

= Faith Leech =

Faith Yvonne Leech (31 March 1941 ? 14 September 2013) was an Australian freestyle swimmer who won a gold medal in the 4 × 100 ? metre freestyle relay and bronze in the 100 @-@ metre freestyle at the 1956 Summer Olympics in Melbourne .

A tall and lean swimmer known for her elegant technique , Leech started swimming as a child to build strength after a series of stomach disorders in her infancy . She quickly rose to prominence after breaking a string of age group records . In 1955 , she became the youngest swimmer to win an Australian title , claiming victory in the 110 @-@ yard freestyle at the age of 13 . She twice broke the Australian record in the 100 @-@ yard freestyle in late 1955 , thereby positioning herself as a leading contender for Olympic selection in 1956 . Leech 's preparation was hindered by illness , which forced her out of the 1956 Australian Championships , but she recovered to gain Olympic selection in both the 100 @-@ metre freestyle and the corresponding relay . Leech produced a late surge to take bronze in the individual event and seal an Australian trifecta , before swimming the second leg in the relay to help secure an Australian victory in world record time . Leech retired after the Olympics at the age of 15 ; she cited anxiety caused by racing as one of the main factors in her decision .

= = Early years = =

The second child of Johnstone Melmore and Jessie Francis Leech , Leech was born in the inland regional Victoria town of Bendigo in Australia . Leech was given the name Faith after her elder sister , who died from leukaemia at the age of two . As a delicate child , Leech had an aversion to eating in the first two years of her life , so her mother fed her in small hourly doses . Leech was twice rushed from the family home to a Melbourne] hospital . Conventional medicine failed to rectify Leech 's dietary issues , so her mother put her on a fast for ten days at the recommendation of a naturopath . Leech was later placed on a diet of fruit , salad and vegetables , with an emphasis on beetroot juice and carrot juice .

Leech 's health improved , but she remained slight and frail , with a double curvature of the back . In an effort to help her gain muscle control and confidence , her parents sent her to start ballet dancing , before trying swimming , a sport her mother had competed in . Aged six , she was taken to swimming classes while the family holidayed in the Mornington Peninsula . Leech was coached by Gus Froelich , a former European swimming champion and coach of Australian Olympic medallist Judy @-@ Joy Davies . After a difficult start , Leech improved in her second year . At the Victorian Championships , she showed her potential by setting a state record of 17 @.@ 4 seconds (s) for the 25 @-@ yard freestyle in the under @-@ 8 division . The following year , she covered 25 yards in 15 @.@ 7 seconds , three seconds faster than Davies had done at the same age . She progressed steadily , sweeping the state age titles from nine to 13 , setting records that were often faster than those by boys of the same age .

Living in Bendigo and studying at Camp Hill Primary School , Leech could only travel three times a year to train with Froelich , so she relied heavily on dry land simulations , such as a pulley attached to the kitchen door . When she was 12 , she covered 110 yards in 1 minute (min) 7 @.@ 1 seconds , setting an unofficial world record for her age group . This achievement prompted her parents to rent an apartment in Melbourne , so she could train with Froelich on a regular basis . Leech moved there with her mother , while her father stayed to look after the family 's jewellery business . From 1954 , Leech attended St. Michael 's Girls ' Grammar School and trained with Froelich on a daily basis at the City Baths . The regular sessions paid off at the 1955 Victorian Championships ; Leech won the open 110- and 220 @-@ yard freestyle in times of 1 minute 7 @.@ 2 seconds and 2 minutes 39 @.@ 3 seconds , respectively , setting state records in both events . She proceeded to the Australian Championships , winning the 110 @-@ yard freestyle in 1 minute 7 @.@ 6 seconds to become the youngest ever winner of an open title at the age of 13 . Leech also won the national junior 110- and 220 @-@ yard events .

