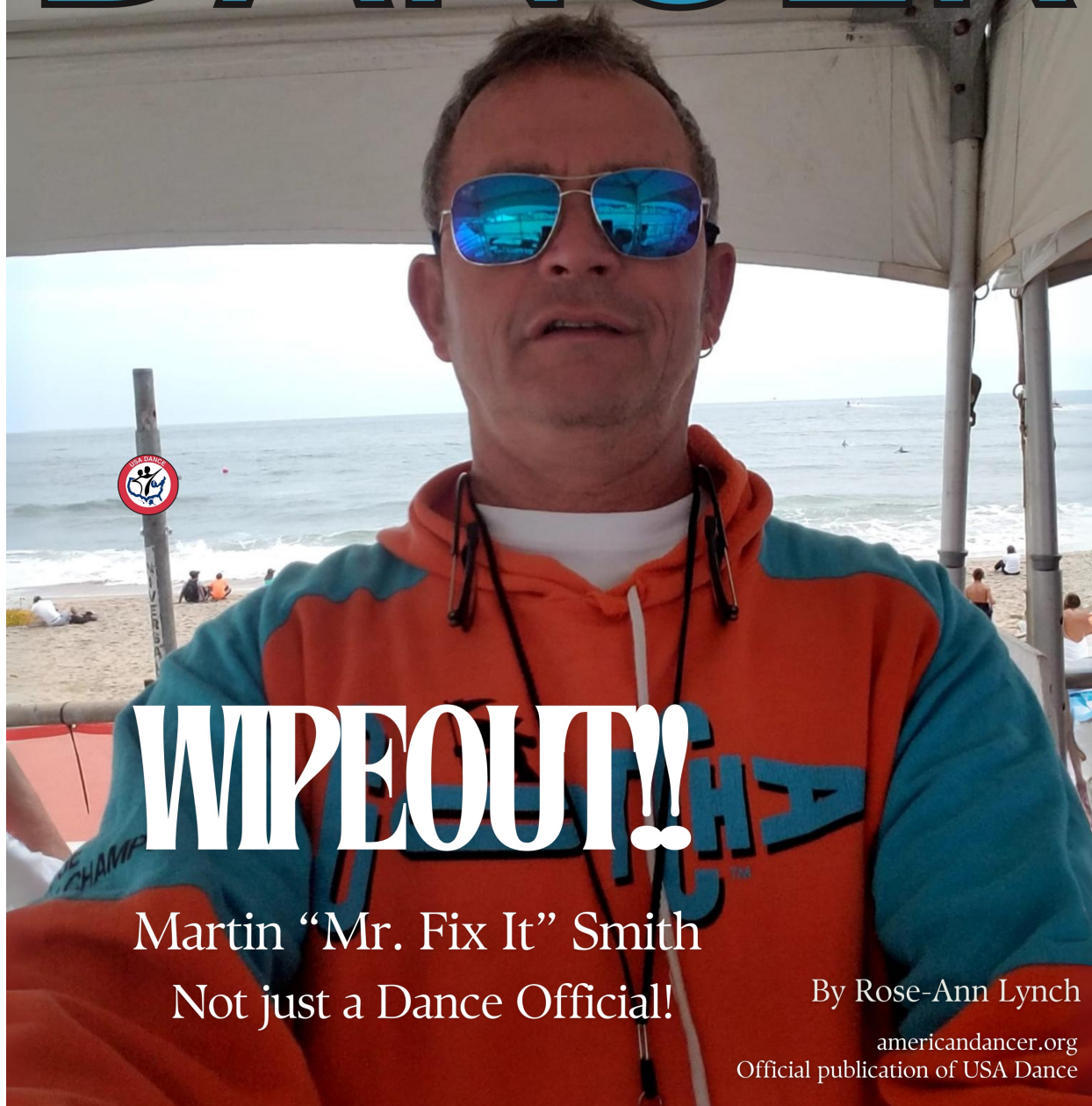


AMERICAN DANCER



WIPEOUT!!

Martin "Mr. Fix It" Smith
Not just a Dance Official!

By Rose-Ann Lynch

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Anyone who has ever had a dance coaching session or lesson with USA Dance Official Martin Smith knows why he is called, “Mr. Fix It.” He can take the broken things – frames, steps, lines, timing -- and “fix” them. But what many don’t know is that Martin has another side. Behind the stately USA Dance adjudicator in the tuxedo is...A Surfing Dude!! And not just a Surfing Dude; Martin is a qualified and experienced surfing official who has judged surf competitions up and down the United States East Coast as well as in his native South Africa.



USA Dance Official Martin Smith judging the World DanceSport competition in Bremen, Germany.

This brings up all kinds of questions, doesn't it? Which came first, the surfer or the dancer? Which came first, the surfing official or the dancing official? Which does he prefer? How did he get started in these two sports? Many of us can name obvious differences between surfing and dancing, but are there any similarities? What does *Hang-10* mean? And of course...How do you judge a surfing competition?

American Dancer caught up with Martin Smith to find out some of these answers...and more.

Martin Smith was born in 1961 in Durban, a coastal city in eastern South Africa, the southernmost country of the African continent. His mother was an author, potter, artist, playwright, and a doctor of homeopathy. His father and stepfather were famous screen, tv, and stage actors, opera singers, and producers. “I was the only dancer,” noted Martin.

Martin, the ballroom dancer, was extremely shy as a child. “When I started dancing, I was afraid to ask the girls to dance,” he explained. But as he improved his skills, he noted, “they started asking me!” Thus began the dancing career of Martin Smith.



