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AT Special Feature:

Walnut Creek brings home Bronze in International Competition



Alexa Tcheknarev performs a solo

Article by Sonja Bowman
 Comen Cup Photos by Brian Horii

How do today's synchronized swimmers prepare for the 2016 Olympics? They train year round with world renowned coaches and they compete with their peers in international competitions. The Walnut Creek Aquanats are following this formula. They just returned from the Comen Cup in Belgrade, Serbia with bronze medals in hand.

From August 3rd through 9th, the best synchronized swimmers born in 1994, 1995, and 1996, competed in Serbia. The Walnut Creek Aquanats had the distinction of representing the US in this competition, bringing international recognition to the City of Walnut Creek.

By the end of the week, the Walnut Creek Aquanats were on the medal stand. Alexa Tcheknarev claimed a bronze medal in the solo competition. She was joined by teammate Alyson Haylor for a bronze medal duet performance. These were just some of the many accomplishments of these top ranked synchronized swimmers. Recently, these swimmers moved to Walnut Creek to train with the Aquanats -- Alyson from Nevada and Alexa from Michigan. Considering the short time these girls have swum together, their performance was more than remarkable.



This beautiful duet move is performed by Alexa Tcheknarev and Alyson Haylor

In the team event, the Walnut Creek Aquanut 13-15A team earned an impressive fifth place with their "Chopstick" routine. The team included eight long-time Aquanats: Gwen Gabie, Rina Horii, Grace Moran, Sandra Ortellado, Suying Rothrock, Marisa Tashima, Lizzie Welzein, and Tori Yee. Just weeks earlier, this eight member team won gold at the US 13-15 Age Group Championship in Gainesville, Florida. They had just seven weeks to prepare for the Comen Cup competition.



Working together as a team takes lot's of practice and patience. Here the girls show a great example of what the end result looks like. In this photo: **Suying Rothrock, Lizzie Welzien, Tori Yee, Rina Horii, Sandra Ortellado, Grace Moran, Marisa Tashima and Gwen Gabie.**

All of these athletes were coached by Tammy McGregor, 1996 US Olympic Gold Medalist and 2008 US Olympic head coach. McGregor, a Northgate High School graduate, had tears of joy as she watched her team compete. McGregor said, "I am very proud of this team. They trained less than a year together and worked very hard. The possibilities are endless for these young world class athletes."

Last week, these ten Aquanuts returned from Serbia to train for the Walnut Creek Aquanuts' Bollywood Splash Swim Show. The show will begin at 8 pm nightly, September 3 – 6, at the Heather Farm Swim Center in Walnut Creek, and will feature performances by current Aquanuts as well as four US Olympians including McGregor. For more information and tickets, visit www.aquanuts.org or Sports Basement in Walnut Creek.



Locally, the Aquanuts put on many other great performances. Pictured here is Venezuelan champion **Mary Soto** performing a Bollywood routine, which earned a standing ovation and a silver medal in national competition.

Since synchronized swimming debuted in the 1984 Olympics, the Walnut Creek Aquanuts have won more medals than any other synchronized swimming club in America. With less than seven years to the next Olympics, these upcoming synchronized swimmers may very well be standing on the medal stand in 2016.



Another amazing picture from the team event.



Here are the happy girls after a great performance. Top row from left to right: **Sandra Ortellado, Grace Moran, Marisa Tashima and Gwen Gabie.** Bottom row from left to right: **Suying Rothrock, Lizzie Welzien, Tori Yee and Rina Horii.**

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