



January 9, 2008

Area competitors know synchronized swimming is a challenge

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The Journal News

WHITE PLAINS - Kriya Amin had tried all the traditional sports. Soccer was fine, but the 10-year-old from Armonk didn't like the practices. Swimming was fun, but laps were boring. Then her mother, Ragini, told her about a synchronized swimming program run out of the pool at the White Plains YWCA.

"I never found a sport where I could have so many friends, and it's about working together," Amin said.

In synchro, Amin found a combination of music, costume and swimming that she liked. And after years attending friends' games, Amin was proud to be able to invite them to her first performance.

"It's fun and it's different," Amin said.

Synchronized swimming hasn't always had a very athletic reputation. Old films featuring Esther Williams focused more on show than sport. Even when it became an Olympic sport, in 1984, a "Saturday Night Live" parody featuring Martin Short was perhaps more well known that year than the gold medal Americans Tracie Ruiz and Candy Costie won in duet.

Rowena Dale Mohammed didn't know much about the sport when she was asked to join her club synchronized swimming team at the University of Pennsylvania. She learned to swim at the age of 14 because of a school requirement, but found that she enjoyed the choreography and camaraderie.

Mohammed started the Gotham Synchro in White Plains, and has several other sites and classes for kids and adults. The Ramapo Aquamasters, a team for adults, practice at Rockland Community College twice a week.

On a recent Saturday in White Plains, she and three teams of kids picked out fabric for swimming suits before doing some stretches and routines on dry land.

"Synchronized swimming uses every muscle in your body," Mohammed said. "In synchronized swimming and wrestling you need a lot of core strength."

So even before these swimmers get in the water, they need to stretch and have a fresh idea of what maneuvers they will be doing in the water. Although the waving arms make the sport seem simple, what goes on under the water takes training and precision.

Swimmers must be able to hold their breath, and it takes a tremendous amount of underwater sculling to be able to keep legs above the water during certain tricks. But what the audience should see is a calm and exact routine set to music.

"You've got to love the water," Mohammed said. "Because no matter how good you get, it is always

difficult."

That is part of the appeal for 9-year-old Adrienne Jadric of Mount Vernon. She likes to practice her ballet leg, when one leg points to the ceiling while the swimmer is floating on her back. It's a hard move, since the arms must do all the work of keeping the body at the water's surface and looking graceful.

"It's just fun to do flips and try and challenge myself," Jadric said.

Emma Boshart, 8, is on the green team, one of three levels for the larger Saturday group. Green is for the youngest swimmers, and she has already been at it a year. Along with her teammates, she listened to the music for their upcoming show, "Cotton Eye Joe" and picked out a purple design for their team suit.

"It's my second-favorite color," Boshart said.

Right now the program is made up of mostly girls, but Mohammed would like to see a time when boys feel equally comfortable learning the skills. She sees it as a way to build confidence through teamwork, since with the exception of infrequent competitions, synchro is about learning to work in precision with a group.

"For me, what I'm interested in, I want happy, healthy kids who learn how to be confident," Mohammed said.

Ragini Amin said it was just what her daughter needed.

"She loves music, loves to dance," Ragini said. "We tried it and loved it."
