden, 1986, p. 1)

While the original recommendation made by the Program Review Committee was, in
fact, to downgrade synchronized swimming to a club sport, Ruggieri and Bailey’s
laborious campaigning efforts finally paid off as an athletic council member, Don
Christenson, made one final plea for his fellow council members to reconsider their
decision (Durk, 1986; M.J. Ruggieri, personal communication, May 31, 2010). “It just
didn’t feel right to cut a program that’s the best in the country,” said Christenson
regarding his last minute appeal to retain the varsity status of the synchronized swimming
team (Durk, 1986, p. 4; Stern, 1986, p. 1). After another extensive and agonizing debate
over the amendment to the original recommendation to drop synchronized swimming to
the club level, Christenson’s last minute motion passed, but only after Chairperson Lena
Bailey cast the deciding vote, which served as a tie-breaker (Stern, 1996).

When the Program Review Committee spokesperson read the recommendation in
a meeting held later that evening stating that the synchronized swimming program was to
be retained as a varsity sport, “the room erupted into cheers,” remembered then junior
Christine Harrison (C. Harrison, personal communication, March, 19, 2010). Prior to that
meeting, Ruggieri and Bailey not only encouraged current and former Ohio State
synchronized swimmers to attend the reading of the committee’s recommendation, but
they also invited others to attend, including their many influential friends and media
advocates who collaborated with both women to save the varsity sport program (M.J.
Ruggieri, personal communication, May 31, 2010). They did this in part because Ruggieri had secretly found out earlier in the day from a source in the athletic council that the vote was not going to go in her program’s favor (M.J. Ruggieri, personal communication, May 31, 2010). Unaware that a last minute appeal was made on behalf of her team sparking a reversal in the committee’s decision, Ruggieri and Bailey devised a last ditch effort to save the program by inviting as many supporters of the program to the committee’s recommendation reading in order to protest what they thought was going to be a negative outcome (M.J. Ruggieri, personal communication, May 31, 2010). “We hoped that by having so many advocates in the room protesting the committee’s recommendation that it would ultimately pressure the Athletic Council to reverse its decision,” recalled Ruggieri (M.J. Ruggieri, personal communication, May 31, 2010). “The last minute appeal,” she continued, “happened so close to the evening’s meeting time that my athletic council source was not able to inform me of the new decision, so needless to say, I about dropped my lunch when the recommendation to save our varsity status was read” (M.J. Ruggieri, personal communication, May 31, 2010; Wharton, 1986).

A few months prior to the athletic administration’s public announcement of their proposal to drop a number of varsity sport teams to club status, rumors had begun surfacing throughout the athletic department about the imminent cuts, causing many coaches, including Mary Jo Ruggieri, to fear the worst for their programs (M.J. Ruggieri, personal communication, May 31, 2010; Wharton, 1986). Consequently, Ruggieri scheduled a meeting with Athletic Director Rick Bay to inquire about her program’s
future under Bay’s relatively new athletic administration. Ruggieri vividly recalled Bay’s response to her inquiry. He said to me, “You’re history, honey…you’re history” (M.J. Ruggieri, personal communication, May 31, 2010; Wharton, 1986, pp. 1-2). In an article following the committee’s final decision Ruggieri said,

Five years ago if the athletic director wanted to do whatever he wanted to do, he could. Five years ago I would have been crawling out of there on all fours. I’m really proud of this university for standing up for us. They’re the first university in the United States to say no to some things. (Wharton, 1986, pp. 1-2)

When asked after the committee meeting about the strong support received by the synchronized swimming program throughout the entire process, Bay commented that, “I just thought it was unrealistic, but if that’s what everybody wants, then fine, I’ll work within the recommendations and administer the program thusly” (Wharton, 1986, pp. 1-2). Although the team retained its varsity status, Ruggieri was not permitted to give any scholarship money to incoming recruits from 1986-1988 (Wharton, 1986). “Cutting back is okay, I am a team player and I will support the athletic department’s adjustments,” noted Ruggieri (Wharton, 1986, pp. 1-2). In her final analysis of the proposal to cut her program, Ruggieri stated,
I think the real issue at hand was the philosophy of educational values versus athletic values. Maybe what synchronized swimming offers isn’t what they [the athletic department] traditionally feel sports like football can accomplish. But it [synchronized swimming] is an important part of these women’s education and their lives. (Wharton, 1986, pp. 1-2)

Switching Gears and Refocusing

After spending nearly six months directing all of their time and energy towards saving their varsity sport program, Mary Jo Ruggieri and her team were more than ready to switch gears again and begin concentrating on collecting their third straight national title in three years and their ninth overall in the 11 year history of the title event (Blackledge, 1987; Media Guide, 1987). With 13 swimmers returning from the 1986 national championship team and an incoming freshman class that was dubbed Ruggieri’s finest in her 16 year coaching career despite not being able to offer scholarships, it was no surprise that the Buckeye’s goal for the 1987 season was to add another national crown to its trophy case (Blackledge, 1987; Media Guide, 1987). But accomplishing this goal would not be an easy task given the altered landscape of collegiate synchronized swimming (Blackledge, 1987; M.J. Ruggieri, personal communication, May 31, 2010). Although Ohio State’s perennial rival, Arizona, did not fare as well as the Buckeye’s did in their efforts to save their varsity synchronized swimming program—Arizona’s program was eliminated altogether in late 1986—two upstart teams, Stanford and
Richmond, quickly filled the void left by the demise of Arizona’s program (Blackledge, 1987; M.J. Ruggieri, personal communication, May 31, 2010). The Buckeyes, however, had an added advantage over their two new challengers in the upcoming 1987 USSSI National Collegiate Championships (renamed again prior to the 1987 event) by serving as the host team to the 17-participating schools (Media Guide, 1987; Meet Results, 1987).

Just as expected the 1987 title competition came down to the last two events, the solo competition and the team routine, with Stanford leading Ohio State 50-48 and Richmond trailing close behind with 46 points (Media Guide, 1987; Meet Results, 1987; Bermudez, 1987). With a clutch victory in the solo event by Ana Amicarella and a stunning win in the team routine, Ohio State was indeed able to defeat the two new upstart programs, outscoring runner-up Stanford by nine total points and third place finisher Richmond by 26, to claim their ninth overall national championship title (Media Guide, 1987; Meet Results, 1987; Bermudez, 1987). After the competition Ruggieri said, “I knew it was going to be a really close finish with Stanford and Richmond since both programs benefitted tremendously in the recruiting process in the past couple of years from our inability to offer any new athletic scholarships” (Media Guide, 1987, Bermudez, 1987). Ultimately however, Ruggieri and her swimmers used the same team dedication and togetherness that helped keep their morale high during the fight to save their varsity program, to also help them overcome a late deficit to pull off an exciting victory in the 1987 title event (Bermudez, 1987; M.J. Ruggieri, personal communication, May 31, 2010). In addition to first place finishes in the solo and team routines, the Buckeye’s Cathy Cramer, Ann Brown, and Jessica Hudacek also captured first place honors in the
trio final (Media Guide, 1987; Meet Results, 1987). Lastly, for a second year in a row, eight Buckeyes were selected as All-Americans following the collegiate nationals including three-time award winner Ana Amicarella, two-time recipients Cathy Cramer and Kathy Zittel, as well as first-time honorees Ann Brown, Jessica Hudacek, Tammy Hunt, Denise Sawicki, and Cheryl Schemenauer (Media Guide, 1987; Meet Results, 1987).

Although both the 1988 and 1989 synchronized swimming seasons were considered “rebuilding years,” as the new Ohio State Athletic Director Jim Jones reinstated the program’s athletic scholarships, both of Ruggieri’s young squads dominated their national championship contests and accomplished several feats that no other synchronized programs, including any of Ruggieri’s past teams, had ever done in the history of the title event (Media Guide, 1988; Rickel, 1988). The 1988 squad captured first place finishes in every divisional category that they entered in 1988 USSSI Collegiate Championships (Media Guide, 1988; Meet Results, 1988; Rickel, 1988). Cathy Cramer and Jessica Hudacek took first place honors in the duet final. They then, teamed up with Tammy Hunt to win the trio contest. And, afterwards all three united with five other Buckeyes including, Kristin Eakin, Tia Harding, Amy Pryor, Cheryl Schemenauer, and Cheryl Wiegand to capture the team routine title and complete the sweep of their three scored events (Media Guide, 1988; Meet Results, 1988; Rickel, 1988). In addition to this accomplishment, the 1988 squad also captured the most All-American honors, with 9 of 14, in the history of the award. The nine included, Cramer for her third consecutive year, Hudacek, Hunt and Schemenauer for the second time and
Eakin, Harding, Pryor, Wiegand and Diana Ulrich for the first time (Media Guide, 1988; Meet Results, 1988; Rickel, 1988).

