

# **AROUND THE WORLD IN 35 DAYS WITH THE**

## **SEATTLE GYMNASTIC CLUB**

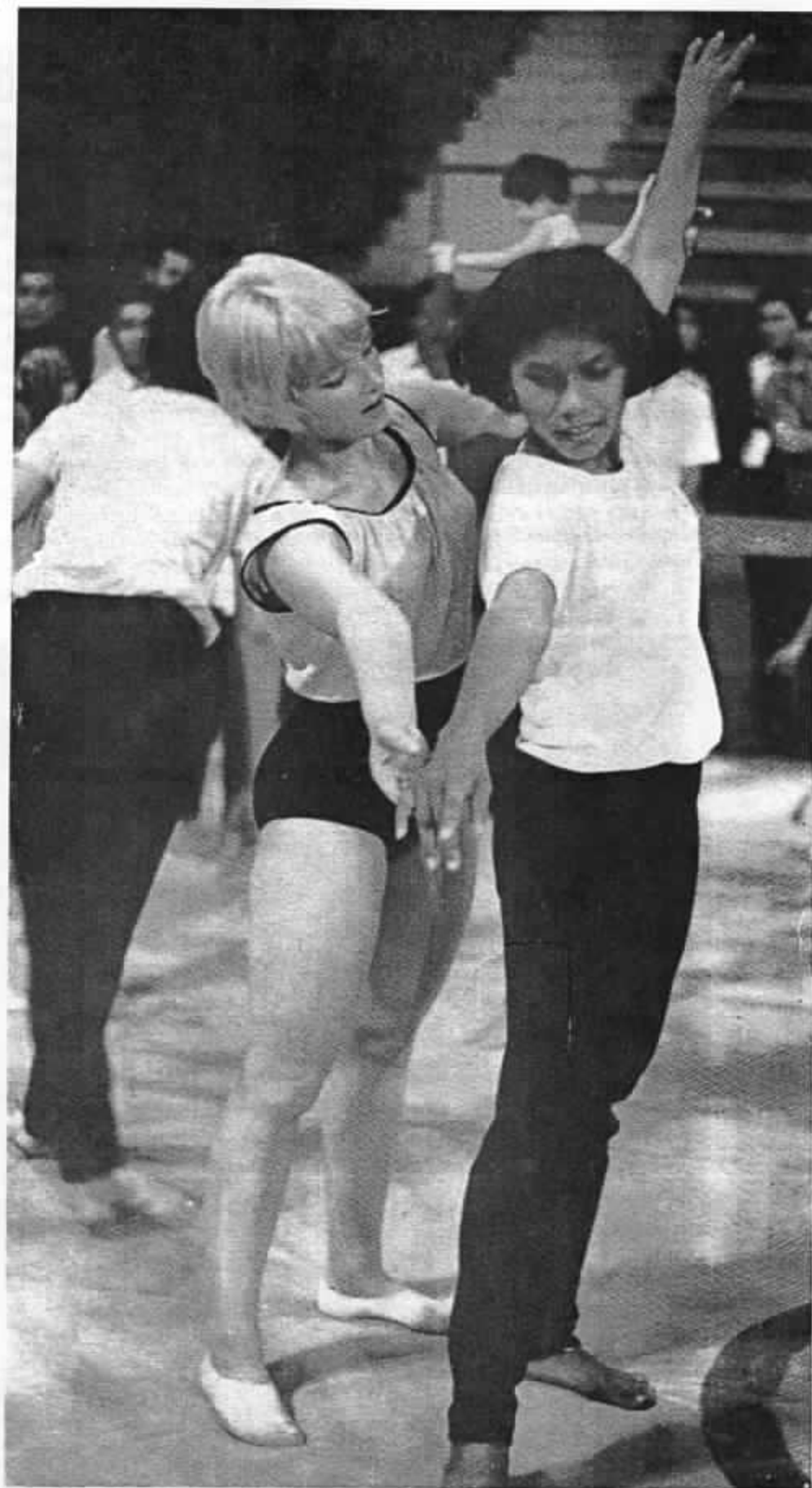
By  
Dr. Eric Hughes

The Seattle Gymnastic Club returned home on September 12th after spending five weeks touring Japan, Thailand, Singapore, Philippines, Taiwan and Hawaii. The "goodwill" tour was sponsored and financed primarily by the United States Department of State as a part of their Cultural Presentation Program. This international competition was approved by the Amateur Athletic Union of the United States.

The Seattle Gymnastic Club served as co-sponsor with the State Department and provided the funds for meals, hotels and miscellaneous expenses when these items were not provided by the local sponsors in the host countries. The Seattle Gymnastic Club (S.G.C.) was founded in 1961 to promote the sport of gymnastics in Western Washington and to raise money to send gymnasts to National gymnastic meets. Since 1961 the club has expanded its activities to include the sponsorship of visiting foreign teams in Seattle and tours such as this Southeast Asia tour. The S.G.C. is a combination of two well known Seattle gymnastic teams - the Seattle Y girls team and the Husky Gymnastic Club of the University of Washington. The tour group was composed of the following six women and eight men: Bo Bennett, Linda Bennett, Gunter Bohrmann, Barbara Cook, Jim David, Pauline David, Carol Elsner, Gary Finne, Mike Flansaas, Bob Hall, Yoshi Haysaki, Jean Hendeson, Charlie Peters, Peggy Rowen and Dr. Eric Hughes, gymnastic coach from the University of Washington.

