

the Outrigger

MAY 1997



Published by the Outrigger Canoe Club for Members and Guests at Home and Abroad

Aileen Soule Is Still Making Waves

By Barbara Del Piano

A year in the life of Aileen Riffin Soule, America's oldest woman Olympic Gold Medalist.

Between interviews and the photo session, there was barely time to keep the hair appointment and meet with the wardrobe mistress. Thank heavens for the aide, constantly at her side, reminding her of the schedule and escorting her from one appointment to the next. The rehearsal was over and now to the make-up department for a final touch-up before making an appearance at three cocktail parties and the formal dinner in the Waldorf Astoria's main ball room.

A day in the life of a fashion model? Television actress? Super athlete? Actually, Aileen Riffin Soule has done it all. She was an honored guest at the annual dinner of the Women's Sports Foundation in October, 1995, where guests paid \$10,000 a table to meet and mingle with the glittering array of sports heroines which included, along with Soule, celebrities such as Monica Seles, Martina Navratilova, Chris Evert, Kristi Yamaguchi, Susan Butcher, and Bonnie Blair, to

name a few.

With the 100th anniversary of the Olympic games fast approaching, Olympic women pioneers were the special honorees, and who, more than Aileen Riffin Soule, fits the bill?

The 90-year old former Olympic Gold Medalist was on the go for an entire year, making 10 trips to the mainland to be acknowledged and honored for her role as a pioneer in women's Olympic competition. Through it all, she managed to keep up with scores of athletes a fraction of her age, exhibiting a phenomenal sense of enthusiasm and joie de vivre.

During the past 12 months, Soule was featured in articles in the *New York Times*, and appeared on the front page of the *Chicago Tribune* and the cover of *Parade Magazine*.

The *Dallas Morning News*, *Time* magazine, *Friends*, and even the *National Enquirer* paid tribute to her achievements. She was a featured guest on one of the most popular TV talk shows and appeared on an NBC Live news broadcast.

Time can never erase Soule's mark in the history of the Olympic games. As a 14-year old diver in Antwerp, Belgium, in 1920, she

was the first American woman ever to win a Gold Medal, and the youngest as well.

Returning to the Paris Olympics in 1924, she competed in both diving and swimming, and won a medal in both competitions. As the first person to win a medal in two different sports, Soule accomplished a feat that has been repeated only once in Olympic history.

One of the special honors Soule received last year was her selection as one of 12 "Ambassadors" chosen by the Avon Corporation to travel around the country making public appearances, representing America's outstanding "Olympic women". Other sports legends chosen for this honor were Nadia Comaneci, Jackie Joyner Kersee, Shannon Miller and Janet Evans.

A photo session for advertising and promotional purposes was arranged in December of '95 in New York City. When Soule reluctantly admitted that her allergy to cold weather would prevent her from going, Avon sent an entire crew of 12 to the West Coast and rescheduled the "shoot" in Los Angeles.

The resulting ad that covered

two pages in *Vanity Fair* featured a petite and glamorous Soule with several he-man types provided by the Conover Modeling Agency. Soule affectionately refers to them as the "six hunks". The caption read, "Guess which one's the Olympic gold medalist in springboard diving?"

In March of 1996, Soule again flew off, this time to the University of Indiana in Bloomington, for an Olympic Reunion, held in combination with the Olympic swimming trials. Each day and evening, the former Olympians were introduced, according to the year of their competition. As the only member of the 1920 team, Soule was in a class of her own.

With only a few weeks back home to catch her breath and change wardrobes, Soule was off again to New York City in early May for Avon's luncheon to kick-off its national Olympic publicity campaign. The event, held in the Rainbow Room at Rockefeller Center, included more press conferences, interviews and photo ops at the company's corporate offices on 5th Avenue and 57th Street.

While involved in all this activity, Soule, amazingly, was training for the National Masters



Aileen Soule receives a proclamation from Governor Cayetano.



Aileen shows off her Gold Medal in the OCC Lobby.

Short Course Swimming Championship. After a brief return to Honolulu, she was off again to Cupertino, California, where she competed in the 90-94 age bracket for the first time. She entered six events, and not only won them all, but set six national records.

Later in the month, another trip brought Soule back to the West Coast where she made a series of appearances and talked to a variety of audiences, mostly youngsters, in both San Francisco and Los Angeles.

During a brief spell in Honolulu, Soule was royally feted. She appeared on the poster of Hawai'i's Olympians produced by the State Department of Health for Hawai'i's school children, and was a guest of honor at the "Zolympics".

Much sought-after as a guest at various luncheons and dinners, her social calendar was always filled during the brief times she was in town. Governor Ben Cayetano presented her with a special award at a breakfast at Washington Place and the Quarterback Club of Honolulu honored her at one of their monthly luncheon meetings.

The end of May found Soule at a chilly sunrise ceremony at the summit of Kilauea, along with

many past and present Olympians, as Hawai'i held its own kick-off for the Olympics. Runners lit their torches from the volcano's fire and ran down the slopes in a burst of Olympic fever.

Barely catching her breath, Soule was whisked off to Chicago in early June to be a featured guest on the Oprah Winfrey television show, along with Greg Louganis and Nadia Comaneci. The show's producers gave her the red carpet treatment with first class air travel, superb hotel accommodations, limousine service and a free day which she opted to spend at the Chicago Institute of Art.

The pace quickened as the opening of the Olympic Games drew closer. Avon staged an opening in late June for its exhibit in Atlanta called "The Olympic Woman" and all the "Ambassadors" were on hand for the highly publicized event.

After another whirlwind trip home, Soule was back in Atlanta for the Opening Ceremonies of the 100th anniversary of the modern Olympic games. She was so much in demand that Nissen Corporation cut a deal with Avon to share her personal appearances.

The only woman featured at

the Nissen exhibit, Soule rubbed elbows with the likes of Bruce Jenner, Rafer Johnson, Bob Mathias and Bill Toomey. Visitors were lined up for blocks to view the outstanding exhibit which featured a wall listing the name of every American athlete who ever competed in the Olympics, and to get the autograph of the living sports legends present.

Thanks to her two corporate sponsors, Soule attended many of the competitions where she was provided with good seats, food and transportation and an introduction to President Clinton and his family. She was recognized at the Xerox company's dinner for the 100 most outstanding Olympians as the oldest living woman competitor. (Hawai'i weight lifters Peter George, also an OCC member, and Tommy Kono were among the 100.)

In the midst of the mayhem, Soule managed to keep in shape and train for the World Masters Long Course Swimming Championship held in August at the University of Michigan at Ann Arbor. After yet another brief trip home, Soule traveled to Michigan to enter the competition where she came in first in the five events she entered and again set five new world records.

Soule is now back in

During 1996, Aileen was an Olympic Woman.



Honolulu, trying to catch up with the huge amount of fan mail she has received, as well as sort out the bags and boxes of photographs, awards, clippings, programs and other memorabilia accumulated during this very exhausting but memorable year in her life. But she's not taking it too easy. Back on a rigorous training schedule, Soule plans to compete in the Pan Pacific Masters Swimming Championship in Lahaina in June of 1997. ☐



The youngest Olympic champion, Aileen received her trophy from King Albert for fancy diving.