With all but one senior returning for the 1989 season the Buckeyes, again, dominated the national title event and had a record six swimmers named to the 1989 U.S. National team including Cathy Cramer, Tia Harding, Jessica Hudacek, Tammy Hunt, Cheryl Schemenauer and Diana Ulrich (Media Guide, 1989; Meet Results, 1989; Myers, 1989). “The most swimmers I ever had selected to the national team prior to this year were four,” said Ruggieri (Myers, 1989). “I think now Ohio State is on its way to becoming the most acclaimed team in the country,” she proudly added (Myers, 1989).

A New Decade of Excellence

By the end of the 1980s, Ohio State synchronized swimming was by far one of the most decorated sport programs, not only at Ohio State, but also among all intercollegiate sport programs. Despite the Buckeyes history of supremacy within the collegiate sport, however—finishing first in all but four collegiate meets in its 19-year history, capturing 11 national championship titles in 13 years and producing 46 All-Americans—it was not until the 1990s that Mary Jo Ruggieri began thinking of her Ohio State program as an elite program (Lima, 1990). Ruggieri said, “In the past, we’ve had a few standouts and then the rest of the team; but recently with the high number of top recruits coming to Ohio State from across the country and around the world, the supporting cast has moved up about ten notches closing the spread between the best and the others” (Lima, 1990, p. 3; Media Guide, 1990). Thus, by the start of the 1990s, instead of wondering if her team
would win the national championship each year, Ruggieri expected her team to win each year, and deemed any other outcome from her program as subpar (M.J. Ruggieri, personal communication, May 31, 2010). “Excellence, that’s what our program is all about, excellence—my swimmers’ know that I don’t tolerate mediocrity,” said Ruggieri in a 1990 *Lantern* article (Casburn, 1990, p. 6; M.J. Ruggieri, personal communication, May 31, 2010). Ruggieri did admit, however, that winning a national title was no easy feat, especially when competing against their new perennial rivals, Stanford and Richmond, whose programs’ also had close to or as many talented swimmers as the Buckeye program (Casburn, 1990; M.J. Ruggieri, personal communication, May 31, 2010).

Although the Buckeyes dominated the 1990 USSSI Collegiate Nationals, as expected, in their home pool defeating runner-up Stanford by 17 points, Ruggieri went into the 1991 title contest second-guessing her team’s chances at winning (Golden, 1991; Media Guide, 1991; Meet Results, 1991). Despite the fact that all eight of her 1990 All-American and six National Team members were returning for the 1991 season, Ruggieri knew that Stanford’s team had recently acquired some of the best recruits from several west coast AAU programs (Golden, 1991; Media Guide, 1991). “We knew we had to wow the audience and the judges to win the 1991 national title,” said senior Tia Harding (Dwyer, 1991, p. 51). And, that is exactly what the Buckeyes did when two of their swimmers completed two back flips out of the water during the team routine (Innes, 1987). In an effort to explain the difficulty of the stunt performed Ruggieri said,
You have to remember unlike gymnasts, who launch into a series of flips and twists by pushing against a solid surface, synchronized swimmers are forbidden to touch the pool floor, so stability and propulsion for a lift or throw must come from the other teammates who are suspended underwater, holding their breath sometimes in the final seconds of an exhausting four-minute routine. (Innes, 1991)

Ohio State was the first program to ever attempt this maneuver, and the judges rewarded them handsomely with a near perfect score, which ultimately helped the Buckeyes secure their thirteenth national championship title (Media Guide, 1991; Meet Results, 1991; Innes, 1991). “I went into the meet being apprehensive about our chances to win considering Stanford’s overall talent, but I underestimated how much depth and talent I had on my own team and how much we had progressed in just a year,” remarked Ruggieri (Innes, 1991, p. 8).

The depth and talent that Ruggieri referred to in the 1991 season helped the Buckeyes to claim three more national titles by landsides in the years 1992, 1993 and 1994 (Media Guides, 1992-1994; Meet Results, 1992-1994). In the 1992 season, the Buckeyes finished first in four of the six divisional events including the senior figures (Carrie DeGuerre), the duet event (DeGuerre and Kim Ochsner), the trio contest (DeGuerre, Ochsner and Jenny Dunn) and the team routine (DeGuerre, Ochsner, Dunn, M. Shea Tanabe, Jennifer Sprague, Sandra Valles, Heather Roda, and Julie Jasontek) (Media Guide, 1992; Meet Results, 1992; Silver, 1992). Once again a record 9 of the 14
All-Americans were from Ohio State including two-time recipients DeGuerre, Dunn, Ochsner, and Sprague as well as first-year recipients Kyla Guenin, Jasontek, Roda, Tanabe and Valles (Media Guide, 1992; Meet Results, 1992; Silver, 1992).

During the 1993 season DeGuerre and Ochsner defended their duet title from the year before and then joined teammate Jenny Dunn to also defend their previous year’s trio title (Media Guide, 1993; Meet Results, 1993; Peck, 1993). Finally, the group of DeGuerre, Ochsner, Dunn, Tanabe, Sprague, Roda, Guenin, and new freshman stand-out Sadie Pietras claimed first place in the team routine (Media Guide, 1993; Meet Results, 1993; Peck, 1993). Seven of the eight Buckeye team routine members were also selected as All-Americans after the national title competition including, DeGuerre, Dunn, Ochsner, Pietras, Roda, Sprague and Tanabe (Media Guide, 1993; Meet Results, 1993; Peck, 1993). Finally, Ohio State’s synchronized swimming national title win against 20 other schools in 1994 marked the first time in the history of Division I collegiate sports that a team had won 10 straight championship titles (Jefferson, 1994; Media Guide, 1994). In response to this record Ruggieri said jokingly, “I guess we can now qualify as a collegiate sport dynasty” (Jefferson, 1994, p. 11).

In her final season as head coach of one of the most impressive sport dynasties in collegiate sport history, Ruggieri ended her coaching career on a high note with her team collecting its eleventh consecutive national championship title and its seventeenth title overall (Fong, 1995; Media Guide, 1995). In a field of 25 other teams the Buckeyes claimed first place honors in the duet event with a near perfect performance by Emily Marsh and Becky Jasontek, and the trio contest as Marsh and Jasontek teamed up with
Sadie Pietras for that victory (Fong, 1995; Media Guide 1995; Meet Results, 1995). Those two first place finishes secured a twelve point lead for the Buckeyes over a strong Stanford squad (Fong, 1995; Media Guide, 1995; Meet Results, 1995).

**Conclusion**

In just over a quarter of a century (1970-1995) head coach Mary Jo Ruggieri was able to construct one of the winningest and most consistent sport programs in the history of collegiate sports (Media Guide, 1995). Throughout her tenure as head coach of the Ohio State synchronized swimming team, Ruggieri guided her program to 17 of 19 national collegiate championship titles, with 11 of those occurring in her last 11 years as head coach, a record that remains to this day among Division I collegiate sport programs (Media Guide, 1995). In addition to these remarkable accomplishments, Ruggieri also coached 2 Broderick Award Winners, 6 USSSI Collegiate Athletes of the Year, 67 All-Americans, 22 U.S. National Team members, 7 Pan American competitors, and 5 Olympians, included 1988 Olympic silver medalist Karen and Sarah Josephson, during her illustrious career (Media Guide, 1995). To add to her numerous accolades, Ruggieri also served as the head coach of the 1988 Venezuelan Olympic team and was a member of the U.S. National Team coaching staff during the years of 1987 and 1990 (Media Guide, 1995). Mary Jo Ruggieri, with all of her achievements and accolades, will forever remain a legend in the synchronized swimming community as well as in Ohio State sport history.

