

Slick on Water--and in Business

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by Marilou Hedlund 2 Jul 17, 1964

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Meet the Min-Aqua-Bats

BY HEDLUND

I F COLLEGES ever pass

out athletic scholarships to I water skiers, a group of teenagers in Minocqua, Wis., will be a good bet to take them all-much like they ve been t a k i n g tournament trophies thruout the midwest.

The young people call them- selves the Min-Aqua-Bats and, tho they re proud of their tournament records, they make competitive skiing only a side- line. Primarily, they re per- formers, trick, b a 11 e t, and jumping skiers whose "ama- teur" water show is one of the most professional this side of Cypress Gardens, Fla. And not only are they talented on the towlines, but they ve turned their sport into a business or- ganization that would earn them "A's" in anyone s mar- keting class.

The Financial Side

The water-borne entrepre- neurs work with a \$12,000- \$14,000 budget each summer. Their 17-act show, given three nights a week on Lake Mi- , draws 3,500 spectators per performance. Motor manu- facturers, ski companies, and swimsuit makers donate prod- ucts for their use plus a men- tion in the show program.

They charge no admission, but spectators are invited to contribute if they wish after the show. [Average family donation is \$1.1 Last year, a

The Min-Aqua-Bats of Minocqua, Wis., call it "footin" when Tom Beech, club president, skims the wake barefoot.

One of club s 17 acts. Rosanne Kreml (left) and Carla Zimmerman hitch a ride from Robin Coleman (left), Jim Fry, and Tom Brown.

The youthful water ski experts give a pennant welcome to their audience. Last year, they borrowed \$25,000 to build their Aqua-bowl, which seats 3,500, on Lake Minocqua.

bank thought enough of the mn-Aqua-Bats' credit to loan them \$25,000. The money built tiered shoreline bleachers, a clubhouse and storage area, and permitted the youngsters to install lighting equipment "that lights up our part of the lake b r i g h t e r than County stadium."

This year there are 35 active Alin-Aqua-Bats. Half of them live year 'round in the north woods county, the others are summer residents. Eleven are members of the coveted Cen- tury club for skiers who have jumped more than 100 feet in a tournament, and 15 belong to the American Water Ski as- sociation s Barefoot club. All Self-Taught

The most surprising thing about them is that they re all self-taught skiers. Tho the older ones give tips to the junior members, there s no professional coach.

"When the club started 15 years ago," says Tom Beech, president, "it was very in- formal. About all you had to know was how to swim. Now- adays, it s tougher-most of the kids who apply already ski barefoot and jump."

That goes for girls as well as boys. Instead of confining themselves to ladylike ballet and slalom skiing, the girls at- tempt the same tricks and jumps as the boys [the jump level for them, however, is 5 feet instead of 63.

"The hardest thing for us to is to find time to practice; it really has to be a hit and miss affair," says Tom Brown, this year s program director and a June graduate from the University of Notre Dame. Be- sides skiing in shows and tournaments, all but a few of the Alin-Aqua-Bats have sum- mer jobs in the area.

"The only time I see my sons is at breakfast," says

A practice session--either for the show or for a tournament--and Tom Beech comes off the jump between Mike LeBaron and Tom Zimmerman.

Mrs. E. A. Brown ruefully. '1f

they re not working, they re skiing, or cleaning up the ski area." Tom works as a water- front instructor in a nearby camp. His brother Dick is a butcher s helper in a super- market.

Two boys tend lawns and dig graves in the local cemetery, others work in grocery stores, bakeries, coffee shops, clothing stores, and drugstores.

Pat Dyer of Park Ridge, one of the grave men, is the most likely candidate for "star" rating among the Amin-Aqua- Bats, tho t h e y have little

patience with individual fame and would rather be recognized as a group. Pat, who holds the midwest jumping record [134 feet], has taught himself to sail-ski while attached to a soaring red kite.

What the skiing teens would like most now that they have audiences, bleachers, b o a t s, and costumes is a national ski champion. They've had a num- ber of regional champions and have sponsored tournaments. Their next chance to qualify for national tryouts comes Aug. 7-9, when they ll be hosts for the Midwest