

## Aileen Riggin (USA)



Aileen Riggin was not only the youngest American to win an Olympic Gold medal, winning the springboard diving event at the 1920 Olympic Games, she was also America's smallest Olympic winner at only 4 feet 7 inches and 65 pounds. At the 1924 Summer Olympics in Paris, she became the only woman to win medals in both diving and swimming, winning the silver medal in springboard diving and the bronze medal in the 100 meter backstroke.

If no woman started earlier as an amateur champion, certainly no woman pro stayed on the top longer. Riggin turned pro in 1926, played the Hippodrome 3 weeks, and toured with Ederle 6 months after her Channel swim. She toured the world in 1930, including the Swedish World's Fair, worked steadily, including many Hollywood pictures, helped interview, organize and coach Billy Rose's first Aquacade in which she also starred in the 1937 Cleveland Exposition. She was one of America's first female sports reporters and as a journalist, her articles appeared in *Colliers*, *Good Housekeeping* and other national magazines.

As a ballerina, she appeared in slow motion films shot by Thomas Edison. In 1922 and 1923, she performed in some of the first underwater and slow motion swimming and diving films for Grantland Rice.

Gertrude Ederle was expected to win three gold medals at the 1924 Olympic Games. Instead she returned to New York City from Paris with only one gold, for a relay, and two bronze medals in her individual events.

In 1925, "Trudy" set her sights on an even greater challenge - to be the first woman to swim across the English Channel. Although she failed in her first attempt, she returned to the shores of Cape Gisnez, in France, on August 6, 1926 and this time she succeeded. Not only did Trudy do what was thought impossible for a woman, but she beat the men's record by nearly 2 hours and proved that women were not physically inferior to men or incapable of strenuous activity.

When Ederle returned home, she was welcomed by over two million people and the biggest ticker-tape parade in the history of New York City. Mayor James J. Walker likened her feat to Moses parting the Red Sea, Caesar crossing the Rubicon and Washington crossing the Delaware. She went on to play herself in a movie ("Swim Girl, Swim"), toured the vaudeville circuit and was a star in Billy Rose's Aquacade. She was one of America's first female sports idols, met President Coolidge and had a song and a dance step named for her.

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