

Cam McArthur

March 5, 1943 -

When Cam McArthur won the Tim Turow Cambridge athlete of the year award, he was at the height of his athletic career.

The 1975 Canadian champion paved the way for such future stars as Joel McClintock, the 1979 world champion, and Judy McClintock, 1985 world champion (tricks).

Competitive water skiing was still in its infancy in McArthur's early years. Indeed, organized water skiing began when the International Water Ski Union (then the World Water Ski Union and now the International Water Ski Federation) was created in Geneva during a series of powerboat races on July 27, 1946 by Albert Schmidt, Andrew Couteau and skiers from France, Belgium and Switzerland who had been invited to perform for the crowds between the races.

Paul Jurbala, writing for the Ontario Water Skier, said McArthur was like an icon in the sport. The following is excerpted from Jurbala's interview with McArthur.

"Some people are just always there. You can feel it when they're missing as a sort of indefinable wrongness, like when an old friend suddenly appears without glasses or a moustache. Something's wrong, but you're not sure what. That's what water skiing in Ontario would be like without Cam McArthur.

Cam's been involved in water skiing since he was 11 years old. He grew up with it, and it with him. In our profile of Judy Messer in the last issue, she identified Cam as the person who got she and her brothers (the McClintocks) going in competition. How many others would have missed their opportunity in our sport, if not for Cam?

Cam has seen it all. He was repeatedly Canadian Champion and a member of the National Team (with typical modesty, Cam points out he was "an alternate" for three Worlds). But a conversation with him reveals that, more than anything, he typifies the roots of Canadian water skiing ... families discovering an exciting new activity and adopting it as their own. And there's something very Canadian about Cam, a quiet primary school teacher, member of the OWSA board of directors, father of four boys (Dan and Dave compete), and in the summer, director of Pleasant Bay Camp.

McArthur came by the sport honestly. His grandmother had a cottage on Puslinch Lake, just outside of Cambridge, and given that there was already some water skiing on the lake -- this was about 1954 -- Cam got his start.

"When I was eleven, my cousin came out with a boat and some skis, so I tried and got up first time - and I just loved it," he said. "Most of our summer was spent at the lake, so we kept at it. We made our own skis; I remember using boiling water to soften the tips of some wood skis we made so we could bend them up. We made the bindings out of inner tubes. One day a fellow named George Gruetzner came out with trick skis, and I tried them, too."

He loved the sport and travelled all over to see it, including the CNE's Aquarama, where some top-notch skiers from Cypress Gardens competed and performed.

They gave the young Canadian water skier a lot of food for thought. Inspired, McArthur went back to the lake with renewed vigor.

"When I was about 15, we built our own jump out of plywood and old doors - it was a terrible thing! Anyway, my first competition was when I was 15, at Caledonia, and there I met some good skiers like the Filions and Claude Dupuy from Quebec, George Deniston, Pat Shearer. Afterward, someone approached my dad, Tom, to see if we would host a tournament at Puslinch, and we did - my dad always encouraged us."

McArthur had begun to ski on the snow when he was two, so the shift to water skiing in the summer was a natural cross-over. "I just loved to ski and the fact that I picked it up quickly helped. There were so many challenges, so many things to try - jumping, barefoot."

He rose to all the challenges, including the first time he jumped over 100 feet. It was 1961 at Lac St Joseph and he went 109 feet, good enough to be named an alternate for the 1961 Worlds at Long Beach, California.

He was named to the team again for Vichy in 1963, and subsequently won many Ontario and regional events. He became a Canadian champion for the first time in 1975 in Calgary when he set a jump record of 133'. He won the title for the next two years.

McArthur was instrumental in starting the Cam-Am Ski School (now the McClintock Ski School) at Puslinch in '68, mostly to keep the McClintock kids skiing while their parents were at work...the McClintocks started skiing at the lake around 1965, and they came out to watch the Worlds in 1967.

"I remember watching them jump, at about age six - they'd disappear altogether



Water Skier Cam McArthur was a gifted champion and one of the central figures in the early days of the sport in Ontario.

when they reached the ramp, and you wouldn't see them again until they cleared, they were so small. They would ski at the school every day, and sometimes we would have other students as well. Anyway, I was also an instructor at the Ontario Water Ski Instructors Course, and I did a cross-country tour with George Athans in 1970, putting on clinics."

McArthur was at the first Canada Summer Games as an athlete in 1969, then became an Ontario coach at the Games in 1973 and 1977.

McArthur helped the McClintocks along - once writing to Ralph Meloon (owner of Correct Craft, the builders of Ski Nautique boats) saying these local kids had potential and asking for a boat. And when the Grahams started coming out to the lake, he could see the potential Barbara Graham had.

"We tried to encourage her, and their dad Wes would be out there filming it all." Despite a lot of falls in the learning process, she went on to become a world record holder.

But McArthur's greatest thrill was seeing Joel McClintock win the World Championship at Long Pond (Toronto) in 1979. "When he won, just to think I had, you know, contributed in some way..."

Wrote Jurbala: "It's safe to say that without the Cam McArthurs, who spent the time to encourage newcomers and share with them the love of water skiing in the 1960's and 70's, Canada's World Championship victories of 1991 and 1993 would never have happened."

Cam McArthur continues to live in Cambridge.

Inducted 2006