



LOIS COLBURN: Bridesmaid's Luck

At least three times in her long judging career, Lois Colburn benefited from a bit of luck. "You never know when something good is around the corner."

The first time was at AIAW Collegiate Nationals at Louisiana State University in 1978, when she was unexpectedly handed the chief judge position due to a fellow judge's illness. The second time, she was asked to judge the 1980 Independent Club Nationals as a last-minute replacement. And then in 1984 she again replaced someone at UCLA to judge her first NCAA meet, which allowed her the thrill of judging in Pauley Pavilion the year of the Olympics.

Her luck continued, however, when she was asked to attend the FIG Course in Texas in 1985 because someone could not make it. "Jackie Fie called me 10 days before the course. I had my Code of Points but had to cram!" she laughs. "The live gymnasts they used were freezing, as Texas was experiencing a cold snap."

Lois began her gymnastics career at the YMCA program in Wakefield, Massachusetts. "We competed against other 'Y' teams around the State," she recalls. "My junior year, our coach, Bob Rein, pitched the idea of high school gymnastics teams to the members of the board of education. The boys got their team, but the Board said they didn't want the girls in the gym in our leotards around the boys!"

She attended Tufts University in Medford, but they had no girls' team there, so she worked out with the YMCA team whenever she came home. After graduating, she began to teach middle school physical education in Burlington, MA. She also worked out with the high school team—one of Massachusetts' first girls' high school teams— and helped coach. "There were only about 8 or 9 teams in 1967 in Eastern Massachusetts," she says, "And each school had to find a person to take the judging course."

That person was Lois, who took the course from Virginia Cullity and then the written exam from the AAHPER-DGWS (American Association of Health, Physical Education and Recreation/Division of Girls' and Women's Sports) officials. After judging high school meets for a few years, Lois started training other officials with the Boston Board of Women's Officials. "I've been training judges my whole career," she notes.

In the early 70's, Kitty Kjeldsen, who was the coach at the University of Massachusetts in Amherst, was offering statewide judging courses. Lois joined 20 other women for a judging course and test at Springfield College. "We judged live routines right along with Kitty and her staff." She received a Regional rating and kept judging high school, emerging club gymnastics meets and local college meets, like Salem State College.

When Kitty helped form NAWGJ in 1974, Lois was appointed Massachusetts' first SJD. Her RJD was Gail Davis, who was the coach at Southern Connecticut State University. In 1976, Lois was asked to attend her first elite national course in Ohio, taught by Delene Darst, Sharon Valley and Gail Davis. This test included an oral exam. "You sat in front of two of the instructors and answered test questions," she remembers. "And then there was a live practical exam." Lois received an Elite National rating and traveled to bigger meets. "Our regional elite meets (Region VI) were combined with Region VII, and that is where I first got to know judges from outside of New England: Cheryl Hamilton, Carole Ide, Jenny Sperring, and Sue Ammerman. We also were expected to attend all of the regional elite meets whether we were judging or not."

Beginning in the summer of 1977, Lois helped out at a week-long coaching/judging course at Tufts University and by 1983 had become its director. "I spent the early summer in Maine each year typing up a written judges manual from all the random judging rule notes that were available."

Lois took over the Regional Judging Director's position in 1978, which she held for eight years. She also traveled to Santa Barbara to attend NAWGJ's second National Symposium. "Betty Sroufe had a beachfront unit and we sat on her deck, looking at the ocean." She also remembers playing a lot of tennis with other attendees.

A year later, Lois made a memorable trip to AIAW Nationals at State College, Pennsylvania. "Unfortunately," she recalls, "it was the weekend of the 3 Mile Island nuclear accident in Harrisburg, and I flew to the meet with a stop in the Harrisburg airport." In 1980 she returned to Pennsylvania (Allentown) for the Independent Club Nationals (see photo).

Later in 1980, Lois attended the third NAWGJ Symposium in Miami, Florida. "The best thing about that Symposium was the introduction of the international shorthand system for judging."

After her two terms as RJD for Region 6, Lois served as the NAWGJ liaison to Judges Certification, Inc. (JCI). "They were a wonderful group," she says. She has since served as meet referee at NCAA Nationals numerous times and has been a clinician at NAWGJ and USAG congresses and clinics through the years. She also became one of the first regional collegiate assigners for JAS. "I was very excited about the creation of a judges assigning system in 2005. I thought that there needed to be more neutrality in the assignment of collegiate officials – that schools should not be hiring their own judges. My schools during those first years were LSU, Nebraska, Centenary, Oklahoma, Denver and Air Force."

After she received her FIG rating in 1985, Lois traveled internationally, visiting places she never thought she would see, like Puerto Rico, Italy, Japan and Israel. "Coming into Jerusalem, overlooking the city – that was amazing!"

Lois had begun working for Tufts University part time in the mid-80's, then settled in as a Director for the Tufts Veterinary School (Grafton) in 1993. She credits her NAWGJ work as the best training for being an administrator.

She retired from Tufts in 2015. "Judging is a perfect retirement thing," she notes. She even returned to her roots and resumed high school judging! She and her husband, Peter, who is a former men's FIG judge, have five grandchildren and spend six months of each year at Peter's ancestral home on the Maine coast.

"Gymnastics has been an avocation for almost 60 years. It has brought me wonderful experiences, travel opportunities and many friends all over the country. At least four of the most memorable events happened because I was an alternate for the meet and could accept at the last minute. Sometimes being a 'bridesmaid' is worth it!"



Judging Independent Club Nationals - Allentown, PA 1980

(L to R) Audrey Schweyer, Sharon Valley, Delene Darst, Patsy Knepper, Lois Coburn, Marilyn Sheldon, Carole Ide



Judging in Action! 2011



2013 P&G Championships



**Lois (2nd from R back row) with her fellow Massachusetts Judges
Boston Strong Meet 2014**



Time to Relax!

St. Louis Botanical Gardens with Marilyn Blilie, Denise Green, & Jenny Spring