Ohio State Synchronized Swimming

The popular Buckeye motto—“The People. The Tradition. The Excellence.”—has been connected to Ohio State’s athletic department for as long as I can remember. Yet, I never realized the significance associated with the adage until I interviewed synchronized swimmers from various generations about the reasons for which they chose to participate in the sport of synchronized swimming at Ohio State. While the women’s answers varied based on their unique individual experiences and distinct generational differences, the common theme expressed by the women was that “the people, the tradition, and the excellence” of the Buckeye synchronized swimming program drew them to Ohio State. According to a majority of those interviewed, “the people” referred to the administrators who taught the women valuable life skills and who served as their principal role models. “The tradition,” addressed the long-standing practices, rituals, and customs of the program that were passed down from generation to generation affirming a strong sense of collective identity and communal belonging. And lastly “the excellence,” pertained to the high expectations required of all those who were members of the sport program at Ohio State. Together these three words signified to the women the important elements synonymous with a top-notch collegiate synchronized swimming program.
“The People”

The overwhelming consensus among the former synchronized swimmers interviewed for this project, whether they were members of the team during the decade of the 1970s, 1980s or 1990s, was that Phyllis Bailey and Mary Jo Ruggieri were the primary individuals responsible for creating, developing, and preserving the all female sport program of synchronized swimming at Ohio State. It all began with Phyllis Bailey, the first women’s athletic administrator, who, according to Lisa Cassini, “made an early commitment to the sport’s creation at Ohio State during a time when synchronized swimming was beginning to thrive as part of the newly established AIAW” (L. Cassini, personal communication, February 9, 2010). “Bailey,” continued Cassini, “had the foresight to hire Mary Jo Ruggieri, who not only possessed the biological and physiological knowledge needed to coach synchronized swimmers, but who also had the powerful personality and extraordinary will to build and maintain a top-rated all female sport team in an athletic department that was completely dominated by men” (L. Cassini, personal communication, February 9, 2010). While it was Bailey who originally ensured that a synchronized swimming team was among the several new competitive athletic sport programs being made available to Ohio State female athletes in the late 1960s, it was ultimately Mary Jo Ruggieri, with Bailey’s administrative help, who began developing the team into a leading collegiate synchronized swimming program.

One of the first projects Ruggieri undertook as the new head coach at Ohio State, recalled several of her former synchronized swimmers, was to restructure the team’s
training program. “Mary Jo had a degree in kinesiology and exercise science and she often used us [her athletes] as guinea pigs to experiment with her new and innovative training ideas,” remembered Karen Callaghan (K. Callaghan, personal communication, February 9, 2010). “Besides our customary swimming activities” she added, “Mary Jo also incorporated many dry-land exercises into our weekly routine, including running, lifting weights, jumping rope, climbing stadium stairs, dancing, ballet and yoga (when it was virtually unheard of)” (K. Callaghan, personal communication, February 9, 2010). “In fact,” noted Callaghan, “Mary Jo’s workout program was more intense than anything I had ever experienced before in my life and it was certainly all encompassing” (K. Callaghan, personal communication, February 9, 2010). Teammate Carolyn McLaughlin also echoed Callaghan’s sentiments when she stated that, “Mary Jo was well ahead of her time when it came to her training and workout methodologies” (C. McLaughlin, personal communication, March 16, 2010). In addition to the wet and dry-land exercises mentioned previously by Karen Callaghan, McLaughlin added that, “Mary Jo had the team doing mental imagery, nutritional planning and psychological counseling well before these training practices were widely accepted as mainstream” (C. McLaughlin, personal communication, March 16, 2010). Moreover, described McLaughlin, “Mary Jo was a huge advocate of women’s health education and even invited us [the team] over to her house so that her gynecologist friend could teach us how to do proper self-exams” (C. McLaughlin, personal communication, March 16, 2010).

At the same time, Ruggieri was also a strong proponent of feminism and an active participant in the women’s rights movement (M.J. Ruggieri, personal communication,
May 31, 2010). Former swimmer Laurette Longmire said of Ruggieri, “Mary Jo was a mover and a shaker and she exposed many of us to the concepts and ideas affiliated with feminism and the women’s rights movement for the first time ever in our lives” (L. Longmire, personal communication, March 17, 2010). “What’s more” she added, “Mary Jo often led by example and taught us to fight for what we wanted and what we deserved” (L. Longmire, personal communication, March 17, 2010). Longmire vividly remembered the first time that Ruggieri fought for the rights of the synchronized swimming team while she was at Ohio State. Longmire recalled,

The football team used to have access to the weight room from 9:00am to 9:00pm, Monday through Saturday, so we were forced to lift in the mornings from 6:00am to 8:30am in order to avoid their reserved times. One day while we were lifting weights at our regularly scheduled time, Woody Hayes decided he wanted his team to lift early. I remember him yelling at the top of his lungs at us, “Get out of my weight room.” We [the team] were all terrified. But Mary Jo screamed back at him, “You have the room reserved from 9:00am to 9:00pm so come back at your designated time.” She then slammed the door, locked it, and returned to what she was doing. It was simply amazing and unheard of at that time. (L. Longmire, personal communication, March 17, 2010)
There were, indeed, several fascinating stories told by former synchronized swimmers about how Ruggieri, with the help of Phyllis Bailey, fought the larger athletic establishment to improve the practice and competition conditions of the synchronized swimming team at Ohio State, (including getting access to the varsity pool, and negotiating more reasonable practice times), which were all incorporated into the text previously. But, one story shared by Sharon Dillon seemed to capture the essence of the larger battle being fought for all sportswomen within the microcosm of Ohio State athletics. Dillon recalled,

It was 1987 and the athletic department had proposed to cut the varsity synchronized swimming program. I remember attending the Athletic Council’s committee hearing with all of my teammates and all of the other supporters’ of the program waiting anxiously to learn the final fate of our beloved varsity team. At the time, we [the team] didn’t fully comprehend the true scope of the battle being waged on our behalf by both Phyllis Bailey and Mary Jo Ruggieri. It wasn’t until much later that I think we finally began to understand they [Bailey and Ruggieri] weren’t just fighting a battle to preserve a varsity sport team; they were fighting a much larger battle for women’s rights and women’s equality—more specifically, for our rights and equality. (S. Dillon, personal communication, March 16, 2010)
In addition to self-advocacy, many of the former synchronized swimmers reported that both Ruggieri and Bailey taught them valuable life lessons including: team work, commitment, discipline, determination, perseverance, confidence, loyalty, hard work, pushing beyond pre-conceived limits, being a part of something greater than oneself, knowing and valuing a sisterhood of women of all ages and backgrounds, and doing what is right—not what is easy, to name but a few. Kathy Zittel said of Mary Jo Ruggieri and Phyllis Bailey, “They instilled in all of us a high sense of self-esteem” (K. Zittel, personal communication, February 9, 2010). Adding to this Lisa Cassini said, “Because of them [Bailey and Ruggieri], I learned how to be a strong woman, capable of facing a challenge, meeting a goal, working hard towards that goal’s end, and working as part of a team” (L. Cassini, personal communication, February 9, 2010). Lastly Sharon Dillon made the point that, “Being involved in synchronized swimming at Ohio State not only enriched our lives, but it also exposed us to valuable life lessons that we might not have had the chance to learn otherwise” (S. Dillon, personal communication, March 16, 2010). It was obvious to see through the stories shared and the life lessons learned why “the people” aspect of the program was so important to the former synchronized swimmers at Ohio State and why they (“the people”) made such an impact on these women’s lives.
“The Tradition”

Equally as important to the former synchronized swimmers as “the people” aspect of the Buckeye sport program was “the tradition” piece. As one of the oldest women’s sport club teams on campus, originating in 1928 with the Swan Club, the sport of synchronized swimming has had plenty of time to establish a wealth of traditions at Ohio State. While many new traditions have been created over the long history of the sport’s existence, several of the original rituals and customs instituted during the Swan Club era have, indeed, been passed down from generation to generation, and still exist to this day (M.J. Ruggieri, personal communication, May 31, 2010). Consequently, each year when former Buckeye swimmers congregate at their annual reunion, hundreds of women from unique backgrounds and different generations are instantly bonded by the tradition that unites them as communal members of Ohio State synchronized swimming. For Mary Jo Ruggieri, preserving the rich tradition of the Ohio State program was one of the most important responsibilities that she undertook as the new head coach in 1970 (M.J. Ruggieri, personal communication, May 31, 2010). In fact throughout Ruggieri’s 25 year career as head coach, she refused to hire anyone other than her former swimmers as assistant coaches in order to maintain the continuity of the program’s venerable traditions (M.J. Ruggieri, personal communication, May 31, 2010).

