

**MARCIA
INGRAM
JONES-SMOKE
1941-**



**AMERICA'S
GREATEST
FEMALE
KAYAKER**

Marcia Jones-Smoke is the only American woman to ever win an individual Olympic medal in kayaking. She won eleven straight kayak single championships from 1963 to 1973. At the 1964 Tokyo Olympic Games, she shocked the world by winning a bronze medal in the K-1 (single participant) race.

Marcia Ingram Jones was born in July 1941 in Oklahoma City. Her father was an electrical engineer working in Caracas, Venezuela and her mother was one of two women who graduated from the University of Michigan Law School in 1929. On summer trips to see their dad, Marcia and her older sister Sperry joined the local country club's swim team. At age ten, their mother formed a swim team in Oklahoma City, and the girls competed in AAU swim meets across Oklahoma and Texas.

Both sisters failed to make the team at the 1956 and 1960 U. S. Olympic trials so, as a gift, their mother took them to the 1960 Rome Olympics, where a poor performance by the American women kayakers convinced Jones that she could do better, so she switched to kayaking. While attending the University of Michigan, the sisters learned about a Niles, Michigan man who built beautiful wooden Danish flatwater racing kayaks. Jones purchased her first kayak for \$250 in the spring of 1961.

That summer she went to her first National Championships in Washington DC. Although she didn't win, over the next several years she trained very hard. In 1962, she transferred to Michigan State University, and continued training on Lake Lansing. Jones graduated in 1964 with a degree in social science.

In September, Jones won all three of her K-1 qualification races at the 1964 Olympic Trials, earning a trip to the Tokyo Games. Sperry missed the team when the sisters finished second in K-2 to Francine Fox and Gloriane Perrier. Arriving three weeks early, the three American girls were offered training by an Italian coach. The Americans shocked the world when Fox and Perrier won a silver medal in the K-2 race and Jones won a bronze in the K-1 event, narrowly missing the silver medal.

Jones' boyfriend William Smoke, who finished fourth in his K-1 race, was interested in finding someone who could build canoes and kayaks so he could start a business back home. Canadian athlete – and Hungarian defector from the 1956 Melbourne Games – Andor Elbert recommended his former Hungarian teammate Andras Toro, a bronze medalist at the 1960 Rome Olympics, who was good at designing and building boats, but also wanted to defect.

Jones' mother, an attorney with embassy connections, arranged a meeting for Toro at the U. S. Embassy in Tokyo. He originally thought defection would be easier from Mexico City in the 1968 Games but decided to make his move now. Within two days, Toro was on an airplane to Washington DC. With Smoke's help, Toro enrolled at the University of Michigan, advancing through the English Language Institute in the first six months, and earning a degree in naval architecture.

Marcia Jones and William Smoke married in 1965 and settled in Michigan. Jones-Smoke won three gold medals at 1967 Pan American Games in K-1, K-2, and K-4. The only American who ever defeated her in her prime was her sister Sperry, who never let her forget it. Both sisters competed in the 1968 Mexico City Olympics, with Marcia just missing a medal, finishing fourth in the K-1 race and seventh with her sister Sperry in the K-2 event. In the 1972 Munich Olympics, Jones-Smoke finished ninth.

Jones-Smoke retired in the mid-1970s after winning 35 Senior National Championships and 24 North American Championships. Her favorite Olympic memories are winning the 1964 bronze medal, competing with her sister in the 1968 Games, and watching her son compete in 2004 at the Athens Games.