



Courtesy of the Greater Merrimack Valley Convention and Visitors Bureau. Photographer: Jim Higgins.

Synchronized skating teams perform at a past Colonial Classic Competition. Colorful costumes combined with elegant formations exemplify the beauty of this sport. Lifts, jumps and skilled maneuvers demonstrate the athletes' strength and athleticism. The synchronization on the ice is impressive, requiring hours of intense practice. Repetitive block warm-ups and instant video play-back assessments help skaters refine each move. Synchronized skating is fun to watch, and also very competitive.

United Front

Synchronized Skating Teams to Compete in January
at the Colonial Classic in Lowell

by **Beth Daigle**

photos courtesy of **The Greater Merrimack Valley Convention
and Visitors Bureau. Photographer: Jim Higgins
and Hayden Synchronized Skating**

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The sound of whooshing blades gliding across smooth ice is as melodic as ocean waves breaking on the shore. The eight to 20 skaters that comprise a synchronized skating team aim to wow spectators with their athleticism and artistry.

Spectacular costumes, ballet-like movements and intricately orchestrated patterns add to the allure of the sport. Synchronized skating arrived on the scene in 1954, according to the U.S. Figure Skating organization, but it is still considered relatively new among the various types of competitive skating. It requires many of the same skills as freestyle, pairs and ice dancing, making it a formidable discipline.

Synchronized skating has its roots in Ann Arbor, Mich., where the first American team, the Hockettes, performed during intermissions at University of Michigan hockey games. The sport has grown significantly since then, and locally has become increasingly popular over the last 15 years.

Lexington, Mass., is home to the Haydenettes, one of the most successful senior-level synchronized skating teams in the history of the sport. This year, the Haydenettes won their 22nd gold medal at the annual U.S. Synchronized Skating Championships. Lynn Benson founded the Hayden Synchronized Skating teams in 1979, and today the teams are directed by Saga Krantz, a World Championship silver medalist, choreographer and coach from Finland. She is head coach and choreographer for the senior-level Haydenettes, the junior-level Lexettes and the novice-level Ice Mates.

“

I hope that we are going to be at the Olympics ... That is the way we are training and that is where our focus is right now. Even if these skaters aren't to make it to the Olympics, they want to make sure that the next generation will get there.

”

~ Saga Krantz

at UMass Lowell in the 31st annual Colonial Classic Synchronized Skating Competition Jan. 9 - 11, where all levels of the sport will be

“We have come far in such a short time. In just 50 years we've come to this super competitive place,” Krantz says. “These skaters need to be able to do jumps, spins and lifts, and I can tell that the future is going to be even more competitive.”

Hayden Synchronized Skating teams will be competing at the Tsongas Center

at UMass Lowell in the 31st annual Colonial Classic Synchronized Skating Competition Jan. 9 - 11, where all levels of the sport will be

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Leah Gens of the Hayden Synchronized Skating team, the Lexettes, performs as part of a flamenco-themed short program. The accompanying music was from the flamenco dance scene in the film "Mission Impossible II" starring Tom Cruise. The team's goal was to express an emotion of longing. This program contributed to the Lexettes' national championship title.

Courtesy Hayden Synchronized Skating



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showcased, from juvenile to masters.

Regardless of their level, the participants' dedication to the fundamentals of skating, fitness and teamwork is evident when a team hits the ice with grace and power.

"People enjoy it because of the beautiful costumes and the perfect unison; there is just something really amazing about that," Krantz says. "Element-wise, the lifts and intersections are also things that the spectators love to see. As a coach, those are the most demanding elements. To be able to pass through each other in different shapes with a lot of speed can be dangerous and very difficult."



Courtesy of the Greater Merrimack Valley Convention and Visitors Bureau. Photographer: Jim Higgins.

The group dynamic of synchronized skating fosters camaraderie and unity. The opportunity to develop strong relationships with other team members and fellow skaters is a big draw for the athletes who participate in the sport. Together, teams of skaters are able to showcase their talents, personalities and artistry.

In the U.S., there are about 525 registered synchronized skating teams, according to U.S. Figure Skating, and nearly 5,000 athletes participate each year in the synchronized skating sectional championships. The International Olympic Committee is considering the inclusion of synchronized skating in the 2018 Winter Olympics in Pyeongchang, South Korea.

"I hope that we are going to be at the Olympics," Krantz says. "That is the way we are training and that is where our focus

is right now. Even if these skaters [don't] make it to the Olympics, they want to make sure that the next generation will get there."

Leah Gens, 16, is junior at Andover High School and is in her sixth year of synchronized skating, currently as a member of the Lexettes. Her mother, Chie, recalls Leah wanting to skate in the Olympics since she was 9 years old. Like many synchronized skaters, Leah started out in singles, but after attending a skating show featuring the Haydenettes it wasn't long before she found herself joining a Hayden team. Traveling four times a week from Andover to Lexington for practices, not to mention competitions around the world, is a big commitment for Leah and her parents. Chie Gens supports her daughter because she values what the sport brings to Leah's life.

"I wanted her to try this because it is a team sport. Figure skating, if you are doing individual, is single and so lonely," Chie Gens says. "With synchro, they practice together and they compete together. It's like a sisterhood, and you learn from other people."

Leah has similar feelings about the team dynamic, but is also glad to have had her singles skating experience now that synchronized skating is using some of the more challenging elements that previously were expected only of the other disciplines.

"Because we have so many skaters on the ice at one time and we all have different abilities, strengths and weaknesses, it's definitely hard," Leah says. "But we make it work, and once we figure it all out, we have great chemistry on the ice." mvm

2015 Colonial Classic

Lowell, Mass. | January 9 - 11
Tsongas Center at UMass Lowell
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Hayden Synchronized Skating

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