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SPECIAL:

A LOOK INSIDE
THE RAMS
TRAINING CAMP



SPORTS ^{OF A} LIFETIME

FROM AGE 7 TO AGE 84, EACH OF THESE LOCAL SPORTS HEROES IS CULTIVATING AN ATHLETIC **PASSION THAT'S BUILT TO LAST.**

BY ELIZABETH TURNER PHOTOGRAPHS BY GARY MOSS

What if you could find the sports version of your soul mate—an athletic endeavor that taps into your talents, feeds your passion, and keeps you on your toes for the long haul? The people on the following pages have found just that. From a precocious little slugger to an octogenarian tennis champ, these local athletes have found the magic. Some are strictly enthusiasts, others have parlayed their passions into careers. Every one has achieved remarkable accomplishments, **all for the love of a sport.**



**THE PITCHING
PRODIGY**
CHRISTIAN HAUPT, 7
Thousand Oaks

In 2012, Christian Haupt became the youngest person to throw out the first pitch at a Major League Baseball game. He was 4 years old. The baseball-obsessed preschooler was already riding a wave of Internet fame after Adam Sandler's casting director spotted the boy's exceptional ball-handling skills on YouTube, and Sandler promptly cast Haupt in a baseball scene for the 2012 film *That's My Boy*.

Since the age of 2, the gifted left-hander has dreamed of pitching professionally for the Dodgers. "I think Christian has excelled at baseball because of his passion," says Haupt's mom, Cathy Byrd. "Malcolm Gladwell always recommends 10,000 hours to master any skill, and Christian literally played 8 to 10 hours a day when he was little. He played baseball morning, noon, and night."

These days, Haupt is rocking the Thousand Oaks Little League and Simi Youth Baseball PONY circuits, playing on the Simi Patriots 7-and-under all-star team and gearing up for two weeks of baseball camp this July in Cooperstown, New York. He's also rubbing shoulders with Dodgers ambassador and former World Series-winning manager Tommy Lasorda, who regularly drops in on Haupt's Little League games to check on his progress.



**THE SHARP-
SHOOTER**
BAILEY CLARK, 15
Shell Beach

Archery up-and-comer Bailey Clark picked up her first bow and arrow reluctantly, at a family-style summer camp at age 13. "I didn't want to do it, but my mom convinced me to try it," says Clark. "I pulled back this bow, and something just clicked. I fell in love with it right away."

Eventually she was shooting three to four days a week at Central Coast Archery (centralcoastarchery.com) in San Luis Obispo. Clark progressed from traditional bare bow to Olympic recurve shooting, which involves "sights and stabilizers and a lot of extra gadgets on the bow that make it really precise," she explains.

At last year's state competitions, Clark placed second in her age group for bare bow and third for Olympic recurve. She now ranks 11th in the nation for her shooting style. "I want to be a serious competitor," Clark says. "A lot of colleges have archery teams, so I'm looking into those. I'd like to continue through high school and college and maybe even after that. And once the whole competition thing calms down, I'll still be shooting. I want to teach it to my kids when I have kids. I want them to fall in love with it the way I did."

THE PRO CYCLIST

ALEXIS RYAN, 21
Ventura

Cycling is a family affair for Alexis Ryan. The nine-time national cycling champion grew up being *dragged* to her older siblings' bike races. "I was kind of just along for the ride. I don't think I truly enjoyed racing until I was around 15 or 16 and started maturing a bit," she says.

The adventure of cycling eventually hooked her. "You can go on a five-hour ride and see so much more than if you were in a car," says Ryan. "You get to see a lot of the world by bike."

Following in sister Kendall's footsteps, Ryan turned pro at age 18 and now rides for the Canyon/SRAM (wmncycling.com) professional road-racing team, which means spending half the year racing around Europe. When back at home in Ventura, she loves to ride up Highway 33. "There's great riding around here, but I think Ojai is my favorite area—Ojai and Santa Barbara and around Lake Casitas—because it's really quiet, and there aren't too many cars," she says. "I see myself riding as long as I live. Anyone can do it. I know 80-year-olds who ride, and they still enjoy themselves."