The group left Seattle on August 9 and stopped in Tokyo for three days. This part of the tour was not arranged or financed by the State Department. It was an added attraction made possible

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*Linda Bennett instructing during a clinic in Bangkok.*

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because the best air route from Seattle to Bangkok, the first official stop on the tour, resulted in a stop in Japan. The three days were used to sightsee and visit gymnasiums where some of the top Japanese gymnasts train.

The main purpose of the tour was to create goodwill and develop friendship and understanding between the peoples of the United States and the countries visited. In each country a local sponsoring group arranged the schedule of activities and acted as host for the Seattle Gymnastic Club. These host groups were: Thailand, the National College of Physical Education; Singapore, the Singapore Amateur Gymnastic Association; Philippines, the Gymnastic Association of the Philippines; Taiwan, the Gym-

nastic Association of the Republic of China. Each of these groups arranged clinics, demonstrations, TV appearances as well as receptions, banquets, social functions, and sight-seeing tours. Members of the touring group had an opportunity to meet and mix with sport administrators, civic leaders, officials of the sponsoring organization, teachers, college students, gymnasts, and public school children. Because of the common interest in sports and gymnastics, friendships developed rapidly and any barriers imposed by language and differences in cultures seemed small indeed.

In the four countries officially scheduled on the tour activities included a total of thirteen clinics, seven demonstrations, five TV appearances and two

informal work-out sessions with local gymnasts.

The clinics varied greatly. In some cases they were formal presentations of teaching techniques, lead-ups, spotting methods, etc. to a large audience sitting in the bleachers. Several were participation type clinics in which school children were divided into small groups and were rotated from event to event to work directly with the visiting Americans. Several clinics were very informal in nature so that teachers and gymnasts could move about freely and get individual help from members of the S.G.C. who were stationed at the various pieces of equipment. At one clinic a group of children were assembled in the gym and were taught as in a regular physical ed-

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*Photo was taken on the palace steps in Thailand.*



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education class situation with a large group of teachers in the stands to observe the process. All of the clinics were planned jointly by Dr. Hughes and the host organization with the local leaders selecting the type that they believed would contribute the most to their gymnastic program. Attendance at clinics ranged from about 150 to over 2,500 in one city.

Demonstrations were planned to be entertaining and of interest to the general public as well as to gymnasts. The bulk of the program was a demonstration of competitive mens and womens gymnastics. Three clown members were presented, one on the trampoline, one on the tumbling mats and one novelty slapstick handbalancing act. The girls developed two modern gymnastic group numbers performed to music and one of the girls did a novelty acrobatic dance, utilizing two ordinary chairs as equipment, to jazz music. Several members of the group happened to be accomplished musicians and in many demonstrations musical numbers were included to add variety to the show.

The TV appearances varied greatly from short appearances on regular news

telecasts to full length two hour programs. Some of these shows were done live, others were taped to be used at a later date. The estimated viewing audience for many of these programs was huge. Several of the cities had only one TV channel and therefore somewhat of a captive audience. Television is very popular and during certain hours of the day huge audiences are obtained. Two shows presented by the S.G.C. were for an estimated audience of 1,400,000 while another was for approximately 800,000.

Newspaper coverage was tremendous. It is hard for us in the United States who have struggled for years to get reports in the papers (Seattle is an exception with good newspaper support for gymnastics) to understand the interest in the sport in some foreign countries, especially in the ones we visited where gymnastics is still in the embryo stage. Photographers and reporters followed our group throughout our tour taking photos of our clinics and social activities, as well as our arrival and departure from their city.

On one occasion 13 year old Peggy

Rowen, the youngest member of our group who happens to be a very attractive girl, had a total of 24 photographers gathered around the balance beam as she warmed up prior to a show. While they recorded Peggy on film we photographed the antics of the group gathered around the beam.

In spite of the excellent publicity, we did not always have a sell-out for our demonstrations. Audiences ranged from about 2,000 to 7,000 in halls that seated up to 9,000 people in one city. In Taiwan, however, the gyms were full. For one of our performances people who were unable to get in stayed outside throughout our performance and created so much noise by pounding on the doors and yelling that it was difficult for the audience inside to hear the explanation of the demonstration over the public address system.

During this tour members of the Seattle Gymnastic Club had opportunity to observe the staff of our American Embassies and the United States Information Service (U.S.I.S.) in action. END

*Photo shows: L to R: Carol Elsner, Peggy Rowen, Jean Henderson and Linda Bennett.*





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