

TEN AT THE TOP

CELEBRATING CHAUTAUQUA COUNTY'S OLYMPIANS



Featured Writer

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Like thousands of other Chautauqua County residents, I have been avidly watching the 2024 Paris Olympic Games and rooting for our USA athletes.

I think I first became aware of the Olympics in 1958 when the handsome face of Bob Richards appeared on the box of Wheaties on my family's breakfast table. I learned that Richards had competed in the previous three Olympic Games and had won gold medals in pole vaulting in 1952 and 1956.

Two years later, I was excited by the exploits of American sprinter Wilma Rudolph and decathlete Rafer Johnson in Rome.

Fast forward to my senior year at Jamestown High School and the dreaded term paper requirement. Miss Grace Dorman, my outstanding English teacher, encouraged and supported

my idea of the Olympics as a suitable topic. I soon was engaged in research at the Prendegast Library. This was in the days before computers, cellphones, the Internet and Artificial Intelligence. The use of 3X5 note cards and proper notated references were taught by Miss Dorman.

I wrote about the ancient Olympics held from the 8th century BC to the 4th century AD in Olympia, Greece. I explained that French Baron Pierre de Coubertin founded the International Olympic Committee in 1894 and that the first Modern Olympic Games were held two years later in Athens. I related that in 1924 a winter sports

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week was held in Chamonix, France that became the first Winter Olympic Games. Lastly, I wrote about heroic USA Olympians such as Jim Thorpe, Babe Didrickson, Johnny Weissmuller and Jesse Owens. To my great relief, Miss Dorman approved of my final product.

For the next 4 decades, I retained a rooting interest in USA athletes at the Summer and Winter Olympics. I took American pride in the successes of Mary Lou Retton, Bruce Jenner, Mark Spitz, the Miracle on Ice hockey team of 1980, Carl Lewis, the Dream Team of 1992 basketball lore, and Jackie Joyner-Kersey, among so many others who wore the red, white and blue.

After my retirement from my teaching career, I became involved with the Chautauqua Sports Hall of Fame and that is where I discovered the missing pieces in my Olympics' education - Chautauqua County's connections to the Games. That was about the time when Fredonia's Jennifer Stuczynski swelled the chests of local residents with a silver medal in the pole vault at the 2008 Beijing Games. Four years later, now known as Jenn Suhr, following her marriage to her coach, Rick, she captured the attention of the entire world with a gold medal in the 2012 London pole vault.

Jenn competed again at the 2020 games in Rio, but despite being a heavy favorite to repeat, suffered a debilitating stomach virus on the day of competition. Now retired from active competition, Suhr trains vaulters at her alma mater Roberts Wesleyan in Rochester.

My involvement in the CSHOF taught me about Jamestown middleweight boxer Jimmy Clark and his controversial loss to a Polish opponent at the 1936 Berlin Olympics where black American athletes laid waste to Adolph Hitler's plan to showcase Aryan supremacy.

I learned that Jamestown Richard Shearman was the manager of the 1952 USA speed skating team that won both gold and silver in the 500 meters. Subsequently, he moved to Lake Placid and got involved in bobsledding.

The CSHOF has inducted Geza Farkas, a gymnast on the Hungarian teams at the 1952 Helsinki and 1956 Melbourne Games. Following a Bronze Medal performance in team gymnastics in '56, Farkas defected from Communist Hungary and ultimately came to Jamestown where he taught his sport to youngsters

at the YMCA. His grave marker at Lakeview Cemetery features the five interlocked Olympic rings.

Tara VanDerveer, who has a home in Chautauqua Institution, was the coach of the gold medal women's basketball team at the 1996 Atlanta Olympics. Tara has recently retired from coaching at Stanford as the winningest basketball coach in NCAA history, male or female.

Fredonia's Alex Conti, a 2016 CSHOF inductee, was an assistant women's wrestling coach on the American team that competed in London in 2012. One of his athletes won a bronze medal in the women's 48 kg. freestyle.

Chautauqua County has had two individuals who qualified as USA Olympians, but through no fault of their own, were not able to compete. Brad Rendell, of Falconer, qualified for the steeplechase on the 1940 American team, but the Olympiad was canceled because of the outbreak of World War II.

Busti's Jay T. Kearney qualified for the 1980 American whitewater kayaking team, but his Olympic dreams were denied by the USA boycott of the Moscow Games that year.

Kearney later was a sports physiologist in the Sports Science and Technology Division of the United States Olympic Committee at Colorado Springs.

Two other CSHOF inductees competed ultra-successfully in other Olympic-style tournaments against their peers from around the world. Falconer's Karen Tellinguisen won a gold medal in javelin at the 1977 World Deaf Olympics in Bucharest, Romania, and four years later, captured a bronze in javelin at the 1981 World Deaf Olympics in Cologne, Germany. Daniel Bryner, of West Ellicott, earned a gold and 2 silver medals at the 1995 Special Olympics World Games in New Haven, Connecticut in the sport of roller skating.