“Mary Jo was a firm believer in the idea that strong tradition built strong communities and that strong communities built strong teams,” explained Lisa Cassini (L. Cassini, personal communication, February 9, 2010). “For this reason” Cassini continued, “Ruggieri spent a good deal of time teaching us about the history of our
team’s emergence and development over the years, as well as the evolution of the sport of synchronized swimming itself” (L. Cassini, personal communication, February 9, 2010). Reminiscing about her first day of practice as a freshman at Ohio State Penny Billingham recalled,

Instead of working on our routines or practicing our maneuvers,

Mary Jo and the upper-class swimmers spent the first day of practice teaching us [the freshman] the words to Carmen Ohio and instructing us on the proper “O” formation for the Circle of Friendship tradition performed during our pre-meet rituals. I remember thinking to myself what the heck are we doing spending all of our time on this. (P. Billingham, personal communication, March 17, 2010)

“What I did not realize at the time,” continued Billingham, “was that the formation of the “O” in the Circle of Friendship originated in 1928 as the Swan Club’s first pre-meet tradition, and one that the team proudly continues and preserves” (P. Billingham, personal communication, March 17, 2010). Carol Korpi fondly recalled, “I remember seeing the Buckeyes perform the pre-meet “O” when I was in high school… I got goose bumps all over and from that moment on I knew I wanted to be a part of that team and that tradition” (C. Korpi, personal communication, January 10, 2010). Only recently has this long-standing tradition been amended by the program (H. Vargo, personal
According to now associate head coach, Holly Vargo, “Today, the team’s traditional closed circle of friendship is held open to allow a place for Jessica Beck,” a former Ohio State synchronized swimmer who died in 2005 just prior to her senior season (H. Vargo, personal communication, January 13, 2010).

“My class understood the pioneers in the sport and appreciated what they did for us, so we made sure to carry out their esteemed traditions,” said Karen Callaghan (K. Callaghan, personal communication, February 9, 2010). In addition to the “O” Circle of Friendship tradition, the former swimmers ended each of their home meets much like their predecessor did in the Swans Club by swimming “Script Ohio” for the Ohio State crowd (K. Callaghan, personal communication, February 9, 2010). Just as the Ohio State Marching Band marched out the cursive letters of Ohio on the football field, the synchronized swimmers swam into the formation of “Script Ohio” in their home pool, a tradition that began in the mid-1930s (K. Callaghan, personal communication, February 9, 2010). Moreover, the time-honored tradition of the “Blessing of the Pool” continues to take place prior to each national championship meet to this day (H. Vargo, personal communication, January 13, 2010). The tradition stemmed from the Swan Club era when members of the club collected water from the Pomerene Hall Pool and stored it in a small vile in order to transport the water to the natatorium in which they were performing (H. Vargo, personal communication, January 13, 2010). Before their routine, the Swans would pour the water from the Pomerene Hall Pool into the other natatorium for good luck (H. Vargo, personal communication, January 13, 2010). Today, the “Blessing of the Pool” does more than just assure good luck, it also signifies a “home pool advantage” for
the Buckeyes. “When we pour the water from our pool into the championship-site pool, we claim the championship-site pool as ours and believe that we now have the home pool advantage in the competition,” explained Mary Kay Kretschmer (M.K. Kretschmer, personal communication, February, 9, 2010).

While Ruggieri and her teams’ honored the traditions that were established long before them, they also created a few of their own. “I used to preach to my swimmers about the importance of paying homage to those who sacrificed and fought for all of the benefits that we now reaped as a group because of their assiduous efforts,” Ruggieri recalled (M.J. Ruggieri, personal communication, May 31, 2010). Ruggieri was always thankful for all that Phyllis Bailey had done for her personally and for the synchronized swimming program at Ohio State (M.J. Ruggieri, personal communication, May 31, 2010). “I would not have had a career in collegiate coaching and Ohio State would not have had a varsity synchronized swimming program if it were not for the pioneering efforts of Phyllis Bailey,” exclaimed Ruggieri (M.J. Ruggieri, personal communication, May 31, 2010). “I wanted all of my swimmers to know and understand what Phyllis Bailey meant to our program, so very early on as the head coach we [the team at the time, and I] collectively decided that every time we saw Phyllis Bailey we would hold our hands over our head in the formation of an “O,” as a sign of our gratitude, respect and admiration,” remembered Ruggieri (M.J. Ruggieri, personal communication, May 31, 2010). This tradition continues today as former synchronized swimmers form the “O” over their heads when they see Phyllis Bailey at the annual Buckeye synchronized swimming reunion (M.J. Ruggieri, personal communication, May 31, 2010).
Another popular tradition created during Ruggieri’s tenure was “Jonathan the Puppet” (H. Vargo, personal communication, January 13, 2010). “In the early 1970s one of the former synchronized swimmers had a puppet named “Jonathan” that she took with her to every performance,” recalled Holly Vargo (H. Vargo, personal communication, January 13, 2010). “While everyone originally made fun of her for bringing Jonathan to the meets, the puppet eventually became our unofficial team mascot, even after its original owner graduated,” she added (H. Vargo, personal communication, January 13, 2010). Jonathan traveled with the team to each of its meets and was situated in a place of prominence for good luck purposes (H. Vargo, personal communication, January 13, 2010). “I remember our team got so attached to Jonathan, and maybe even a little superstitious about Jonathan’s “magical powers” to help us win, that we basically forced Mary Jo to turn the bus around on our way to a competition at Michigan so that we could retrieve Jonathan from our locker room,” laughed Vargo (H. Vargo, personal communication, January 13, 2010). Sharon Dillon recalled another incident when, “Our arch-rival Michigan hung Jonathan from the rafters in our pool as a sign of disrespect…we got even with them however at nationals by beating them handedly” (S. Dillon, personal communication, March 16, 2010). While Jonathan was a mainstay in the Buckeye program for at least 15 years, no one seems to recall what happened to the legendary puppet. “Maybe he is still hanging in the rafters at one of our rivals’ pools,” contemplated Mary Kay Kretschmer (M.K. Kretschmer, personal communication, February 9, 2010).
Finally, although not necessarily deemed a tradition in the conventional sense, many of the former synchronized swimmers claimed that some of their best memories on the team involved the numerous practical jokes and pranks that they played on Mary Jo Ruggieri each year. “You have to remember we worked so hard and were so serious all the time that we needed to decompress occasionally so pulling pranks on our ‘torturer’ was the only way we knew how to do this,” Sharon Dillon said jokingly (S. Dillon, personal communication, March 16, 2010). “One of my favorite pranks,” added Dillon, “was the time that we shoved the handles of about a 200 forks into Mary Jo’s lawn at home with a sign next to them that read ‘Fork You Mary Jo’” (S. Dillon, personal communication, March 16, 2010). Christine Harrison fondly recalled the time that, “We [the team] all collected our alarm clocks while traveling on the road and set each one of them for a minute apart beginning in the middle of the night, and then hid them all in Mary Jo’s hotel room and waited for them to go off and hear her scream” (C. Harrison, personal communication, March 19, 2010). “One year,” recalled Kathy Augenstein, “the team turned all of Mary Jo’s hotel furniture upside down including her bed and taped all of her clothes to the window” (K. Augenstein, personal communication, February 9, 2010). The former swimmers agreed that Ruggieri was always a good sport about the pranks and practical jokes because she knew that when it was time to get serious her team would “get down to business” (S. Dillon, personal communication, March 16, 2010).
“The Excellence”

When I asked the former synchronized swimmers to explain to me how their sport program was able to consistently achieve excellence not just year after year, but decade after decade, they told me that the answer to my question was simple if I knew Mary Jo Ruggieri’s philosophy on pedagogy, “When you expect excellence from people, you get excellence from them” (L. Longmire, personal communication, March 17, 2010). “Mary Jo had no rules for us; just expectations of excellence in everything we did,” recalled Jessica Hudacek (J. Hudacek, personal communication, February 10, 2010). “I remember Ruggieri telling us from day one that mediocrity would not be tolerated,” noted Kim Ochsner (K. Ochsner, personal communication, February 9, 2010). “Second place would not cut it for Mary Jo, unless she knew we preformed to the best of our abilities,” added Sandra Valles (S. Valles, personal communication, March 19, 2010). Despite the obvious pressure involved in swimming for Mary Jo Ruggieri, the majority of those interviewed for this project did not seem to mind that Ruggieri held them to such a high standard. In fact many of the women said they achieved more than they ever thought they could because of her high expectations and because they knew without a doubt that Ruggieri believed in them. Just as Ruggieri held her athletes accountable to a standard of excellence, “she also required that same standard of excellence for herself and for her coaching staff,” recalled Holly Vargo (H. Vargo, personal communication, January 13, 2010).

