

1948 Olympic Champ Victoria Manalo Draves



Catch a Diving Star

BY RACHELLE Q. AYUYANG

Does anyone remember 1948 Olympic diving champion Victoria Manalo Draves? Most people remember Samoan American diver Greg Louganis's dramatic sweep of the men's diving competition in the 1984 and 1988 Olympic Games. Thanks to television. But 40 years ago in the Games in London, the Filipina American diver became the first female—and third—diver in modern Olympic history to win a gold medal in both the three-meter springboard and ten-meter platform.

“Being a part of a huge athletic event and seeing all those wonderful

athletes all over the world was really a thrill,” recalls Draves, now a 71-year-old retiree in Palm Springs, California. “And then to come out on top with the gold, it’s an unbelievable thing. It’s the only chance for a woman to feel true patriotism. You feel you want to do this for your country.”

Born in the United States in 1924, Draves was raised in the low-income South of Market neighborhood in San Francisco. Her Filipino father, Theodore Manalo, died in 1945. According to Draves, her father and mother (Gertrude) seldom talked about their past histories with their twin daughters, Victoria and Consuelo, and oldest daughter, vivacious Frances, who

First-Ever: U.S. athlete Victoria Draves (seen here with husband-coach Lyle) was the first female—and third—diver to win two gold medals in the Olympics.

later died of cancer in the early '50s. Draves only knows that her father had traveled the United States with a musical band.

One contemporary, Antonio Dixon Campos, 73, knew the mestiza beauty who had a knack for confounding competing suitors with her shyness. "Vicki was very private and difficult to make social contact with," Campos says. "Her parents watched over her carefully. I always thought of her as very studious."

Former *San Francisco Chronicle* sports reporter Art Rosenbaum, who covered the 1948 Olympics, says, "You can love her but not really know her. She was a lovely young lady, but I can't remember a word she said because she was always in the background."

"I guess I learned well from my mother (that) little children should be seen not heard," says Draves. "She was always on my case about behavior."

From Dance to Diving

Draves, who believes she was an "average" student in school, initially wanted to be a dancer, but her parents couldn't afford lessons. So her artistry was channeled into diving. Schools back then didn't support women's sports, but Draves was undeterred, receiving a lot of encouragement from her diver-pal and role model, Shirley Kelly.

Like most city youths whose families were economically strapped, Draves in the summer would spend a nickel for a street-car ride to Fleischacker, the public seawater pool that was regarded as the largest in the world at the time. Through one of the divers there, Draves, then 16, was introduced to Phil Patterson, the swimming team coach at the Fairmont Hotel Swimming and Diving Club.

She became a club member in 1940, but she didn't train with the rest of the team members. Instead, she practiced as the sole member of the "Phil Patterson School of Swimming and Diving."

"I ran into a considerable amount of prejudice," Draves says.

Patterson also insisted that she use her mother's maiden name, Taylor, rather than her father's surname, when she started competing. "It surprised me," Draves continues. "I didn't like it at the time. I didn't think what it would do to my father."

Draves didn't dwell on her

coach's actions or motivations. "I didn't pay attention to the ins and outs," she says. "I was a young girl, and that was my opportunity to dive." Patterson, who was aware of her family's financial straits, secured for her a part-time job passing out towels and mending suits in the Fairmont's locker rooms. After graduating from Commerce High School, Draves worked as a secretary. She was often too tired to do well in meets, where she'd show up without the all-important sponsorship and financial backing of an athletic club.

Then Patterson enlisted for the war in 1941, and Draves had to stop diving. In 1942, she resurfaced at the Crystal Plunge Diving Club, first under renowned swimming coach, Charlie Sava, and then Jimmy Hughes. In 1943, she shopped for a new coach because Hughes couldn't continue training her free of charge. His commute to

the club was becoming too expensive, since the war had placed a premium on rationed gasoline. Sava suggested she go to the

Athen's Club in Oakland where a coach from Iowa, Lyle Draves, was training a fellow Midwesterner, Zoe Ann Olsen.

Romance

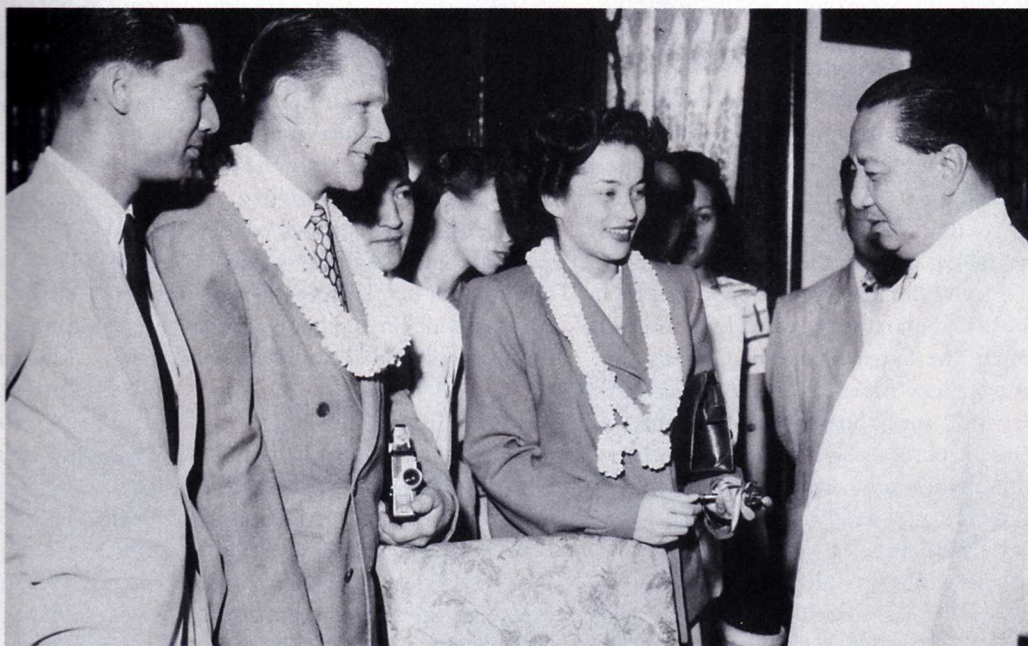
The shy mestiza hesitated at first, saying to Sava, "Oh gee, Charlie, he's already got divers." But there was no avoiding destiny. She became Lyle's pupil, and the relationship grew beyond that of athlete and coach. At that point, Olsen's parents took over Zoe Ann's training from Lyle.

