

Al Luber- Biography

Al was owner and head coach at Santa Monica Gymnastics Center from 1973 to 2008. He had numerous male and female gymnasts that were All-Americans at universities such as UCLA, Washington, Stanford, and others.

Al has served as both President and Vice President of Southern California's Women's Gymnastics Association.

He was born in Nuremberg, Germany, and his family immigrated to Canada and then to the United States in the early 1950's. His families moved to Venice, California, where he started doing gymnastics at Venice Beach while in junior high school. The two major places to do gymnastics at that time were Venice Beach and Santa Monica's Muscle Beach. On any weekend you would find National competitors and Olympians working out there. He learned to do flyaway of the swinging rings and was hooked on gymnastics. Swinging rings was his favorite event and was still a competitive event in the late 1950's in both high school and college.

As a 10th grader at Venice High, Al discovered that Venice had a gymnastics team. Swinging rings had just been dropped as a competitive event. Despite being skinny and weak, he managed to make the team on still rings as the fifth man. By the end of the year he, was able to make the tumbling team and eek out a varsity letter. The coach at Venice that year was a young second year coach named George Rose. Rose was the B football coach and initially knew little about gymnastics, but he knew how to coach. As a tenth grader he worked at City Championships at Venice High and was motivated by the tremendous performers at that competition. In Al's senior year at Venice high he was captain of team and qualified to City Championships on floor and parallel bars.

Al was recruited by UCLA and Berkley and chose to stay home and attend UCLA on a partial scholarship. He competed all-around for the first time for the UCLA freshman team. Incoming freshmen could not compete on varsity teams in those days. The coach at UCLA that year was an elderly gentleman named Ralph Borrelli. At that time the men's gymnastics team practiced in the old UCLA men's gym while dodging basketballs from coach John Wooden's first two National Championship teams. This was a great time to be a UCLA athlete. Seeing the likes of Rafer Johnson, CK Yang, both decathlon gold medalists, Walt Hazzard, Gail Goodrich, Keith Ericson, Lew Alcindor (Kareem Abdul Jabbar) all tremendous basketball players, Gary Beban, Heisman winner, made it hard not to be successful at UCLA.

During Al's sophomore year, UCLA hired Art Shurlock as coach. Al was captain of the UCLA team in 1965, 1966, and 1967. He qualified to National High Bar finals all three years, placing third for All-American honors in 1966.

While at UCLA, he assisted the Venice Highs boys program under coach George Rose. Venice High started its rise to dominating the City High School boys gymnastics program that year under Coach Rose. Venice won numerous City Championships and was one of

the top boys programs in the country, sending gymnasts to compete at universities and colleges all over the country. Coach Rose was a huge influence on Al's involvement in coaching.

Al started playing beach volleyball at Santa Monica Beach by the Pier when UCLA's trainer and track coach, Ducky Drake, recommended running in the sand to strengthen a badly sprained ankle that was not responding to treatment during his senior year. Just like in gymnastics, years earlier at Muscle Beach, there were many quality players, including Olympians, playing volleyball at the at the Pier. There was a lot to learn and plenty of people to teach you.

He Graduated UCLA in 1967 with BS in Engineering. He continued coaching at Venice High while working full time as an engineer at Hughes Aircraft and later at a smaller company, Micromega. He competed one more time at the qualifying meet for the Olympic trials at the old Long Beach Convention Center in 1968 and did not qualify to trials.

Al met his wife, Linda, at Muscle Beach and married in 1969.

In 1973 he took a sabbatical from engineering to get away from the 60 hour workweeks and played a little beach volleyball with wife Linda. He ran into Glenn Sundby, (editor and owner of Gymnast Magazine) at the beach who suggested that he start a gym in the empty space Glenn had next door to the Gymnast Magazine offices in Santa Monica. Santa Monica Gymnastics Center was born. It was a great and fun location. A constant parade of gymnasts from all over the country and the world came through the Gymnast Magazine offices and the gym.

Al and his wife Linda took over the running of the Santa Monica Gymfest held every Labor Day weekend from 1974 to the early 1980's. This very fun, low key competition in the sand was started by Glenn Sundby from Gymnast Magazine in the early 1960's. It had an all-comers format and the prelims would allow novice gymnasts to participate along side Olympians.

Daughter Carol was born in 1976.

Al and Linda moved SMGC to a larger location in West Los Angeles in 1977 to accommodate growing enrollment.

Daughter Karen was born in 1980.

In 1980, Al met and hired Yefim Furman, who later became UCLA men's assistant coach in 1985. From 1980 to 1984 both men's and women's UCLA and USC gymnastics teams used SMGC's facilities until UCLA finally got pits in 1984 and USC dropped both programs. Having quality athletes and people like Peter Vidmar, Tim Daggett, Susie Kellems(USC) and others in the gym daily was fun and very motivating for SMGC coaches and athletes.

Al coached many times Austrian National Champion and UCLA gymnast, Birgit Schier, to 1987 and 1989 World Championship appearances and 1988 Olympic qualification.

In 1993, after 17 years in West LA, the building housing SMGC was sold and Al and Linda were lucky to find a building in Culver City that they were able to stay in for the next 15 years.

Al is currently coaching at Los Angeles School of Gymnastics and still trying to play a little beach volleyball at the Santa Monica Pier.