As I sit in front of my television watching the 2024 Paris Games, I reflect proudly about the Olympic connections of our Chautauqua Sports Hall of Fame inductees. I think I should submit a revised term paper to Miss Dorman. How do I get in touch with Marty McFly and Doc Brown's DeLorean Time Machine?



TEN AT THE TOP

CELEBRATING CHAUTAUQUA COUNTY'S OLYMPIANS IN HISTORY



JIMMY CLARK

Jamestown

1936 Berlin Olympics

- Middleweight boxing
- Lost controversial decision in quarterfinals



JAY T. KEARNEY

Busti

1980 Moscow Olympics

- Whitewater kayaking
- USA boycotted Olympics due to Cold War



BRAD RENDELL

Falconer

1940 Helsinki Olympics

- Steeplechase
- Olympics cancelled due to World War II

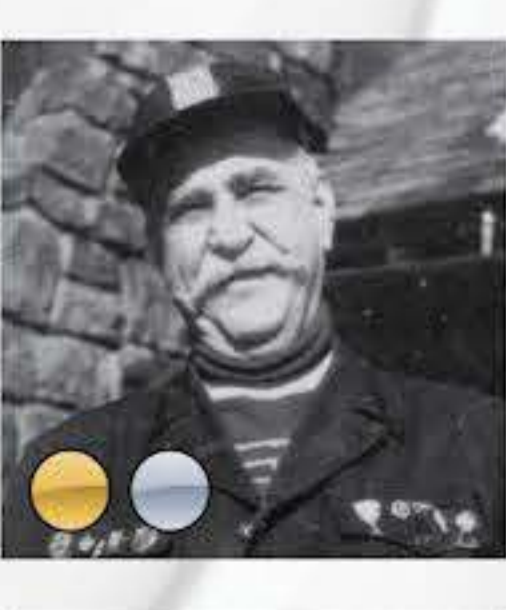


DAN BRYNER

West Ellicott

1995 New Haven Special Olympics World Games

- Roller skating
- Gold Medal & Two Silver Medals

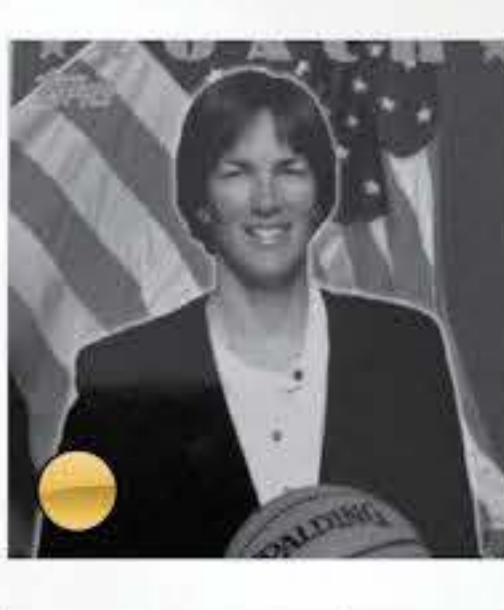


RICHARD SHEARMAN

Jamestown

1952 Oslo Olympics

- Team manager, speed skating
- Gold & Silver Medals - 500-Meters

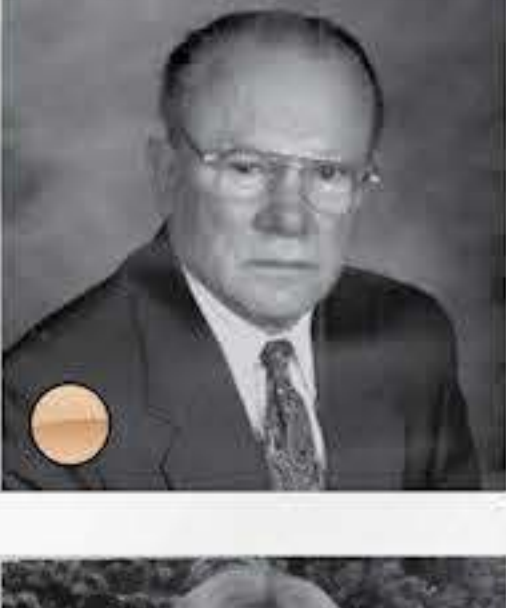


TARA VAN DERVEER

Chautauqua Institution

1996 Atlanta Olympics

- Coach, women's basketball
- Gold Medal - Women's Basketball



GEZA FARKAS

Hungary

Later defected to US, Jamestown

1952 Helsinki & 1956 Melbourne Olympics

- Gymnastics
- Bronze Medal 1956 - Team Gymnastics



ALEX CONTI

Fredonia

2012 London Olympics

- Assistant coach, women's wrestling
- Bronze Medal Women's Freestyle 48kg



KAREN TELLINGUISEN

Falconer

1977 Bucharest & 1981 Cologne World Deaf Olympics

- Javelin
- Gold Medal 1977 & Bronze Medal 1981



JENN SUHR

Fredonia

2012 Beijing & 2016 London & 2020 Rio de Janeiro Olympics

- Pole vault
- Silver Medal 2012 & Gold Medal 2016