

## Orlando Sentinel

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# It takes grace -- and endurance

## Synchronized swimmers display spirit, teamwork and their best dance moves, but a key skill, holding their breath, doesn't show.

By Jim Buynak  
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April 4, 2004

CLERMONT -- The young women glided, twisted, turned and kicked through the water to jazz, classical music and show tunes.

It was like watching world-class figure skaters, if the ice had melted.

"The hardest part is holding your breath," said 14-year-old Morgan Fuller of Sunnyvale, Calif., and a member of Santa Clara Aquamaids.

Morgan was one of 321 swimmers from around the United States, Canada and Puerto Rico who were competing in the 2004 Speedo Junior Synchronized Swimming Championships at the USA Triathlon National Training Center on Thursday through Saturday.

The duet competition Saturday required pairs to "dance" around the pool to music while teams of judges rated their performances.

In addition to presentation and choreography, pairs were judged on certain mandatory moves such as the Heron Twirl or the Split Walkout.

Jackie Gramlich, 17, and Katlyn Gedeon, 16, of the Tonawanda Aquettes, from the Buffalo, N.Y., area, said they didn't "nail" their routine, but were still having fun in the Florida sun. Like Morgan, they said holding their breath was key. "Endurance," both girls chimed in when asked to name their toughest task.

The coach of the Walnut Creek Aquanuts from Northern California was returning to her old stomping grounds.

Tammy McGregor, a 1996 Olympic gold medalist and a member of the 2000 Olympic team, was born in Sanford and got her start in synchronized swimming with the Orlando Loreleis, the host team for the championships.

Bill May, coach of the Santa Clara Aquamaids, said the teams start preparing for the season in the fall and practice as many as 25 hours a week.

The coaches pair up the teens who will compete in the duet category, he said.

"You rate their skill level, their compatibility and how they look together," he said.

Judy McGowan, who competed in the 1958 nationals and has been judging the sport since 1968, said the swimmers offer a lot of promise.

"They are good," McGowan said. "I think we'll see some champions out of here."

Top routines advance to U.S. National Championships this month in California. Top athletes go to final trials, also in California, for the U.S. Junior National Team in May. The team will go to the world championships in Moscow in July.

California is nationally recognized as the hotbed for synchronized swimming, according to Amy McClintock, spokeswoman for U.S. Synchronized Swimming, but the sport is popular around the world.

Even cold-weather states support it.

"We swim indoors," said a smiling Katlyn of the Tonawanda team. "There are teams all over New York."

For a couple of girls from Alaska, the championships were more than a chance to show off their synchronized swimming talent.

Koko Urata and Sarah Felix, 14-year-old classmates who attend Dzantik'i Hee Middle School in Juneau and swim for the five-member Juneau Aurora Knights, knew the competition was going to be tough, but couldn't turn down a trip to the sunshine.

"There's so much more to do here," said Sarah as she and Koko soaked up some rays poolside.

"We went to Disney World," Koko said.

It was obvious the competitors also knew how to synchronize their fun.

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