"He is a good and fair man," Draves defends her husband and mentor. "The attraction was there between me and Lyle. I guess I just fell in love."

In 1946, at the age of 23, Draves married Lyle, and they moved to Pasadena, California, where she gained sponsorship from the Pasadena Athletic Club. But Draves still held a full-time job, which was a 50-mile round-trip commute from her



Shy Beauty: Would-be suitors couldn't figure out how to approach her.



Homecoming: Vicki, who was born and raised in the United States, and Lyle paying a courtesy call on Pres. Elpidio Quirino (right) at the presidential palace in Manila in 1949.

home. Evenings were devoted to her training, and household chores were postponed until the weekends.

She believes that marrying her coach didn't raise any serious controversy but admits, "Maybe I was naive. I thought I liked everybody and everybody liked me. I always felt accepted as a diver."

Rosenbaum, who says Draves pulled

preparation shocked even Draves's friend from Pasadena, Sammy Lee, who would emerge the 1948 and 1952 gold medalist in the men's ten-meter platform.

"We all worked pretty hard getting ready," according to Lee in the *South of Market News* in 1983, "but Vicki was like a slave. I actually got sore at both of them. Lyle worked her six hours a day, broken

body into a full somersault before straightening out to hit water. Draves scored an eight to Olsen's seven-and-a-half. The final point total: Draves, 108.74 and Olsen, 108.23, a difference of 0.51. The petite Filipina, who all through the meet was the picture of deep concentration and stoicism, broke down in tears of joy and relief. In the clutch, she emerged the champion. After repeating her springboard performance with a gold medal in the ten-meter platform, she immediately announced her retirement from the sport.

Hollywood offered Draves movie roles to cash in on her popularity, but they were of the "native girl" variety in mediocre films. "I didn't start out being an actress," she says with a laugh, "and I wasn't about to make a fool of myself."

She did the round of water shows, touring Europe with Buster Crabbe's "Aqua Parade," performing for two weeks in Larry Crosby's "Rhapsody in Swimtime" and appearing in Al Sheehan's shows, "The Minneapolis Aquatennial" and "The Seattle Sea Fair."

Homecoming

In 1949, Draves went to the Philippines, where she performed exhibitions in Cebu and visited her father's hometown of Orani, Bataan. "They accepted me like I was their own," she says. She also met then-President Elpidio Quirino and his daughter, Victoria, at Malacañang. Lyle joked that the homecoming was so hectic that they spent 39 days in the Philippines but only had 39 hours of sleep.

Draves, in 1953, finally got around to a promise she had made after quitting competitive diving—having five children. She has four sons, David, 44, Jeffrey, 42, Dale, 35, and Kim, 33. (She lost one child.) Draves also returned to work as a secretary and then became an office manager before settling into retirement. Now she and Lyle travel the country in an RV, sometimes visiting her husband's relatives in Iowa or her twin sister, Consuelo, in Florida.

Draves wistfully remembers her past specialty, the ten-meter platform and her favorite simpler dives, such as the swan, back-dive and half-gaynor. Time, she says, was suspended when she was in the air. With her feet firmly on the ground, life has just gone on since the 1948 Games. Draves' two gold medals, which were once kept in a trophy case, now rest on her television set. ■



Life Goes On: Retirees Vicki and Lyle spend lots of time driving around the country in an RV.

off her 1948 triumphs with an "easy grace," describes her as "submissive" to coach/husband Lyle during the Games. But he adds crustily, "She wasn't hurt by his efforts."

The Competition

In 1948, tension between two former allies, the United States and the Soviet Union over the rebuilding of postwar Europe loomed over the Olympic Games in London. Another, more benign, tussle was taking shape in the diving pool.

Vying for the upper hand, at least in the PR department, were Lyle and Art Olsen, the father of one of Draves's chief rivals, fellow American Zoe Ann. Lyle and Art took turns boasting about their athletes to sports reporter Rosenbaum. "I wasn't convinced," says Rosenbaum of Draves's mettle. "I thought Zoe Ann would be the star."

He probably didn't realize that, in five years, Lyle had turned Draves into a lean, mean diving machine under a rigorous regimen that made up for her sporadic, inadequate training in the past. Lyle's grueling

down into three two-hour workouts. She'd run through her list of dives four times a day—that's 105 dives!"

The rigor paid off. The springboard competition proved the toughest test, as the lead bounced between Draves and Olsen. The latter won five of the eight optional dives in the final round, but the day before, Draves led after the compulsory dives, when Olsen committed a fatal mistake on a back-dive. Olsen could've bagged the gold, but Rosenbaum wrote, "The pressure told on her, however, and she exhibited unmistakable signs of nervousness in contrast to her quiet confidence yesterday."

Victory

Virtually the only thing between Draves and the gold was her final dive, a back one-and-a-half, which, according to Lyle, was her weakest dive in practice. "The water can feel like cement, when you're not lined up or ready for it," Draves later explains. "You certainly need your wits about you."

Shooting up in the air, she flipped her