

Check out the September issue of Swimming World Magazine and read, "Still Kicking: Gail Peters Roper," by Phillip Whitten. At 23 years of age, Gail Peters was the most versatile American woman in the water. Today, Gail Peters Roper is unquestionably the most dominant female swimmer in the world in the 75-79 age group. Find out all about her career--from age group to Masters. You'll even discover that when she was young, she'd swim a 25, and the judges would rate her with numbered cards. They would actually take pints away if she splashed or swam too fast!

Following is a story of Gail's Olympic experience at Helsinki...and beyond.

TO HELSINKI...AND BEYOND

By Phillip Whitten

One of Gail Peters' first races came in high school. It was a 50, and Gail came in fourth.

"I didn't like getting fourth," she recalls, "but what made it worse was my friend won it, and she was absolutely obnoxious about it, wearing her medal to school for the next three days."

Later that year, she won her first-ever race, swimming 1:12.6 in the 100 yard free. Although no one encouraged or helped her, Gail stuck with it and continued to improve.

At the 1950 Nationals, she was third in the 300 IM. Two years later, at the age of 23, she set an American record in the 200 meter breast at the U.S. Olympic Trials in Indy to earn a spot on the U.S. Olympic team.

The 1952 Games, held in Helsinki, Finland, just 20 miles south of the Arctic Circle, were nothing like today's lavish affairs. Gail describes the swimming conditions: "The air temperature was about 41 degrees, and the water in the outdoor pool was a chilly 71. To make matters worse, it was rainy and windy during the swimming competition. There was no hot water in the showers. Some people took cold showers to get warm!

"I only weighed 109 pounds then, and I came down with hypothermia and tore a ligament in my ankle. As a result, I failed to make the final in the 200 breast.

"If I'd swum as I had at Trials, I coulda been a contender," she laughs.

After the Games, Gail decided to swim four more years--through the 1956 Games in Melbourne. But she certainly didn't

have much support: "You've had your chance; give someone else one," she was told.

By 1953, she was ranked No. 1 in the world in the 100 meter breast--just 2-tenths off the world record. That year, she won seven national titles and, for the second straight year, was nominated for the Sullivan Award.

But the following January, FINA split the breaststroke, which was being swum with butterfly arms and breaststroke kick, into two separate strokes--today's breaststroke and butterfly. It spelled the end of Gail's career--that is, until she became one of the most dominant female swimmers in the world today in Masters swimming.