

Southington Sports Hall of Fame

Perfect 10

Kristy Dougan launched a Southington sports dynasty

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Kristy Dougan steadied herself on the diving board and waited for the signal from officials. She had her back to the pool. Fans and coaches held their breath. Dougan hadn't performed a single dive as she rehabbed her fractured ankle during the regular season, but here she was at the state meet, ankle taped, and waiting patiently.

Nothing could slow Southington's all-American diver. Over the course of her high school career, Dougan suffered shoulder injuries that typically strike baseball players, fractures, bumps, and bruises, but when the competition began Dougan left it all behind.

Hall of Fame

With a small skip she vaulted into the air and flipped one and a half times in a perfect pike position before slipping into the water with barely a ripple across the pool's surface. Her ankle was taped and throbbing, but Dougan was nearly perfect. Despite obstacles that would have ended most careers, Dougan was on her way to her second state open title.

"She never let anything faze her. In diving, one little thing can throw you off, but I never saw that happen one time in her whole career," said former Lady Knight swimming and diving coach Jay Dubinsky. "She was mentally tough. Her dives were extremely clean, but it all came from her dedication, her focus, and her hard work in practice."

Nobody worked harder than Dougan, and nothing could stop her once competition began. She battled through surgeries and fractures that would have stopped

most athletes. She overcame obstacles that would end most careers, and posted better scores with injuries than her competition could do with perfect health.

And Dougan did it with a smile and a wave to the judges.

"I had to become more creative with my routines, and the struggle made me appreciate the sport even more," she said. "It was like a new project for me. As time went on I became more comfortable and my scores reflected that. I felt a good amount of pressure but just kept calm and did my best time in and time out."

Southington High School was already established as a leader in women's sports when Dougan entered the high school in 2004, and the club gymnast never set out to be a pioneer. In fact, she opted out of high school gymnastics as a freshman because that's what top level gymnasts were expected to do at the time.

But when Hall edged Southington in a controversial finish at the Class L gymnastics meet at the end of her freshman year, Dougan decided to throw her hat into the ring. The following year Dougan joined the high school team, along with an influx of club gymnasts, and the state never knew what hit them.

In a sport measured by tenths and hundredths, the 2005 Lady Knight gymnasts shattered the team record at the state meet by five points. They cruised past their opposition in the state meet by double digit points, and Dougan led the charge. As a sophomore she rallied for the all-around title at the Class L championship, the state open, and the New England meet—a feat that has never been duplicated by any other Lady Knight.

"If you made a mistake, Kristy



took advantage of it," said former Lady Knight gymnastics coach Byron Knox. "One of the things that Kristy brought to the team was her consistency. She didn't have that high-flash, superdynamic routine, but she made you work if you wanted to beat her. She was the epitome of good defense. She wasn't going to give anything away."

When her opponent slipped up at the state open by missing a pass on the floor, Dougan responded with a nearly perfect floor routine to capture the title. She danced across the mat and the beam like a ballerina on the stage. Dougan never slipped. She rarely stumbled, and her scores are the proof. In three seasons with the Knights, Dougan rallied for six Class L titles in the all-around, beam, bars, and floor. She battled for three state open titles and five New England championships.

When the Knights needed a lift, they'd turn to their ace, and Dougan never let them down. She'd tweak routines, add skills, and do whatever was needed to secure the necessary score.

"It was about staying focused and relaxed," she said. "I tried to compete smart. If I wanted to change a skill or combination in the last minute, I did. The key was always making sure my start value was at the closest possible to a 10.0, then executing with minimal error."

Of course, there was a price for her efforts. As she continued to push herself further, her body began to break down. First came the shoulder surgery, then came the fracture. Dougan was not able

to defend her all-around title, but she continued to compete in whatever events she could for her team. The medals kept coming and the Knights kept winning, and Dougan said that was all that mattered.

"I knew I probably would never match my sophomore year, but the scores didn't matter to me," she said. "I was in love with the sport, and anything I could do just to compete was good enough for me. My determination led me to come back as strong as possible for my junior and senior years."

She was never able to compete in the all-around again, but she continued to dominate whenever she competed. As a junior, she captured state titles on beam and floor on her way to a New England title on beam. As a senior, she defended her beam title and added a New England title in the floor competition as the Knights rallied for a New England record (152.825) that still stands after almost a decade.

Dougan's teams are the only ones that have even come close.

"It was so special for all of us. The way we came together was beautiful. We changed the way of high school gymnastics throughout the state by not just having one leader, but by all being leaders and motivators for one another," she said. "I knew we left a great mark with our accomplishments. I hope our success inspired those in the following years to achieve greatness."

If that's all she did in high school Dougan would have left an indelible mark on the program, but her efforts in the fall were just as

impressive as her winter showcase. Diving has never been the driving force for Southington swim teams because there is no diving board at home meets, but Dougan wasn't about to let that stop her.

She qualified for the postseason during road trips. She had to travel across the state for practice and competition, but Dougan rallied for the Class LL title as a junior. She scored state open championships as a junior and senior. She was named as an all-American after her junior year and still holds the school record for six dives (227 points) and 11 dives (374.75).

"When you go back through our history at the high school, I don't think that there's anybody that can compare to her as a diver," said Dubinsky. "We had some good divers come in, but she just stepped it up and took it to the next level. She just out-performed everybody that she went up against."

That's why the Southington Sports Hall of Fame selection committee couldn't wait decades to induct Dougan into the local hall of fame. It simply wouldn't be complete without Southington's youngest inductee. On Thursday, Nov. 14, Dougan was honored in an induction ceremony at the Aqua Turf in Plantsville.

"She's the first gymnast, and we couldn't ask for a better spokesperson for our program," said Knox. "I'm really happy that she's being recognized. I remember her romping around the gym with diapers on, and then she was the best in the state. It was an amazing career."



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Inside the Numbers

•2007 Observer Athlete of the Year

Gymnastics

- Only SHS gymnast to capture a Class L, State Open, and NE title in the same year (2005).
- Holds SHS record for beam (9.825).
- All-Conference (2005, 2006, 2007)
- Captain (2007)
- 6 Class L titles—All-Around (2005), Beam (2005, 2006, 2007), Bars (2005), Floor (2006).
- 3 State Open titles—All-Around (2005), Beam (2005, 2006).
- 5 New England titles—All-Around (2005), Beam (2006, 2007), Floor (2005, 2007).

Diving

- Holds SHS record for 6 dives (227).
- Holds SHS record for 11 dives (374.75).
- All-American (2006).
- All-State (2006, 2007).
- All-Conference (2005, 2006, 2007).
- Class LL champion (2005).
- State Open champion (2005, 2006).