



HIGH SCHOOL SPORTS

Miami Supersonics jump-rope team displays breathtaking dexterity

BY WALTER VILLA
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Jumping rope goes back several centuries to ancient Egypt and China — in essence, for as long as there’s been rope.

But the activity, which was brought to the U.S. in the 1600s by Dutch settlers, has been transformed rather recently into an intensely competitive sport, and jump-rope teams such as the Miami Supersonics feature incredible hand-eye-foot coordination as well as breathtaking speed and dexterity.

The Supersonics have won at least one national title for 10 straight years. Most recently, on July 28, four Supersonics team members — Christopher Rosario, 18; Daniella French, 17; Carolina Socorro, 16; and Dylan Biliki, 16 — won the annual AAU Junior Olympics competition in Detroit, breaking the Double Dutch Team Speed Relay record.

Rosario, who is the Supersonics’ oldest competitor, can make 184 jumps — 92 on each foot — in 30 seconds.

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“Chris is one of the fastest kids in the country,” Supersonics coach Dillon Bethell said of Rosario, a 6-1, 160-pound senior at the School for Advanced Studies Wolfson Campus. “He’s electric.”

But Bethell said another of his students, 12-year-old Jake Amster, has even more potential. Amster is No. 1 in the nation in his age group, and he has the double-under record with 82 jumps in 30 seconds.

And Namiya Crespo, a 20-year-old former Miami Palmetto High student who is now in college, competed on the U.S National Jump Rope Team last year, traveling to Sweden where the Americans finished second in the world speed relay, trailing only Hungary.



So how did the Supersonics get so good?

A lot of the credit goes to 42-year-old Bethell, who became a huge advocate for the sport after initially being a huge skeptic.

A football and baseball player at NCAA Division III Greensboro College in his younger days, Bethell was a physical education teacher at Miami’s Sunset Elementary 18 years ago when a bunch of 8-year-olds changed his perspective.

“Five little third-grade girls wanted me to teach them jump-rope,” Bethell said. “They had a jump-rope club before, but the teacher left. They asked me, and I said, ‘No.’

“But they were persistent. They asked me every day for months until I gave in. The next day, we started, and the girls were there 15 minutes early, warming up.

“I said, ‘OK, I need to do a little more investigating about this sport.’ ”

While doing his research, Bethell came across a coach named John Swan, whom he called “the godfather of jump rope” in Florida.

Up to that point, Bethell had thought jump rope to be a girls’ sport. But after he saw what Swan’s all-boys’ team could do, his mind was sufficiently blown.

Bethell learned that the rope — in the hands of a strong athlete — could slice the air at speeds of approximately 75 miles per hour. He learned that jump-rope is a sport with competitive teams in 30 nations — just 10 short of applying for Olympic status. And he learned that there are about 10,000 competitive jump-rope athletes worldwide.

“I asked (Swan) if I could bring my camcorder, and I recorded what his boys were doing,” Bethell said. “At that point, I started to absorb everything they were doing.”



The Miami Supersonics jump-rope team coached by Dillon Bethell, center, displays incredible hand-eye-foot coordination as well as breathtaking speed and dexterity. Photo provided to the Miami Herald

Supersonics Jump Rope



Today, with the availability of YouTube, it's much easier to find out that a jump-rope competition consists of two basic categories: speed and freestyle events.

In speed events, judges count — and they do so very quickly — how many jumps a competitor makes on his or her right foot. In double-unders, the rope passes twice each jump, and that goes three times for triple-unders.

In freestyle, judges assess the creativity of the athletes, who perform choreographed routines that include back-flips, somersaults and hand-stands.

At the AAU Junior Olympics, which is for athletes 22 and younger, competitors contorted their bodies in a constant battle to impress judges with maneuvers inside the jump-rope arena.

The Supersonics have traveled as far as Hong Kong and Sweden for competitions.

“There’s a lot of pressure in this sport,” said Rosario, one of the Supersonics stars. “But it’s exciting.

“When I first started doing it, I thought it was interesting but complex. I knew that I had a lot of work to do to get good.”



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