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## OLYMPIC DREAM DASHED BY WAR

*STEVE CROWE Free Press Sports Writer*

**Bob Gardner** cringed last week as he watched Greg Louganis' head strike the diving board during the Olympic three-meter springboard preliminaries.

"I despaired," **Gardner** said. "I said to myself, 'There it goes. He's all done. He just blew the world championship.' "

Now 68 and retired from Ford Motor Co., **Gardner** sat in the living room of his Dearborn home earlier this week talking of his admiration for Louganis, and remembering 1940, the year that was to be "my Olympics," he said. But Hitler's invasion of Poland on Sept. 1, 1939 dashed that dream and led to personal losses in **Gardner's** family.

As a diver at Detroit Eastern High at Mack Avenue and E. Grand Boulevard -- now demolished and replaced by Martin Luther King High, at 3200 E. Lafayette -- **Gardner** was the city champion in 1937 and '38. He was selected the top prep diver in the United States as a senior, one of 10 All-America swimmers and divers that year from Michigan -- tops in the country.

His were the days of "fancy diving," **Gardner** said, a term he admits is passe today. **Gardner** pursued diving after high school at Wayne State and the Detroit Athletic Club.

"About then I began to work on some dives that were not generally performed, if at all," **Gardner** said. "I was able to do a triple-somersault, and what they now call a reverse 2 1/2 gainer and a 2 1/2 back."

**Gardner** and Sammy Lee of the United States, who won a gold medal in platform and a bronze in springboard diving at the 1948 Games in London, "compared notes" during that period, **Gardner** said, "and we were the only two in the U.S. -- if not the world -- doing those three dives in competition. . . .

"Sam and I developed those dives, and it was just like going into space. You were the only guys in the world doing these things. Had it been commonplace, they would have been routine for us. But every time you tried one of those damn things you'd get nervous. That's why we could never quite get them." Training at the Detroit Athletic Club had its drawbacks.

"The pool wasn't 14 feet deep, so you couldn't really perform an entrance," **Gardner** said. "Many was the time that I shook the fourth floor of the DAC a bit. I used to get up very high, and I'd hit that pool bottom so hard I came home at night with tile marks on my hands."

In a meet at Yale University in 1940, **Gardner** suffered an accident much worse than Louganis', which he said subconsciously impeded him in future competitions. To **Gardner's** surprise, the three-meter board he had practiced on all afternoon was lowered to one meter for that evening's competition.

"My last dive was a reverse gainer and a half, and I used to hit that for 9.5s every damn time," **Gardner** said. "I was tired and went in a little too close to the board. And when I came out of my spin, there was

the board.

"I broke my wrist and my finger and damned near broke my neck. I just averted that. And I fell into the water like Louganis fell into the water. My coach pulled me out of that thing, and that really fixed me. Nineteen-forty just wasn't my year."

When World War II began, **Gardner** said, "a lot of us knew it was all over. That was that." There would not be another Olympics until 1948. At that point, **Gardner** had neither age nor inclination on his side.

**Gardner's** older brother, Bill, was killed in a bomber crash while on a reconnaissance mission off the Florida coast in early 1942. In May 1942, **Bob Gardner** joined the Air Force. He flew 84 missions and became a captain.

"I was so damned mad at everything at that point I just decided, 'I'm going to fight this damned war,' " **Gardner** said quietly.

On July 21, 1943, his 23d birthday, **Bob Gardner** received a letter from his father. His younger brother, Jack -- who had joined the Marines the day after the Pearl Harbor attack -- had been killed by machine-gun fire at Guadalcanal, the letter said. The family learned later that Jack **Gardner** "could have survived if he had just stayed down after being hit," **Bob Gardner** said. "But he got up and went after the machine gunner to save his buddies."

**Gardner's** physical exercise is now limited to about four rounds of golf a week. But he still dreams of going where even Louganis has not.

"I've always wanted to bail out [of my P-38 aircraft] and do five flips," **Gardner** said. "Then I could say I was the only one in the world that did a five-somersault dive. But I never did get around to it."

## CUTLINE

World War II ended **Bob Gardner's** dream of diving in an Olympic Games.

**Bob Gardner** of Eastern High (left) in a 1938 photo with Wade Sloane, a friend from Detroit Southeastern.

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**Illustration:**Photo WILLIAM DeKAY