

# WAS - Trampoline & Tumbling Legend

## Alexandra Nicholson

*2001 Honoree*



### Long Ordeal of a Champion

*Alexandra Magdalena Nicholson was born in Zurich, Switzerland on March 19, 1957. Her father (a native of Trinidad), was, at that time, conducting a medical research at the University of Zurich where he discovered the process whereby Cancer can be produced in White mice. An understanding of this "process" greatly aided further research in the medical field and knowledge as to how Cancer is produced in the human body. Alexandra's mother, Mrs. Annie Nicholson was a fashion designer by profession and a native of Vienna, Austria.*

Four months after Alexandra's birth, the Nicholson's entered the United States on a Student Exchange Visa where, for eight years, Dr. Nicholson served on the staffs of Roswell Memorial Cancer Institute in Buffalo, New York and Georgetown University Hospital in Washington, D.C. In 1965, the Nicholson's moved to Rockford, Illinois where the family took up permanent residency and Dr. Nicholson opened a private medical practice.

Alexandra first became interested in Gymnastics and Tumbling while she was a 5th grade student at Rockford's Guilford Center School. Her physical education teacher at that time, Miss Lynn Lusby, felt that Alexandra had great athletic potential and directed her to enroll in Rockford's Trampoline Town U.S.A. gymnastic classes under the direction of Coach Bob Bollinger.

With former Miss America of 1969, Miss Judi Ann Ford as a teammate, Alexandra was inspired to become a Trampoline Champion. After only six months of training, Alex's Coach entered her in the National A.A.U. Age-Group Championships in Lafayette, Louisiana. In her first competition, Alexandra won the first place title in the 11-12 Age-Group, defeating the favorite from Lafayette, Louisiana!

Alexandra proved to be a brilliant student and, by age 13, already could perform fliffuses of all types. A fliffus is any double somersault (forward and backward) with 1/2 or more twists. Her father bought her a Goliath trampoline from George Nissen and set it up in the family backyard where Alexandra practiced daily.

In the two years that followed her first victory in Louisiana, Alexandra Nicholson went on to win several other titles in both Age-Group and Senior Women's Open Competition. In late August of 1971, Alexandra Nicholson competed in the International Nissen-Eterna Cup Trampoline Championships held in Grenchen, Switzerland. Next to the official F.I.T. World Championships, the Nissen-Eterna Cup competition was, perhaps, the largest trampoline competition in the world as it involved the majority of European countries. In this competition, Alexandra won 1st Place in the Elite Women's Open Division with the highest single score of any competitor in the meet!

Serious problems, however, began for Alexandra at the 1971 National A.A.U. Gymnastics Clinic in Sarasota, Florida. It was discovered by an A.A.U. Official that Alexandra was not a citizen of the United States in spite of the fact that she had lived in America most of her life and had always thought that she was an American. It was discovered that legally, she was a citizen of Trinidad which has no organized Trampoline Association and was not a member of the F.I.T.

Alexandra was told that she would have to become an American citizen in order to be allowed to compete for a birth on the United States team to the World Championships. The same official who had discovered that she was not a U.S. Citizen also told Alexandra and her Coach that a Citizenship Rule was definitely stated in the F.I.T. Constitution.

Congressman John B. Anderson, of Illinois took the initiative by introducing a bill into the U.S. House of Representatives that would grant Alexandra Nicholson American citizenship in time to compete at the World Tryouts for the United States Team at Ann Arbor, Michigan on June 10. A similar bill was introduced in the United States Senate by United States Senator Adlai Stevenson Jr., also of Illinois.

Meanwhile, newly appointed National A.A.U. Trampoline Chairman, Bil Copp of Cleveland, Ohio, sent a letter to F.I.T. President, Erich Kinzel in Germany to get a clarification of a specific citizenship rule. Alexandra's Coach, Bob Bollinger of Rockford and Mr. Ted Blake of Brentwood Essex, England, both maintained that no such rule existed regarding citizenship for competitors in the F.I.T. Constitution and the only mention of citizenship as such had to do with members of the F.I.T. Legislative Congresses. Therefore, no restrictions should be placed on Alexandra and she should be allowed to compete in the U.S. Team Trials at Ann Arbor, Michigan on June 10th.

Three days prior to the competition in Ann Arbor, a letter from F.I.T. President, Erich Kinzel, reached the National A.A.U. Headquarters in Indianapolis, Indiana: Kinzel's letter specifically stated that Blake and Bollinger had been right, that there was no existing rule barring a competitor from competing in International competition because of citizenship. In spite of this fact, a vote was taken by the A.A.U. Trampoline Committee the night before the U.S. Team Trials in Ann Arbor. The vote was nine to six in favor of Alexandra competing in the World Trials. As might be expected, Alexandra Nicholson convincingly won First Place in the Open Division of the U.S.A. Team Trials the following day.

Two weeks following the competition in Ann Arbor, the United States Senate overwhelmingly passed Stevenson's bill to grant Alexandra citizenship.

Alexandra competed for Trampoline Town U.S.A. for six years and during that period won 12 National titles (USTA, YMCA & NAAU), several local and regional titles and two Senior F.I.T. World Championships on the Trampoline, the 7th World Championship in Stuttgart, West Germany, and the 8th World Championships in Johannesburg, South Africa. She was the first woman competitor in the world to ever perform a "Triffus" (a forward triple somersault with a 1/2 twist) in competition and did so in her optional routine in South Africa. The difficulty of her routine in South Africa was 10.6, the same level of difficulty that Men's World Champion Paul Luxon had achieved two years before in Stuttgart.

The most significant feature of Alexandra's great victory in South Africa finds itself not as much in the sports area as it does, perhaps, in the political and social domains. Indisputably, Alexandra and her parents' presence and acceptance in South Africa at that time helped in changing the history of that nation for all time. The Nicholson's themselves, representing a mixed marriage, had the privilege of a royal treatment at the Mayor of Johannesburg's home. During this time, South Africa was still constricting in the throes of "apartheid". The Nicholson's visit and Alexandra's victory helped lead to a lessening of the constricting. This goes to prove that "history" itself is changed as much by the action of individuals as it is by institutions.

When one reviews the entire set of conditions under which Alexandra Nicholson had to compete, it is difficult, indeed, to appreciate the amount of composure and positive attitude that she has been able to maintain throughout her entire competitive career. At only fifteen, Alexandra suffered a long and trying ordeal but, at any rate, won her battle to represent the United States of America, proud of her heritage, proud of her ability, and prouder still of the great nation she was to represent.

After high school, Alexandra attended UCLA, where she earned a degree and became a track star, winning many competitions for that University. She also worked for a period of time as a personal representative in public relations for Muhammad Ali. Today, she owns and manages a large Health Resort in Belize, Central America and manufactures beauty and health products.



Alexandra Nicholson and her coach Bob Bollinger.



Future 1972 World Champions Paul Luxon (GBR) and Alexandra Nicholson posing with Marilyn Stieg (USA) and Jim Cartledge (USA) at the 1972 USTA Nationals.

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