“Another important reason that our program was able to excel on a regular basis,” recalled Karen Callaghan, “was because of Mary Jo’s extraordinary ability to scout the
best talent and recruit that talent to swim for her at Ohio State” (K. Callaghan, personal communication, February 9, 2010). “Why else would a bunch of women leave sunny California to go to snowy Ohio,” joked Callaghan (K. Callaghan, personal communication, February 9, 2010). Lisa Cassini recalled that, “Mary Jo was savvy enough to find ways to recruit swimmers long before recruiting was even sanctioned by the AIWA” (L. Cassini, personal communication, February 9, 2010). One of those savvy methods included becoming a certified regional judge in the junior division of AAU synchronized swimming (M.J. Ruggieri, personal communication, May 31, 2010). In her capacity as a certified regional judge, Ruggieri had legitimate access to nearly every top swimmer in the Midwest region and was able to forge relationships with those potential recruits in ways that other college coaches could not (M.J. Ruggieri, personal communication, May 31, 2010). This certainly created an advantage for Ruggieri and her Ohio State program in the early 1970s. In addition to this advantage, Ruggieri was also the first collegiate coach permitted by her institution to recruit synchronized swimmers internationally during the early 1980s (M.J. Ruggieri, personal communication, May 31, 2010). Ana Amicarella recalled, “Mary Jo had endless amounts of talent to choose from overseas because no other schools allowed their synchronized swimming coaches to recruit internationally and we all desperately wanted to swim and study in the United States” (A. Amicarella, personal communication, January 12, 2010). “Besides,” added Amicarella, “many of the Canadian, European and South American clubs were producing some of the best synchronized swimmers at that time so it was a win-win situation” (A. Amicarella, personal communication, January 12, 2010).
“Our excellence as a program also seemed to stem from the fact that we were always one step ahead of the competition,” recalled Maria Giusti (M. Giusti, personal communication, February 7, 2010). “I always liked to be five years ahead of the competition….if I was not I got paranoid and changed things quickly,” remarked Ruggieri (M.J. Ruggieri, personal communication, May 31, 2010). It was Ruggieri’s firm belief that in order for her team to achieve excellence each year, they had to take more risks by performing stunts that no other team had ever attempted and they had to be more creative and original in their routine selections (M.J. Ruggieri, personal communication, May 31, 2010). “One year” recalled Karen Callaghan,

Mary Jo saw an ice skating show in which a pair of skaters had been skating to music when all of the sudden the music stopped for a period of about 10 seconds. During the 10 seconds of silence the pair kept skating in perfect synchronization and, according to Mary Jo, it looked amazing. After seeing this, Mary Jo decided that our eight-member team routine needed to incorporate this unique stunt into our performance. So, half way through the team routine the music stopped for 10 seconds, but we kept swimming in perfect synchronization. I remember the judges and the audience applauded wildly because no other team had ever attempted this maneuver. In fact because of this, Mary Jo had to stand next to the music so that
the judges did not think that the music had stopped by accident. (K. Callaghan, personal communication, February 9, 2010)

Ruggieri not only took risks and set trends in competitions; she also did so in the ways she trained her swimmers. “Mary Jo had us doing yoga long before anyone knew what yoga was,” said Laurette Longmire (L. Longmire, personal communication, March 17, 2010). “I remember her predicting that yoga was going to become a popular new form of exercise in the future….I told her she was absolutely crazy,” added Longmire (L. Longmire, personal communication, May 31, 2010). Crazy or not, Ruggieri’s progressive training method, risk taking tendencies and trend setting practices helped the Ohio State synchronized swimming program achieve their ultimate goal of “excellence” for nearly a quarter of a century.

Conclusion

Since the completion of this project in 2012, the Ohio State synchronized swimming program has captured yet another USSSI National Collegiate Championship Title, its twenty-eighth national title in the 37 year history of the event. And just as before, I struggle to find any mention of this remarkable feat in The Ohio State Lantern or the Columbus Dispatch, not to mention around campus or within the Ohio State athletic department. This glaring omission, again, raises the questions posed at the beginning of this project:
• Why is it important to document the history of the synchronized swimming program at Ohio State?
• What is the significance of these women’s sporting experiences to the larger body of Ohio State and women’s sport history scholarship?
• Who were the pioneering women (and men) responsible for creating, developing and maintaining one of the most extraordinary women’s collegiate sport programs in the country?
• How and why did these women get involved in the sport of synchronized swimming at Ohio State?
• How and why has Ohio State become such a powerhouse in the sport?

But this time in addressing these questions, I will provide some reasons to illustrate why it is important for the University and Columbus communities to celebrate the Ohio State synchronized swimming program’s twenty-ninth national collegiate championship title win when it occurs, hopefully in 2013.

It is important to document the history of the Ohio State synchronized swimming program, partly, because no one else has ever done so before, but also, partly, because in doing so it provides a unique insight into the uncharted story of women’s sporting history and experiences within an elite level, all-female sporting activity (with no male equivalent). The institutional history of synchronized swimming at Ohio State is also a microcosm of the larger historical struggle for women’s rights and equality within a male dominated society. Men in American society—seemingly by consent—have been able to
establish their own sporting practices as the most valued and legitimate. Women, conversely, have had to fight to gain and maintain control over their own sporting experiences, and at the same time have their alternative practices and activities recognized as legitimate by the dominant male culture. Because of this, the history of women in sport has often been described by sport scholars as “a history of cultural resistance” (Festle, 1996; Hall, 2002; Theberge, 2000). This description accurately reflects the history of how the all-female sport of synchronized swimming was established, developed and preserved within the predominately male sporting culture of Ohio State athletics.

The story of how the sport of synchronized swimming emerged as a varsity sport on Ohio State’s campus is also an important microcosm of the larger story of how women’s sports, in general, emerged on collegiate campuses across the country. It took the courage and fortitude of such women as Gladys Palmer, Phyllis Bailey and Mary Jo Ruggieri, to name but a few, to ensure that future generations of women could enjoy the intrinsic values and joys associated with competition in varsity collegiate athletics. By investigating the history and sporting experiences of the synchronized swimmers at Ohio State, this project reveals some of the unique personal and life lessons that these women gained through their participation in an exclusively female sport. This was particularly evident in Lisa Cassini’s description of how synchronized swimming contributed to her success later in life in the predominantly male culture of the business world. She said,
Synchronized swimming is the perfect sport to teach women how to work together on a team, which is critical in the business world. On sport teams such as softball, soccer, volleyball, basketball, etc., there can be one standout on the team, and while the team can lose miserably, that one standout can shine despite the team’s overall performance. In synchronized swimming, the team is only as good as the weakest swimmer. To make the team better you have to concentrate on making yourself better as well as helping your teammates perform better. One person cannot be a standout or look good if everyone else looks bad. In this respect there really is no “I” in team. In synchronized swimming, you must work together to accomplish team goals and, ultimately, win. The same is true in the business world….your success depends on the performance of all your team members. This is a valuable life lesson that many women do not learn in other sporting or academic settings. (L. Cassini, personal communication, February 9, 2010)

And finally, I go back to the initial comment made by the Ohio State football student-athlete in the SASSO lobby, which ultimately led to my interest in pursuing this project. Let’s face it, women’s sporting accomplishments should not be compared to those of men, nor should they simply be an addendum to men’s achievements. Every history, experience and accomplishment within the institution of sport, whether it is male
or female, is unique and deserves its own special attention. I wrote this dissertation to provide an opportunity for the remarkable women of the synchronized swimming program at Ohio State to find their voice, to tell their unique stories, and to assert themselves as historical subjects not only in Ohio State athletic history, but also within the larger milieu of women’s sport history. It remains, however, merely a beginning. As mentioned earlier in the introduction, my approach to this topic has been to paint a broad picture in the hopes that others will fill in the missing details. As Karen Callaghan suggested in her interview, “There are so many of us who have been extremely successful in life after Ohio State synchronized swimming…..maybe someone should write about those stories…” (K. Callaghan, personal interview, February 9, 2010). I would add that there is also a rich history that still needs to be told beginning in late-1995 with the hiring of Linda Lichter-Witter and the 17 years worth of swimmers who have continued the remarkable success of their predecessors.
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Appendix A: Survey Consent Form

Dear Ohio State Synchronized Swimming Alumnae:

My name is Allison Logan and I am a PhD student in the Sport Humanities program at The Ohio State University. I am writing this e-mail to you because I am in the process of collecting research material for my dissertation project which will focus on the history of Ohio State’s Synchronized Swimming Program.

