



Health and Fitness

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Breaking barriers for love of the sport and love of life

By Saranac Hale Spencer

GUILDERLAND — Whisking over winter's frozen Lake Packanack, with a measured swing in her arm, Cornelia Sanders chased her childhood crush all the way to a place in history.

The young Olympian grew up a few blocks from the lake in Wayne, N. J., "and it froze," she said. "It had beautiful ice."

Dutchy, the boy next door and the object of her affection, skated the lake. "The local people skated on it and some not-so-local people skated on it," she said. "Case in point — the three guys I trained with."

Dutchy's father had told Olympic speed skaters, Ray Blum and Ken Henry, about Packanack's secluded expanse of smooth ice.

"I'd get out there and they'd treat me like one of them," Sanders said. They "let me do laps, let me train, let me do everything they did."

The foursome would clear a quarter-mile track with snow shovels and skate until the sun went down, Sanders said.

"I had this problem," she said. "Girls had figure skates."

The jagged teeth on the toes of her skates, meant to propel twirling skaters through the air, would bite into the ice as she sped, forcing her forward and cutting her chin, she said. "I wanted speed skates," she said, "and I got them for Christmas that year — my dad got a pair for \$10."

So, Sanders kept chasing Dutchy and learned to keep an even gait.

"There was a race one weekend — by age groups — and I went and I skated very well," she said. "I was hooked."

"The jackpot"

With the encouragement of her first win, Sanders, who was 12 or 13 at the time, went on to the Silver Skates competition, which she likened to the Golden Gloves.

"I got a chance to fly across Madison Square Garden in a pair of tights," she said with fresh amusement after over 50 years. It was one of the few races in which she was fouled, Sanders said. "I had wet pants — I thought it was hysterical. I got up laughing," she said, recalling that there had been much applause from the audience.

After finishing the Silver Skates competition with a reasonable showing, Sanders began competing regularly in races. She started picking up medals in 1958 and, "in 1959, I really hit the jackpot," Sanders said.

She broke a 43-year record in Saratoga and won the Lake Placid and Saranac Lake competitions, she said. "I won the New Jersey championship," she said. "That was at Packanack Lake that year."

Sanders was 14 when her father, who worked for a corrugated box company and came up with an idea to put a jingle on the inside of a Coke cap, asked if she'd be interested in trying out for the Olympics.

"I said 'yes' to that and promptly started regretting it," she said. "I was not a big breakfast eater and an Olympic training regimen included eating breakfast."

After she did well enough in the sectionals, regionals, and eastern seaboard trials to qualify for the Olympic trials in Powderhorn, Minn., a judge



Lacing up her skates in Squaw Valley at the 1960 Olympic Games, Cornelia Sanders, the youngest member of the first women's speed-skating team, is ready to compete.

decided that, at 15, Sanders was too young.

"So, despite the fact that I won two of three races — that's two-thirds in anybody's book — I was not certified to go."

A still unidentified onlooker contacted the Olympic Committee, which called her father on the Tuesday before the trials to be held over the weekend. After getting the call, he booked a flight to Minnesota on a mail plane and Sanders took all of her mid-semester exams before boarding.

Making the team

It was 26 below in Powderhorn and it was the first time that Sanders had lost the half-mile race — another skater had punched her in the nose. "I learned something," she said. "These are very hard girls."

All the hotels in town were filled, so Sanders bunked with one of those very hard girls.

When the trials started, she said, the rules were simple: The first was the shortest race and the first three finishers made the team, then, on each of the next three days, the distances increased, but only the winner made the team.

"The first day, I was third from last instead of top three," she said. On the next two races, the 1,000 and 1,500 meter, Sanders was fourth from last. So, on the 3,000 meter, she was "facing an all-or-nothing race."

Sanders skated around the track for almost two hours, until "my perspiration froze on me a half-inch thick," she said, and the next day she woke up, and "my father makes a big deal that I had steak and eggs for breakfast."

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By Jordan J. Michael

The Albany Pine Bush Preserve is one of 20 inland pine barrens in the world, sitting on the glacial lake of Albany. There are 18 miles of terrain to explore.

"It's a very unique area and its right in the Capital Region's

the winter months when the Pine Bush is covered in snow. "We have a full lineup of activities for February," said Etchison. "We want to get people out in the wilderness so we can build a connection between the Pine Bush and the people."

The winter lineup includes

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For the 3,000 meter, she was in the next-to-last pair to race around the quarter-mile track and the other skater was the number-one sprinter in the country. Sanders decided to just keep up with her and she could see that by the fifth lap, the sprinter was starting to wobble. She closed in and passed while the other skater collapsed. With two laps to go, she was a second away from the fastest time yet.

"I thought, 'A second is a long time, but so is two laps,'" she said. "I can make it up."

After the next lap, the announcer said she was even, and Sanders put her head down, "and steamed around that track," she said.

At the finish, she knew she had a good time, Sanders said, and "I whipped across the track and jumped into my father's arms."

She had made the first-ever

Olympic women's speed-skating team in 1960.

"Open, unassuming kid"

In Squaw Valley, Calif., Kathy Mulholland, her hard-drinking roommate who made the team in

moval couldn't keep up with the quarter-mile track. That and the coaching were the biggest obstacles at the games, Sanders said, since the first women's team shared the men's coaches.

**"I whipped across the track
and jumped into my father's arms."**

the first race, would sneak out at night to meet the Squaw Valley Marines, Sanders said.

Snow was falling 10 to 17 inches deep overnight, she said, and the Squaw Valley snow re-

"The coaches didn't know what to do with us," she said. In the following years, each team had its own coach, Sanders said.

"I was a very open, unassuming kid," Sanders said. "I wanted to meet lots of people."

A naturally nurturing soul, who grew up in a family of nine that hosted a series of invalids, Sanders was the only volunteer in the athletes' cafeteria to aid the Polish women's speed skating team, which had come down with "Montezuma's revenge" and spoke not a word of English. She put them on a rice, chicken, banana, and toast diet, which had them "under some control" after three days and eating protein after five, she said.

In a race later in the Games, a Polish skater beat Sanders in her strongest event. At the end of the race, she waited for Sanders and let her know that she wanted to meet at 2:30 in the cafeteria.

They met and she took Sanders to her room, where "she cut the patch right out of the front of her competition jersey and she gave me the patch and she gave me a very close, long hug and then she threw me out of her dormitory room."



Known as Pooch to friends and family, Cornelia Sanders stands with America's 1960 Olympic hockey team after its historic win over the Soviet Union. She got the nickname, that ended up sticking, in utero. During her mother's pregnancy, her parents came up with the code word so that when her father called home during his workday he could ask, "How's the pooch?" and his co-workers would think that he was only asking after a puppy.



The Enterprise — Saranac Hale Spencer

Cornelia Sanders's Olympic experience was not only remarkable for her place on the first-ever women's speed-skating team, but also for her genuine pleasure in meeting new people. Nearly five decades after the 1960 Olympic Games, Sanders flips through her scrapbook, filled with pictures of athletes from various countries, and recounts the friendships she made. Among them were three marriage proposals — from a Russian hockey player, a Swedish hockey player, and a Finnish skater. "I wasn't at all familiar with the politics of the green card," she said this week from her room in the Atria senior living complex in Guilderland.