

Detroit Gymnastics History



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1977: Leon Atchison, Director of the Detroit Parks and Recreation Department (DRP), hired four coaches for the gymnastics program. Two of the coaches, Drs. Ziniada (Zina) and Vladimir Mironov, were working at the Jewish Community Center in Southfield, Michigan. Roza Litvakova and Mike Frieden joined them in Detroit. They were all Master of Sport Coaches (the highest level) from the Former Soviet Union (Ukraine). The newly assembled and highly experienced team taught classes and developed gymnastics teams for girls and boys. Classes were held throughout the city in various recreation centers: Tindal, Crowell, Kronk, Young, and others.

1978: The Detroit Metro Gymnasts Team (DMG) started making its mark in rhythmic gymnastics; which is one of the disciplines of gymnastics and had just been designated an Olympic sport for the 1984 Olympics. Native Detroiter Wendy Hilliard was named to the USA National Rhythmic Gymnastics Team (the first African American), and the Detroit Recreation Department hosted the training camp for the National Team held in Detroit just prior to the Pan Pacific Championships, which were held in Toronto, Canada.

1979: Detroiters Wendy Hilliard and Laura Bell competed on the World Championship Team that competed in London, England.

1980: The Detroit Recreation Department hosted the USA Rhythmic Gymnastics National Championships at Cobo Hall in Detroit. This was the first time these championships were broadcast on national TV; CBS Sports provided coverage.

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1981: The DMG team grew and added more national team members at the junior and senior levels. The DMG won a national rhythmic gymnastics title in Los Angeles. Soon after, suburban gymnasts joined the DMG, due to the success of the DMG on the national and international level. The Detroit Metro Gymnasts performed annually at the Christmas Show at Cobo Hall and the Wassail Festival at the Detroit Institute of Arts. The Detroit Recreation Department hosted several state and regional championship at the Crowell Recreation Center and the Northwest Activities Center. The DMG and the DRP also hosted an international training camps with the Bulgarian National Team at Crowell.

1983: Detroit Recreation Gymnastics Coaches Zina Mironov and Roza Litva were named head and assistant coaches, respectively, of the USA World Championship Group Team.



The World Championships were held in France. Four Detroit Metro Gymnasts were a part of this nine-person team.

1984: Wendy Hilliard and Michelle Berube represented Detroit at the Olympic Trials. Michelle Berube went on to make the first USA Olympic Team in Rhythmic Gymnastics and also competed in the 1988 Olympics. Wendy was selected to represent rhythmic gymnastics for the national tour of the US Olympic Gymnastics Team and performed nationwide including a stop at the Joe Lewis Arena.

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*During this time the Detroit Metro Gymnasts traveled the world representing the USA and various International and World Championships. In addition to the very successful rhythmic gymnastics team, the sports acrobatic team led by Mike Frieden also competed nationally and won national titles.

Zina and Vladimir Mironov moved to Los Angeles in the late 1980's while Roza and Mike continued the very successful gymnastics programs throughout Detroit into the early 1990's.



The gymnastics program sponsored by the Detroit Recreation Department was the most successful public recreation program in the country. The legacy of the DRP gymnastics program includes the hundreds of gymnasts who used the incredible training to become successful college students and later successful citizens and leaders, business professionals, lawyers, doctors, and entrepreneurs.

Gymnastics has grown in popularity and also in expense. The best way to provide gymnastics for youth is to provide a facility that can support gymnastics. Add to that a visionary leader, outstanding coaches, excited young people, motivated families, and the soul of the City of Detroit, and an outstanding gymnastics program can rise again to serve the next generation of Detroit's youth.