THE LUNCH-HOUR BODYSURFER

BRETT TEMPLEMAN, 40
Ojai

Ojai native Brett Templeman started bodysurfing almost as soon as he was able to swim. Now a trial lawyer in Oxnard, he often spends his lunch hour bodysurfing Ventura's South Jetty, the same spot where his dad first taught him the sport when he was 4 or 5. "It's one of those things where if the waves are good, I'll bodysurf almost every day," says Templeman. "The feeling of being on a wave—there's nothing else like it."

All those saltwater lunch breaks paid off big in 2014, when Templeman won the World Bodysurfing Championships in Oceanside. "That contest is something I've been doing almost every year since I was 12," he says. "And I'd done well before, but I'd never won the whole thing before."

The social and family connection is a big part of the sport's appeal for Templeman. "My dad got me into bodysurfing. He's still into it, and he's 74 now," he says. "My brother is into it. A lot of the guys I grew up with—we all do it. That interaction makes it really special for me."



**THE MARTIAL ARTS
PIONEER**
GRACIELA CASILLAS, 59
Oxnard

At the age of 15, Graciela Casillas viewed Tae Kwon Do as a rare opportunity to get out of the house. Raised in a strict Catholic family in Oxnard, she jumped at the chance to take free classes with her local church group.

“The minute I started training I realized I loved it,” she says. “This was something I could go home and practice in my backyard. I could become really good at something that relied completely on my own physical and mental skills.”

Five years later, Casillas became the first athlete to hold world titles in both boxing and kickboxing. Trained in an array of martial arts, she won the World Karate Association bantamweight championship in 1981 and the Filipino stick fighting championship in 2006.

After retiring from martial arts competition, she developed her own eclectic self-defense program called *shen chun do*, which means, “the way of the warrior spirit.” She teaches it at the Casillas Martial Arts Academy in Oxnard. “I’ve always been active, and I’ve never stopped training,” she says. “I’ve continued to evolve my own program.”

THE SWIMMING LEGEND

JIM McCONICA, 65
Ventura

Virtually unstoppable in the water, Jim McConica may be best known for winning two gold medals and one silver at the 1971 Pan American Games in Cali, Colombia, and setting a world relay record in the process. Now one of the top Masters swimmers in the world, he broke five world records in his age group in 2015 alone.

“During my collegiate days my best race was the 200-yard freestyle,” says McConica. “As I’ve gotten older I’ve gotten better at the long-distance stuff.”

Channel swimming has become a specialty: He’s done the English Channel, the Catalina Channel, and both the 12.4-mile route from Anacapa to Oxnard and the 19-mile stretch from Santa Cruz Island to Oxnard in the Santa Barbara Channel.

“The wonderful thing about the last four or five years is I’ve been training with friends who have all done channels. We all train side by side, and we go out in the ocean together,” he says.

McConica swims six mornings a week at the Ventura Aquatic Center unless he’s prepping for a channel swim, in which case he might swim a six-mile stretch off Zuma Beach before he starts his shift there as a lifeguard.





THE TENNIS LIFER

BOB ISENBERG, 84
Thousand Oaks

Bob Isenberg has been swinging a tennis racket for more than seven decades. The retired educator started playing in junior high and won the Junior College Eastern Conference Singles Championship two years in a row while attending San Bernardino Valley College.

But his proudest tennis achievements came much later, when he captured two United States Tennis Association (USTA) doubles championships, which earned him two gold balls, in the 70-and-older and 75-and-older competitions in 2003 and 2006. He's also picked up two silver and three bronze balls along the way.

A longtime member of Sunset Hills Country Club in Thousand Oaks, Isenberg still plays two to four times a week. In fact, he and wife Betty have been the lead coordinators of the USTA Ventura County league since the 1990s.

"Tennis is great competition. It keeps you in shape, and it keeps your mind clear. And you make great friends," Isenberg notes. "There isn't a better sport in my mind. You don't need a full team. All you need is another person or three, and you can play it all your life." ♦