Leech 's regimen differed from most swimmers because Froelich was not an advocate of distance

training , and designed shorter workouts for his students . She trained once a day , swimming no more than 3 km (1 @. @ 9 mi) . Froelich did not push her to continue swimming laps when she felt tired , but emphasised an efficient stroke mechanism , which Leech implemented with a long and graceful arm action . Leech stood 180 centrimetres (5 ' 11 ") , but weighed only 57 kg (126 lb) , with broad shoulders , slim hips and large hands and feet . Her long streamlined action prompted observers to call her a " flying fish " . Spinal problems caused by a back misalignment prevented her from using the optimal flip turn preferred by freestyle swimmers . Instead , she was forced to utilise the touch turn , which was slower .

= = National selection = =

In August 1955 , Leech set an Australian record of 1 minute 5 @. @ 0 seconds for the 110 @- @ yard freestyle , before lowering it to 1 minute 4 @. @ 8 seconds in October ; this prompted newspapers to trumpet her as a prospect for the Melbourne Olympics . She did not get an opportunity to defend her Australian title in 1956 because she was hospitalised with illness . Leech recovered in time to win the national age title in the 100 @- @ metre freestyle in a time of 1 minute 4 @. @ 6 seconds , just 0 @. @ 1 of a second outside Dawn Fraser 's world record . She then posted a time of 1 minute 4 @. @ 6 seconds to defeat Fraser and Lorraine Crapp at another meeting in the following month .

Leech was named in the Olympic squad and the Australian Swimming Union exempted her from travelling to the national training camp in Townsville so she could train with Froelich , who understood her special dietary requirements . She joined the squad for the final race trials in Melbourne in October before the Olympics . Fraser and Crapp were too strong in the 100 @- @ metre freestyle , with Leech finishing second and third in the two races . After combining with Fraser , Crapp and Margaret Gibson to break the world record for the 4 x 100 @- @ metre freestyle relay , Leech was selected as one of Australia 's three entrants in the 100 @- @ metre freestyle entrants and one of six swimmers for the 4 x 100 @- @ metre freestyle relay squad for the Olympics .

= = International career = =

Having arrived at the Olympics , Leech made her debut in the 100 @- @ metre freestyle , an event in which she , Fraser and Crapp were regarded as the three strongest competitors , although the latter two were considered to be substantially stronger . All three won their heats . Leech won her heat by 1 @. @ 6 second in a time of 1 minute 4 @. @ 9 seconds . She was third fastest qualifier behind Fraser and Crapp , who were over 1 @. @ 5 seconds faster . Drawn in Fraser 's semifinal , Leech finished second in a time of 1 minute 5 @. @ 2 seconds , and was the third fastest qualifier for the final behind her compatriots . The semifinals followed a similar pattern to the heats , with Fraser and Crapp more than two seconds ahead of the six remaining qualifiers , who were separated by just 0 @. @ 8 of a second .

This pattern was repeated in the final . Fraser and Crapp were far ahead of the field , finishing in 1 minute 2 @. @ 0 seconds and 1 minute 2 @. @ 3 seconds , respectively . Leech overtook the United States ' Joan Rosazza in the final 25 metres to take bronze in 1 minute 5 @. @ 1 seconds . The race for third place had been tight , with just 0 @. @ 7 of a second separating Leech and the final finisher . The youngest swimmer in the field , Leech had come through to claim the last podium position . Leech said that it was an emotional occasion , having seen the Australian men take a trifecta in the corresponding event on the previous night of racing .

