



Deafness Forum Ambassador **Cindy-Lu Fitzpatrick OAM** has been nominated for Australia's Top 100 Sportswomen. To ensure she makes the cut, visit the link below and vote. Submissions close 26 Feb.

<http://www.sportforwomen.com.au/top-100/nominees/show/Cindy-Lu-Fitzpatrick>

Profoundly deaf since birth, Cindy-Lu Fitzpatrick became one of Australia most remarkable swimmers to represent her country at two Commonwealth games, two Pan Pacific games and competed at 6 Deaflympics games spanning 20 years. Unable to hear the starter's gun Cindy had to rely on vibrations or watch the reflexes of the swimmer next to her to prompt her to start. Often having the slowest reaction time off the blocks due to her deafness meant that Cindy had to work her way from the back of the field to the front. Despite this she was ranked in the top 16 on the 1982 Speedo World Rankings list.

At just age 12 years she won the first of her many medals with a bronze in 1977 at the Romanian Deaflympics. At age 16 she set new Australian records in winning both the Australian and American national open age championships in the 100 and 200 breaststroke. In 1982 she was unlucky not to win a gold medal at the Commonwealth Games when her medley relay team was disqualified for breaking early in a changeover. At the Canada Cup in 1984 she broke three Australian records during the meet.

At national level Cindy-Lu held the Australian title in the 100/200 m breaststroke double in 1981, 1982 and 1986. In 1983 she held the 200 m title at the Australian titles. At the Deaflympics she dominated winning the 100/200 m breaststroke double at 5 successive games from 1981 till her retirement from international swimming in 1997 and won 19 gold, 4 silver and 5 bronze medals.

During this time she broke 18 Deaflympics records and would still be holding them had it not been for fast suit technology of 2009. It was her success at the Deaflympics that elevated her to be the 'most decorated woman in Deaflympic history' by its governing organisation.

In many ways she has been a pioneer for sportswomen with a disability without much of the current support they get. In 1983/4 she was an AIS scholarship holder in Canberra well before the Elite Athletes with a Disability (EAD) program was established in 1989. In 1985 she was awarded the OAM for her contribution to sport and people with disabilities as well as being awarded the prestigious Australian Sports Award Junior Sportswomen category well before a disability category became part of its program.

Such was her following that in 1989 she appeared on the front page of the Daily Mirror (one of the largest selling newspapers at the time) for a controversial decision at the Deaflympic Games in New Zealand where she broke the World Record for the Deaf in the 50m freestyle event only for it to be annulled when the race was repeated.

In 2002 she was the only woman to be inducted in the NSW Hall of Champions alongside the likes of Mark Taylor (cricket), Mark Edmondson (tennis) and Paul Harragon (rugby league). Held with such esteem by the deaf sporting world she was bestowed the honour of lighting the cauldron at the 2005 Deaflympic games in Melbourne becoming the only woman to be given such an opportunity in Deaflympic history.

Now working at the University of Newcastle as an Auslan teacher, Cindy-Lu also works as a Technical Director of swimming for the International Committee of Sports for the Deaf (ICSD) which is the governing body of the Deaflympics.