Very little has been written about the lived experiences of college athletes, in general, and the lion’s share of information that has been written has focused primarily on men’s high-profile sports. My goal in this project is to document the history of the synchronized swimming program at Ohio State and to give voice to a group of women who have been responsible for creating, developing and maintaining a program that has amassed twenty-five national championships (almost half the total number of national titles ever won in Ohio State athletic history).

You are being asked to participate in this study because you were a member of Ohio State’s Synchronized Swimming Program. I am writing to ask that you please complete the survey below. Your information will be extremely helpful in allowing me to tell a textured story of the synchronized swimming program.

I understand that privacy is very important. Therefore, in order to maintain confidentiality I will be the only individual with access to the survey. All materials will be stored on a password-protected computer. Additionally, your identity will not be revealed in any written work unless you give me permission to do so. A pseudonym will be used for those who request to have their identity concealed. Your participation is completely voluntary. Consent to participate in this study is implied by completion of the survey. At any point, you can refuse to answer questions, refuse to participate, and/or withdraw without any penalty or repercussion.

Please feel free to contact me at logan.264@osu.edu if you have any questions or concerns about this project. Thank you in advance for your time and help in this project. I look forward to your responses and having the opportunity to tell this story. Please access the survey from this link:

http://www.surveymonkey.com/s/OSUSynchronizedSwimmingSurvey

Thank you.
Appendix B: Ohio State Synchronized Swimming Survey

1. Please provide the following information:
   
   Age ______________________
   Hometown ______________________
   High School ______________________
   AAU and/or Club Team ______________________
   Ethnic/Racial Background ______________________

2. How would you describe your family’s financial status when you attended Ohio State? Please check the appropriate category.

   Poor ______
   Working-Class ______
   Middle Class ______
   Upper-Class ______

3. How old were you when you began to participate in synchronized swimming?

4. Why did you get involved in synchronized swimming?

5. What attracted you to participate in synchronized swimming?

6. What sports and/or activities did you participate in prior to your involvement in synchronized swimming (Please list all)?

7. What sports and/or activities did you participate in at the same time that you participated in synchronized swimming (Please list all)?
8. What was your association with the Ohio State Synchronized Swimming program? Please circle all that apply.

Participant on the Swan Club
Participant on the Cygnet Club
Participant on the A squad (or Scarlet squad)
Participant on the B squad (or Gray squad)
Participant on both A (or Scarlet) and B (or Gray) squads
Administrator

9. If applicable, in what capacity are you currently associated with the Ohio State Synchronized Swimming program? Please circle all that apply.

Coach
Administrator
Volunteer
Active Alumni
None
Other, please specify

10. What seasons (or years) were you involved with the Ohio State Synchronized Swimming program?

11. What year did you graduate from Ohio State, if applicable?

12. Why did you choose to participate in synchronized swimming at Ohio State?

13. If applicable, why did you choose to work with the synchronized swimming program at Ohio State?
14. How important was your participation with the Ohio State Synchronized Swimming program in your decision to attend Ohio State? Please circle answer.

Not important at all
Not important
Neutral
Important
Very important
Not applicable

15. How important was your participation with the Ohio State Synchronized Swimming program in your decision to work at Ohio State? Please circle answer.

Not important at all
Not important
Neutral
Important
Very important
Not applicable

16. How would you rate your overall college experience at Ohio State? Please circle answer.

Very negative
Mostly negative
Equally good as bad
Mostly positive
Very positive
Not applicable

17. How would you rate your overall work experience at Ohio State? Please circle answer.

Very negative
Mostly negative
Equally good as bad
Mostly positive
Very positive
Not applicable
18. How would you rate your experience as a member of the Ohio State Synchronized Swimming program? Please circle answer.

Very negative
Mostly negative
Equally good as bad
Mostly positive
Very positive
Not applicable

19. How would you rate your experience as a coach/administrator of the Ohio State Synchronized Swimming program? Please circle answer.

Very negative
Mostly negative
Equally good as bad
Mostly positive
Very positive
Not applicable

20. How would you rate the Ohio State athletic administrators’ support of the synchronized swimming program while you were involved with the program? Please circle answer.

Very unsupportive
Mostly unsupportive
Ignored
Mostly supportive
Very supportive
Not applicable
21. How would you rate the Ohio State faculty/staff support of the synchronized swimming program while you were involved with the program? Please circle answer.

   Very unsupportive
   Mostly unsupportive
   Ignored
   Mostly supportive
   Very supportive
   Not applicable

22. How would you rate your fellow Ohio State student-athletes’ support of the synchronized swimming program while you were involved with the program? Please circle answer.

   Very unsupportive
   Mostly unsupportive
   Ignored
   Mostly supportive
   Very supportive
   Not applicable

23. How would you rate the general Ohio State student body’s support of the synchronized swimming program while you were involved with the program? Please circle answer.

   Very unsupportive
   Mostly unsupportive
   Ignored
   Mostly supportive
   Very supportive
   Not applicable
24. How would you rate the Ohio State student newspaper’s (*The Lantern*) support of the synchronized swimming program while you were involved with the program? Please circle answer.

Very unsupportive
Mostly unsupportive
Ignored
Mostly supportive
Very supportive
Not applicable

25. How would you rate the local Columbus newspaper’s (*The Columbus Dispatch*) support of the synchronized swimming program while you were involved with the program? Please circle answer.

Very unsupportive
Mostly unsupportive
Ignored
Mostly supportive
Very supportive
Not applicable

26. How would you rate the local Columbus community support of the synchronized swimming program while you were involved with the program? Please circle answer.

Very unsupportive
Mostly unsupportive
Ignored
Mostly supportive
Very supportive
Not applicable

27. Compared to other sports and activities available at Ohio State when you were involved with the synchronized swimming program was synchronized swimming more or less popular than other female sports/activities? Please explain.

28. Compared to other sports and activities available at Ohio State today is synchronized swimming more or less popular than other female sports/activities? Please explain.
29. Please rate the importance of the following qualities in synchronized swimming (please circle answer for each category):

a. Endurance
   Extremely important
   Important
   Doesn’t matter much
   Not important at all
   N/A

b. Agility
   Extremely important
   Important
   Doesn’t matter much
   Not important at all
   N/A

c. Flexibility
   Extremely important
   Important
   Doesn’t matter much
   Not important at all
   N/A

d. Balance
   Extremely important
   Important
   Doesn’t matter much
   Not important at all
   N/A

e. Strength
   Extremely important
   Important
   Doesn’t matter much
   Not important at all
   N/A

f. Speed
   Extremely important
   Important
   Doesn’t matter much
   Not important at all
   N/A
g. Weight training
   Extremely important
   Important
   Doesn’t matter much
   Not important at all
   N/A

h. Conditioning
   Extremely important
   Important
   Doesn’t matter much
   Not important at all
   N/A

i. Coordination
   Extremely important
   Important
   Doesn’t matter much
   Not important at all
   N/A

j. Grace
   Extremely important
   Important
   Doesn’t matter much
   Not important at all
   N/A

k. Overall athleticism
   Extremely important
   Important
   Doesn’t matter much
   Not important at all
   N/A

30. When you competed for the Ohio State Synchronized Swimming program did you consider the program to be a collegiate sport dynasty? Why or Why not? Please explain.

31. When you worked for or with the Ohio State Synchronized Swimming program did you consider the program to be a collegiate sport dynasty? Why or why not?
32. Do you consider the Ohio State Synchronized Swimming program to be a collegiate sports dynasty today? Why or why not? Please explain.