As the Australians boasted the three fastest swimmers in the individual 100 @- @ metre freestyle event , they were clear favourites for the corresponding relay , especially as Fraser and Crapp were three seconds faster than all of the other swimmers . Leech was not assured of a place in the final quartet . In the heats , Fraser and Crapp were rested and the remaining four swimmers , Sandra Morgan , Elizabeth Fraser , Gibson and Leech qualified the team . Leech swam the second leg in 1 minute 5 @. @ 9 seconds , the second fastest of the Australians , thereby securing her position in the final along with Sandra Morgan , who recorded a time of 1 minute 5 @. @ 4 seconds . Australia

won the second heat by 3 @. @ 1 seconds to qualify quickest for the final . They were 1 @. @ 8 and 2 @. @ 3 seconds faster than South Africa and the United States , respectively , both of whom swam in the first heat . The selection of Leech and Morgan generated controversy . They were Australia 's youngest swimmers and lacked experience at open level competition : Morgan had false started twice at the Australian Championships , and both had competed at national level only once .

In the final , Australia made a poor start ; Dawn Fraser almost stopped when she heard a second gunshot , believing that a false start had occurred . She finished her leg in 1 minute 4 @. @ 0 seconds , two seconds slower than the world record she set in the individual 100 @- @ metre final , but with a 2 @. @ 3 @- @ second lead over the United States ' Sylvia Ruuska . Nevertheless , this meant that Australia had a smaller than expected advantage . Swimming the second leg , Leech maintained the lead in the first 50 metres but faded in the second half and finished with a split of 1 minute 5 @. @ 1 seconds , with the Australian lead cut to 0 @. @ 9 of a second . Even with the advantage of a flying start , Leech 's leg was 0 @. @ 4 of a second slower than her fastest time during the individual competition .

Morgan was then overhauled and passed by Nancy Simons . With 25 metres left , Morgan took her head out of the water , and seeing the American a body length in front , dug deep to re @- @ establish a lead of 0 @. @ 7 of a second going into the final changeover . Crapp then extended the lead over the United States to 2 @. @ 2 seconds to secure gold in a world record time of 4 minutes 17 @. @ 1 seconds . The Melbourne Olympics was the only time that Australia has made a clean sweep of the 100 @- @ metre freestyle and the relay events for both men and women . This feat has only been equaled by the Americans at the 1920 Summer Olympics . The victory was Australia 's only victory in a female swimming relay at the Olympics until the 2004 Summer Olympics .

= = Retirement = =

After the 1956 Olympics , Leech retired from competitive swimming at the age of 15 . She was the first person from Bendigo to win an Olympic medal and was feted upon returning to her hometown . She regarded the experience of living in the Olympic Village as an unusual one ; in addition to the large crowds and the pressure of an Olympics , it was the first time that she had been away from the family home . Physicians endorsed her decision to retire , feeling that she became too nervous prior to races . Leech briefly worked in Melbourne as a model , before returning to Bendigo to help run the family jewelry business . She took a leading role in the business after the death of her father in the 1970s , before handing control of the firm to her son .

Leech married Mitch Tuohy and had two sons , Adam and Troy , whom she discouraged from entering competitive swimming , fearing the pressure and strain of racing . In retirement , she shunned competitive sport , but maintained her fitness and athleticism . She taught swimming to disabled children , some of whom represented Australia at the Special Olympics .

Leech continued her involvement with the Olympic movement through volunteer work . In July 1999 , Leech and Australia 's then @- @ oldest man and World War I veteran Jack Lockett were the guests of honor at a countdown celebration to the arrival of the Olympic Torch in Bendigo in July 2000 . In 2001 , she was diagnosed with a cancerous tumor in her neck , which was the size of a 50c coin . The tumor was removed in a seven @- @ hour operation followed by six weeks of radiotherapy treatment . This experience prompted her to become a volunteer for the Cancer Council and help those who were diagnosed with the disease . In February 2003 , Leech phoned quadruple Olympic champion Betty Cuthbert to comfort her during her recovery from a brain hemorrhage . In October 2006 , Leech combined with 1956 teammate John Devitt to launch " 50 Years On ? The Melbourne Olympics " , a series of stamps from the Australia Post .

Leech is an inductee of the Path of Champions at Sydney Olympic Park Aquatic Centre . She died at her home on 14 September 2013 , aged 72 .