

# WHO REALLY INVENTED THE "FLAIR"?



*The Thomas version*

by Dave Stoldt

Who invented the "flair" on pommel horse? If one reads most of today's literature or listens to the "informed" commentators on television's expanding amount of coverage, one might be inclined to accept the myth that Kurt Thomas invented the flying-legged scissor break which has become the symbol of gymnastics in America.

There is an injustice buried in this myth. It is time the readers are reminded that the flair on horse has roots which reach way back in the line of outstanding American pommel horse specialists. The flair began with the amazing horse specialists in the early 1970's. Ted Marcy was using a shortened version of the flair as a college freshman at Stanford in 1972. The  $\frac{3}{4}$  of a circle giant leg split was amazing for a college student and Ted had been using it for two years in high school! The more developed "Marcy Break" was the subject of the May 1975 "GYMNAST" centerfold after the second of three NCAA titles. Impressive indeed.

At the same time as Marcy, L.J. Larson of Arizona State was performing his own version of the flaired scissor break. Other specialists of that time were developing similar moves. Although they were not as involved as today's flairs, these magnificent earlier works laid the foundation for the variations to follow.

1974 to the present revealed many talented specialists developing the flair. Chuck Walter, also an NCAA champ, popularized the wide-open flaired looparound-undercut. Northern Illinois' Mike Burke two-time NCAA champ, was heralded for his scissor break, so quick and dynamic that people began to call it a "Helicopter". During the same period, Joel Ulloa, Cal State's pommel horse legend and AAU champion added a moore in between flaired circles. This was documented in the Feb. 1977 issue of "GYMNAST" while Thomas was still doing a simple two-circle flair.

Other outstanding gymnasts noted for their flairs of outstanding amplitude or difficulty were Blaine Dahl, LSU, 1974-1978; Curt Rodgers,

Oregon 1973-77; Tony Hanson, SIU; Gary Beasley, Oklahoma; Tom Truedson, Oregon; Dave Schieble, SIU and others. These innovators have given rise to so many types of flairs that the new performers are too many to mention. However, since 1977 we have seen many flairs of better execution or high difficulty than Thomas'. There have been flaired back-moores, bailies, russians, and hops since 1977. The double circle flair that Thomas first went international with is now just an exercise for our top specialists and a flair with a moore or two, or travels, is an intermediate step to the top specialists' final goals.

Of course, honor and respect should be accorded Thomas' invention or adaptation of the flair to Floor Exercise. That is truly an original as well as difficult skill. On Pommel Horse, however, Thomas brought forth his powerful and artistic rendition of an existing move into international competition. He was the first to do so and the move is justly named the "Thomas Flair". Unfortunately, its real inventors are long since forgotten.

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**ON THE COVER**—Natalia Shaposhnikova  
at the Olympics. She placed first in the vault  
and third in balance beam and floor exercise.

(Photo by Don Morley)

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