

Pat McCormick: Diving for Glory, Country and Motherhood

C. Robert Barnett
Marshall University

Patricia McCormick was an American Olympic diver in the 1950s who fought the limitations of social class and the equally stringent limitations placed on women who aspired to be high level competitive athletes. She used a brash sort of daring, physical strength, and hard work to push herself to the forefront of diving.

Pat Keller McCormick grew up in a single parent home in Long Beach, CA. She developed strength and daring playing with her older brother and working out at Muscle Beach. McCormick began swimming and diving competitively as a teenager and was invited to join the posh Los Angeles Athletic Club diving team. She just missed the 1948 U.S. Olympic diving team.

During the summer of 1949 McCormick won her first national championship the AAU platform event and married Glenn McCormick who would later become her coach. In the next seven years she was virtually unbeatable in every diving event. She won 27 national championships, two Pan American games gold medals, and four Olympic gold medals.

What seemed to set her apart from other women divers at that time were her physical strength which allowed her to get excellent height on her dives, her fearlessness, and desire to work hard by doing more dives per practice. Two other factors in her success were the excellent facilities she had available at the Los Angeles Athletic Club and the Los Angeles Swim Coliseum; and the opportunity to practice with Olympic gold medal divers such as Sammy Lee and Victoria Draves.

McCormick won both Olympic gold medals in diving at the 1952 Olympic Games in Helsinki, Finland despite the reentry into the Olympic Games by the Russians and poor showing by the

American women in all events except diving. Between the 1952 and 1956 games, McCormick redoubled her efforts to remain the dominant diver in the world. One obstacle she faced was that she was pregnant and would deliver only five months before the 1956 Olympic trials. She continued to train until five months pregnant and swam until the day before she delivered a fine healthy baby boy.

She again made the 1956 U.S. Olympic team, and her husband Glenn McCormick was appointed as the women's diving coach. Facing stiff opposition from her own teammates, McCormick again won both diving gold medals and became the only woman before or since to win the diving double-double or two gold medals in two Olympic games.