Ever wonder what it is like to jump out of an airplane at 12,500 feet and soar like a bird. Then you may be interested in the Carolina Parachute Club. 

"It is the most exciting thing I've ever done," said Mickey Holoman, who's been a member of the club for about a year and has jumped from as high as 18,000 feet.

Holoman, who reaches speeds over 180 miles per hour while free falling, said there are some "high points of anxiety" in every jump, such as "right before the door opens to jump" and "right before the chutes open."

The USC team competed in the Collegiate National Parachuting Competition in Carbondale, Ill., during the Thanksgiving holidays.

Eight of the 25 "active members" competed.

Holoman said that there are three main categories in free falling competition. Relative work is the category which Holoman termed the most fun. "You jump out and the idea is to catch someone and grab them by the wrist," he said.

The USC jumpers have linked up in the sky and formed six and seven-man standards and are trying to form an eight-man star which makes everyone a star crest recipient, a big achievement in free falling.

The other two categories, style and accuracy, are both used in competition. "Style is a series of turns," said Holoman. "First a right turn, then a left turn and then straight back, all in 360 degree turns."

Holoman said the jumper goes up about 2,800 feet when competing for accuracy, takes a three-second delay, then goes into an arch and gets stable and maneuvers over the target.

Defensive Breakdown

Casey Claffin, goalie for USC's water polo team, turns his head as a Georgia Southern shot flies into the goal. Carolina, who uses the sport primarily as a conditioning program for its swimming team, beat nationally-ranked Georgia Southern, which has five All-Americans on its team.

Miller: 'We're basically a sandlot team; aggressive and hungry to win.'

'Sandlot' Team Used For Swim Conditioning

Water Polo Adds Fun To Workouts

"We're basically a sandlot team," said Ed Miller, USC's Water Polo coach. "We watch other teams and learn from them, picking up things about the game," Miller said.

Even though at Carolina water polo is considered "a sandlot individual to play this physically demanding sport," Miller describes his players as "aggressive and hungry to win." Aggressiveness is almost a prerequisite of this sport, in which it is common to find a water polo player being danked and elbowed in the water at the same time.

Water polo matches can be anything from rough and very close to strategic and controlled. All of this depends on the way the referees call the game as they walk up and down the sides of the pool as the play goes on.

For USC's sandloters, this season the Gamecocks' winning water polo squad defeated a powerful Georgia Southern team to finally receive the recognition they have deserved for a long time.

The target is a pink gravel pit 20 meters in circumference with a center of about four inches. "Ideally you try to touch it (the target) with your feet," Holoman said.

Holoman said the jumper uses toggles, which are the steering system of the parachute, to work himself over the pit. USC's pilot, Robby Frierson was rated third in the nation in free falling accuracy last year.

The team practices in Barnwell on Frierson's drop zone area.

In competition there are three classifications of jumpers. The novice class is for people who have jumped less than 100 times, the intermediate from 101 to 200 jumps and the advanced with 200 or more jumps. Holoman said he only needed a few more jumps before he became an intermediate.

Holoman said that most parachuting accidents occur due to a malfunction because of bad packing or bad body position while in the air.

"Usually the parachute is mechanically perfect," said Holoman.

BY GARY WEST

To Liven A Boring Existence There's The Parachute Club

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