

The Clerk's Black History Series

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Dianne Patrice Durham

(June 17, 1968 – February 4, 2021)

“First Black U.S. National Gymnastics All-Around Champion”

Dianne Patrice Durham was born June 17, 1968, in Gary, Indiana, to Ural and Calvinita. Her father was a director at a steel mill and her mother was a schoolteacher. Dianne started gymnastics in 1971 at the age of three, training at Wanda Tomasi's gymnastics facility in Merrillville, Indiana. Dianne's talents were on full display when she won the Junior Elite All-Around title at the U.S. Championships in 1981. With the encouragement of coach Tomasi, who recognized her Olympic-caliber potential, Dianne traveled to Houston where she was chosen as one of six initial gymnasts selected for the Béla and Márta Károlyi training program. They were the coaching duo responsible for the success of 1978 Olympic champion, Nadia Comaneci.

Dianne's family soon relocated to Houston and Dianne began dominating every meet she attended. In 1982, she defended her Junior Nationals All-Around title and tied for first place in her first international event at the United States Gymnastics Federation international invitation.

In 1983, she won the senior All-Around title at the US National Championships, the first African American in women's gymnastics to take this title. She also won the individual titles for bars, floor, and vault, becoming the first American woman to execute a full-twisting layout Tsukahara on vault.

Dianne was proud of her accomplishments, but only as a step in the path to the Olympic Games. Unfortunately, Dianne suffered knee and ankle injuries that kept her from competing in the meets that were necessary for consideration into the Olympics. Prior to these injuries, Dianne was considered an obvious selection for

the 1984 Summer Olympics. Coach Károlyi argued feverishly on her behalf with the USA Gymnastics Federation, citing her national title and her record, but to no avail. Dianne had missed the opportunity to possibly become the first black woman to receive a medal in the Olympics. Years later, that honor would go to Betty Okino and Dominique Dawes as part of the bronze-medal winning U.S. team in 1992.

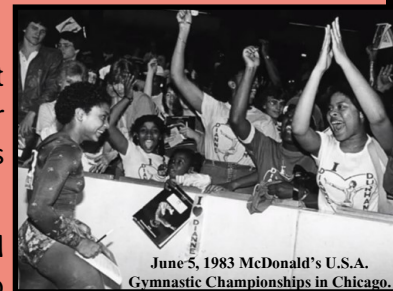
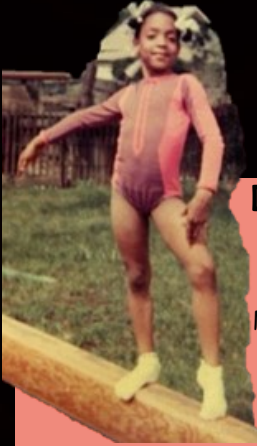
Dianne retired from competition in 1985, at the age of 19, and began teaching alongside Béla and Márta Károlyi in Houston and later at the University of Illinois at Chicago. She performed in professional shows and continued inspiring girls as a coach and motivational speaker.

In 1996, Dianne opened her own gym, Skyline Gymnastics, in Chicago.

She continued teaching for another 25 years while also serving as a National Judge for USA Gymnastics.

In 2017, Dianne was inducted into the Hall of Fame for Region 5 Gymnastics - the area covering the mid-west.

On February 4, 2021, Dianne Patrice Durham died after a short battle with an illness, leaving behind Tom, her husband of 25 years. She was 52 years old.



June 5, 1983 McDonald's U.S.A. Gymnastic Championships in Chicago.