33. What kinds of benefits did your association with Ohio State Synchronized Swimming give you? Please explain.

34. What kinds of values did your association with Ohio State Synchronized Swimming give you?

35. What kinds of disadvantages did you encounter while you were associated with the Ohio State Synchronized Swimming program? Please explain.

36. What is your happiest memory from your Ohio State Synchronized Swimming experience?

37. What is your best memory from your Ohio State Synchronized Swimming experience?

38. What is your most difficult memory from your Ohio State Synchronized Swimming experience?

39. Are you currently involved in synchronized swimming in general (ex: Swimming, Coaching, etc.). Please explain.

40. Would you be willing and/or interested in participating in a 30 minute interview (either in person or on the telephone) regarding your experience with the Ohio State Synchronized Swimming program? If yes, please provide your contact information.

Thank you so much for your participation in this survey!
Appendix C: Survey Respondents by Season of Competition

*All sources are former synchronized swimmers unless otherwise noted.

15. Linda Roesch Crabtree, 1982-1983, age 48, questionnaire, February 1, 2010
22. Ana Amicarella, 1984-1987, age 43, questionnaire, January 12, 2010
32. Tia Harding Fenoff, 1988-1991, age 40, questionnaire, February 8, 2010
42. Anonymous 12, 1993-1997, age 35, questionnaire, January 25, 2010
43. Michele Gaza Brown, 1993-1998, age 34, questionnaire, January 11, 2010
44. Emily Marsh Fleming, 1993-1997, age 34, questionnaire, February 10, 2010
50. Amy Beven Madsen, 1996-1998, age 34, questionnaire, January 11, 2010
56. Stephanie Johnson Starnes, 1997-1999, age 34, questionnaire, January 27, 2010
67. Kim Lester, 2000-2002, age 27, questionnaire, March 5, 2010
68. Sharon Mejia, 2000-2004, age 28, questionnaire, January 27, 2010
70. Leilani Torres, 2000-2003, age 31, questionnaire, January 11, 2010
71. Brianna Walker Trucco, 2000-2004, age 27, questionnaire, January 10, 2010
73. Anonymous 20, 2001-2008, age 26, questionnaire, January 12, 2010 (swimmer and team manager)
74. Anonymous 21, 2001-2005, age 26, questionnaire, February 1, 2010
75. Marjorie Ardito, 2001-2005, age 27, questionnaire, January 11, 2010
76. Anonymous 22, 2002-2006, age 25, questionnaire, January 10, 2010
77. Leslie Edgerton, 2002-2006, age 25, questionnaire, March 3, 2010
78. Mary Elliot, 2002-2006, age 26, questionnaire, January 26, 2010
79. Carly Grimshaw, 2002-2006, age 26, questionnaire, January 10, 2010 (swimmer and volunteer coach)
82. Megan Mikulecky, 2002-2006, age 25, questionnaire, January 11, 2010
83. Stephanie Raftery, 2002-2006, age 25, questionnaire, January 11, 2010
84. Heather Burdick Tiernan, 2002-2006, age 26, questionnaire, January 26, 2010
87. Ashley Rule, 2003-2006, age 25, questionnaire, January 12, 2010
Appendix D: Follow-Up Telephone and In Person Interview Questions

1. How popular was synchronized swimming where you grew up?

2. When did you decide that you wanted to swim in college and what prompted you to make that decision?

3. What was the recruiting progress like for you? Did coaches contact you? Did you visit schools?

4. What was it like to swim for the head coach (Mary Jo Ruggieri and/or Linda Lichter-Witter) at Ohio State?

5. Did participants on the B (or Gray) squad feel as much a part of the synchro team/family as those on the A (or Scarlet) squad?

6. Talk to me about some of the traditions/pranks within the synchronized swimming program.

7. How do you think Ohio State became a powerhouse in synchronized swimming and why has the school maintained the program?

8. Was there ever talk about dropping or discontinuing the synchronized swimming program while you were on the team at Ohio State? If so, what was the outcome?

9. Why isn’t the sport of synchronized swimming a NCAA sponsored sport? Would the sport’s status change if men competed in synchronized swimming?
10. What, if anything, would you want everyday people to know about the sport of synchronized swimming?

Thank you for your participation
Appendix E: Interview Respondents by Season of Competition

*All sources are former synchronized swimmers unless otherwise noted.

1. Helen P. Alkire, 1934-1936, age 94, personal communication, June 2, 2010
2. Barbara J. Heller, 1947-1953, age 86, personal communication, June 10, 2010 (Coach)
7. Anonymous 1, 1977-1981, age 50, personal communication, June 1, 2010
17. Penny Billingham Weinheimer, 1981-1985, age 46, personal communication, March 17, 2010
18. Carol Korpi Billingsley, 1982-1986, age 45, personal communication, January 10, 2010
25. Ana Amicarella, 1984-1987, age 43, personal communication, January 12, 2010
27. Anonymous 5, 1986-1994, age 41, personal communication, April 7, 2010
32. Anonymous 6, 1990-1995, age 37, questionnaire, January 10, 2010
37. Anonymous 8, 1994-1997, age 34, personal communication, April 1, 2010
38. Amy Beven Madsen, 1996-1998, age 34, personal communication, March 17, 2010
41. Marietta Aruta, 1998-2000, age 33, personal communication, March 26, 2010
43. Leilani Torres, 2000-2003, age 31, personal communication, February 9, 2010
44. Mary Elliot, 2002-2006, age 26, personal communication, March 30, 2010
45. Valerie Jolibois, 2002-2006, age not listed, personal communication, March 29, 2010
*Statistical analysis is beyond the scope of this project.

**Question 1:** Please provide the following information:

*Age:*
- Average age surveyed was 35 years old
- Youngest person surveyed was 24 years old
- Oldest person surveyed was 52 years old
- Youngest person interviewed was 26 years old
- Oldest person interviewed was 94 years old

*Ethnic/Racial Background:*
- 82 respondents of survey identified as white/Caucasian
- 3 respondents of survey identified as Hispanic/Latina
- 1 respondent of survey identified as Filipino

**Question 2:** How would you describe your family’s financial status when you attended Ohio State? Please check the appropriate category.

- Poor: 2 or 2.3%
- Working-Class: 15 or 17.2%
- Middle Class: 64 or 73.6%
- Upper-Class: 6 or 6.9%

**Question 3:** How old were you when you began to participate in synchronized swimming?

- The youngest was 3 years old
- The oldest was 15 years old
- The average age was 8 years old
Question 4: Why did you get involved in synchronized swimming?

- My sister swam
- I’m very artistic by nature
- Because it was a cross between swimming and ballet
- My mother talked a lot about the sport and I fell in love with it
- It sounded like fun and my mom coached a team
- I loved swimming and music…the fact that I could swim to music was the perfect combination
- My older sister did it
- Enjoyed swimming while being creative and artistic
- When I was younger I thought it looked fun and I liked the decorated suits

Question 5: What attracted you to participate in synchronized swimming?

- The competition, the grace, the uniqueness
- Being on a team and doing a swimming sport that was creative
- Fun and exercise
- Loved to swim….also like gymnastics without the pain
- It wasn’t boring like racing and practices involved more than just swimming back and forth, and back and forth
- Because I was bored with speed swimming
- I loved the team aspect of the sport, the competition, the creativity, and the strength

Question 6: What sports and/or activities did you participate in prior to your involvement in synchronized swimming (Please list all)?

- Gymnastics
- Speed Swimming
- Dance
- Ballet
- Tap dancing
- Figure skating
- Softball
- soccer
Question 7: What sports and/or activities did you participate in at the same time that you participated in synchronized swimming (Please list all)?

- Speed Swimming
- Gymnastics
- Dance
- Ballet
- Diving

Question 8: What was your association with the Ohio State Synchronized Swimming program? Please circle all that apply.

- Participant on the Swan Club = 0
- Participant on the Cygnet Club = 0
- Participant on the A squad (or Scarlet squad) = 21 or 25.9%
- Participant on the B squad (or Gray squad) = 35 or 43.2%
- Participant on both A (or Scarlet) and B (or Gray) squads = 26 or 32.1%
- Administrator = 1 or 1.2%

Question 12: Why did you choose to participate in synchronized swimming at Ohio State?

- I love swimming and still swim to this day
- Partial scholarship and close to home, championship team and wanted a degree
- Best team while still going to school, close to home
- Ohio State had a very established and successful team. The team and coaching staff are like family and I couldn’t pass up this opportunity
- Nationally known, ranked program
- The people. I had never felt that much support from a group of friends. It was more than college. It was an opportunity to finish all loose ends in my swimming career
- Loved the sport and my teammates and coaches
- The rich tradition at Ohio State in the program
- I chose Ohio State, because they had such a long and proud tradition with their program. Growing up in Ohio I saw OSU Synchro team at meets and I looked up to the girls on the team. Also many of my teammates that graduated before me went to OSU and I saw what kind of achievements they had going to such an established program/school. Once I went on my recruiting trip I really felt like I belonged there with Holly and the rest of the girls I was there with.
**Question 14:** How important was your participation with the Ohio State Synchronized Swimming program in your decision to attend Ohio State?

- Not important at all=1 or 1.1%
- Not important=1 or 1.1%
- Neutral=0
- Important=1 or 1.1%
- Very important=83 or 95.4%
- Not applicable=1 or 1.1%

**Question 16:** How would you rate your overall college experience at Ohio State?

- Very negative=0
- Mostly negative=2 or 2.3%
- Equally good as bad=2 or 2.3%
- Mostly positive=19 or 22.1%
- Very positive=63 or 73.3%
- Not applicable=0

**Question 18:** How would you rate your experience as a member of the Ohio State Synchronized Swimming program?

- Very negative=1 or 1.2%
- Mostly negative=1 or 1.2%
- Equally good as bad=5 or 5.8%
- Mostly positive=24 or 27.9%
- Very positive=55 or 64%
- Not applicable=0

**Question 20:** How would you rate the Ohio State athletic administrators’ support of the synchronized swimming program while you were involved with the program?

- Very unsupportive=0
- Mostly unsupportive=2 or 2.3%
- Ignored=0
- Mostly supportive=35 or 40.7%
- Very supportive=48 or 55.8%
- Not applicable=1
**Question 21:** How would you rate the Ohio State faculty/staff support of the synchronized swimming program while you were involved with the program?

- Very unsupportive=0
- Mostly unsupportive=0
- Ignored=6 or 7.1%
- Mostly supportive=30 or 35.3%
- Very supportive=48 or 56.5%
- Not applicable=1 or 1.2%

**Question 22:** How would you rate your fellow Ohio State student-athletes’ support of the synchronized swimming program while you were involved with the program?

- Very unsupportive=0
- Mostly unsupportive=2 or 2.3%
- Ignored=5 or 5.7%
- Mostly supportive=43 or 49.4%
- Very supportive=37 or 42.5%
- Not applicable=0

**Question 23:** How would you rate the general Ohio State student body’s support of the synchronized swimming program while you were involved with the program?

- Very unsupportive=1 or 1.2%
- Mostly unsupportive=1 or 1.2%
- Ignored=29 or 33.3%
- Mostly supportive=41 or 47.1%
- Very supportive=14 or 16.1%
- Not applicable=1 or 1.2%

**Question 24:** How would you rate the Ohio State student newspaper’s (*The Lantern*) support of the synchronized swimming program while you were involved with the program?

- Very unsupportive=0
- Mostly unsupportive=1 or 1.2%
- Ignored=10 or 11.6%
- Mostly supportive=43 or 50.0%
- Very supportive=27 or 31.4%
- Not applicable=5 or 5.8%
**Question 25:** How would you rate the local Columbus newspaper’s (The Columbus Dispatch) support of the synchronized swimming program while you were involved with the program?

- Very unsupportive=4 or 4.9%
- Mostly unsupportive=5 or 6.1%
- Ignored=34 or 41.5%
- Mostly supportive=22 or 26.8%
- Very supportive=4 or 4.9%
- Not applicable=13 or 15.9%

**Question 26:** How would you rate the local Columbus community support of the synchronized swimming program while you were involved with the program?

- Very unsupportive=1 or 1.2%
- Mostly unsupportive=2 or 2.4%
- Ignored=42 or 50%
- Mostly supportive=26 or 31%
- Very supportive=9 or 10.7%
- Not applicable=4 or 4.8%

**Question 27:** Compared to other sports and activities available at Ohio State when you were involved with the synchronized swimming program was synchronized swimming more or less popular than other female sports/activities? Please explain.

- Less popular even with a nationally ranked team in the campus there were still many people who had never heard of synchro
- When I was there, it was pretty popular. Probably equally as popular as other female sports
- Less popular as it is not well known to begin with
- More popular but I think it had to do with the girls on the team
- Definitely less popular, other female sport drew larger crowds
- In ways it was more popular due to its storied program
- Felt like most women sports were ignored
**Question 30:** When you competed for the Ohio State Synchronized Swimming program did you consider the program to be a collegiate sport dynasty? Why or Why not? Please explain.

- Yes=79 or 90.8%
- No=9 or 9.2%

**Comments:**

- OSU had won about 13 National Championships in a row!
- I was a member of the second class of athletes…too early to tell
- We kicked butt!!! The program as a whole is a dynasty
- Most Championships.
- Up until my freshman year, Ohio State had been national champions for 20 or so years. It was the reason I wanted to go there, to be a part of that
- 25 national championships in the bag! It speaks for itself
- Yes. There were the years that the Josephson twins were training for the Olympics. It raised the level of training and competition for everyone involved in the program and gave the sport more visibility
- I didn’t think about it too much. I just knew that what I was a part of was very important and I needed to continue in the success of the team. Looking back I now know it was a collegiate dynasty
- But there had never been very many competing colleges….so the dynasty is a little underwhelming
- Most definitely!!! If I'm not mistaken it is one of the winningest sports programs in all of Division I collegiate athletics. 25 National Championships (23 when I was there) is impressive no matter who you ask. I know a lot of people do not truly understand what goes into being a synchronized swimmer and think it's just shiny suits and water dancing; but those who do know the intensity and challenge of the sport can't help but respect what the Ohio State program has accomplished over the years.

**Question 33:** What kinds of benefits or values did your association with Ohio State Synchronized Swimming give you? Please explain.

- Connections, leadership, teamwork skills
- Enhanced my self-confidence and self-esteem
- It gave me discipline
- Self-respect, character, friends, family forever
- Lifelong friends, a community, a support system, a network of amazing women, confidence, self-esteem and a sense of grace
- Strong OSU community feeling
• My association with OSU synchro gave me a family when mine was so far away
• Scholarship, travel, a degree
• Memories, friends and laughs

**Question 35:** What kinds of disadvantages did you encounter while you were associated with the Ohio State Synchronized Swimming program? Please explain.

• Hard to have normal social life because we were always busy with synchro activities
• The attitudes of other students towards athletes was quite disconcerting
• The weather
• I didn’t get to study abroad
• People did not realize the amount of practice it required or how hard the sport really was
• I put my swimming before school and my grades reflected this

**Question 36:** What is your happiest or best memory from your Ohio State Synchronized Swimming experience?

• The friendships
• So many
• All the hard work in winning a national championship and all the amazing relationships that were built along the way
• The feeling I would get after a routine when I realized I didn’t mess up
• All the time I spent with my teammates who became my family while I was there
• Competing in the first Synchronized Swimming Olympic trials, winning the National Championships
• The way we all bonded and came together during the hell of Christmas training
• My teammates and classmates were incredible women, students, athletes, and friends. "Growing up" with these women was the best part of being a Buckeye
• Winning our 4th national championship my senior year

**Question 38:** What is your most difficult memory from your Ohio State Synchronized Swimming experience?

• I can't recall one...oh, I remember all the over and unders that I did:)
• Having the team threatened by taking away its varsity status. Losing that program would have been devastating to the sport, the school and young swimmers all over the nation.
• When we almost lost our program "We are positive and confident about our program"!
• It's hard for me to think of my friend, Jessica, who passed away during her senior year. It just doesn't make sense to me... she was so beautiful and smart and talented and perfect. She was healthy, too. It doesn't make any sense.
• Realizing I probably would not make the A squad and coming to terms with that (although being part of the B squad helped to make my experience the positive one that it was)
• Jessica Beck...not being here anymore.
• My most difficult memory is the passing of our teammate Jessica Beck. I was starting my junior year when she passed away
• I really don't have one particular difficult memory. I remember practice and training being difficult, especially because I was not in the physical condition of my teammates when I started. But I got a lot of support and I got through it.
• The 94-95 season with the coaching staff
• The year we almost lost funding from the Athletic Department