All ballroom dancers dream of making a cover. Martin and his partner, Desiree, did it!

Martin started teaching ballroom at the age of 21 and was involved in the development of underprivileged dancers in South Africa. He rose through the ranks, competed, and won numerous titles with his partner Desiree Smith. They danced professionally for 22 years and were the 1997 and 1999 KwaZulu-Natal (KZN) Provincial Professional Standard Champions and South African National Professional

Standard Finalists from 1996-1999, placing 4th in 1999.

In 1999, Martin wanted more. There had to be a way to earn money doing what he loved. He decided to leave his country and moved to the United States, where he continued his professional competitive career until 2008.

Through the years, Martin has continued his education and worked with numerous key coaches, including Jack & Jessie Liddell, Ted Russell, Aubrey Stander, Rosemary Wingrove, Mickey & Anne Mickelbust, Noreen McKenzie, Ethne Kenton, Graham Smith, Alex Gisha, Judi Hatton, David Don, Esther Don, Charlotte Jorgenson, Martin Lamb, Paul Homes, Louis Van Amstel, and Terrie Boucher. Today, he holds a quadruple licentiate/membership degree with USTA and dual licentiate /membership degrees with ISTD(UK), USISTD, and NATD, and has judged in South Africa, Zimbabwe, Germany (WDSF), and the United States.

Martin, the surfer, started surfing when he was 13 years old. But his surfing career took off when he was a student pilot in the South African Army/Air Force. It was then that he joined the Defense Surfing Club and, as a Corporal, became the Team Chair and Captain.

He admits today that he wasn't the best surfer on the team, but the club was one of the tops in the country. Young Martin wanted to be a contributor and asked what he could do to help his team. The answer was to take the judging exam to become a surf judge, which is precisely what he did. He studied and passed the test on the first try, received his first qualification in 1984, and was soon... as he put it, "judging colors." This included officiating at the 1987 South African National Championships and rubbing elbows with celebrities like World Champion Surfers Shaun Tomson and Kelly Slater.



Martin scoring from the Judges Tower at a surfing competition.

So, what does that mean? Surfing competitions, like ballroom competitions, are divided into heats. Two to six surfers at a time, wearing colored jerseys, have between 20-30 minutes (heats) to catch the best wave possible, with the purpose of outscoring their fellow surfers. The goal is to make it to the final.

The judges have the task of scoring the surfers as they ride their waves. It sounds easy...it isn't, especially on a sunny day. "It is enjoyable and stressful," said Martin. "You need quick eyes...and the best sunglasses." By the way, Martin swears by Maui Jim sunglasses.

Surf judges adjudicate from the Judges' Tower on the shore. They must first properly identify each surfer by color and then adjudicate what the surfers are doing. Their criteria include:

1. Commitment and degree of difficulty,
2. Innovative and progressive maneuvers,
3. Combination of major maneuvers,
4. Variety of maneuvers, and
5. Speed, power, and flow – the most prominent judging criteria.

Scores range from 1 to 10 and are calculated to the 0.1 decimal: 1-2 Poor, 3-4 Average, 5-6 Above Average, 7-8 Good, and 9-10 Excellent. In the earlier days, scores were kept by paper and pen, but today, there is an Absolute Judging

System with electronic scoring, like the one used at USA Dance competitions.



Martin and his wife, Kristina, enjoying some free time in between heats.

There's much more to scoring surfing, but this is a good start for the layman.

Still, it may seem to most that surfing and ballroom vary greatly. But Martin sees it differently. "Surfing is like dancing on the waves," he explained, "...your partner is your board."

According to Pubity Sport, which rated the world's most difficult sports, surfing is one of the top contenders and was ranked #2. Martin believes that both surfers and dancers are

"Super Sportsmen...They are also very health conscious."

He noted that there are different styles of surfing, like there are different styles of dancing -- International Ballroom and Latin, and American Smooth and Rhythm. In surfing, one may compete *Long Boards* – fewer tricks [By the way, *Hang-10* means 10 toes are hanging over the edge of the board, and *Hang-5* means five toes are hanging over the edge. Who knew?], *Tandem* – two surfers on one board, *Artistic* – Tandem with lifts, and *Regular*. Martin's favorite surfing style is *Regular*.

As for the differences between judging surfing and dancing, Martin laughed, "There are no suits and ties, you are on the beach, you can smoke, and you need good sunglasses."



Martin's favorite partner is Kristina. Their favorite dance is the Argentine Tango. Photo by Cathy Benton.

Asked about other similarities, he smiled and responded, "Pretty girls." But Martin only has his eye on one girl. He proudly talks about the love of his life, his beautiful wife, Kristina, who

is 22 years younger than him. She dances too! Occasionally, she can be seen behind the desk at the Virginia Beach studio and has served as a tabulator at surfing competitions. When his fellow surfers saw her, they asked how he won the prize, and he said, “It’s not the surfing. It’s the dancing!” Obviously, it pays to do both, but that is why Martin prefers ballroom over surfing!

Martin’s favorite dance is the Argentine Tango and then Salsa, but Slow Foxtrot would be his choice in the ballroom world. His favorite partner is his wife.

His advice to ballroom competitors on how to improve... “Know, understand, and execute basics...posture, footwork, and musicality.” His peeves as a judge... “Chasses and locks on the heel, looking down, muscular leading, and broken sides.”

For surfing, his advice to improve is... “Stay ahead of the foam...practice timing and balance.” His pet peeve is “People who cut in on others.”

It sounds like timing, being grounded, and floor craft, or would it be “wave craft”?



Martin and Kristina social dancing in Virginia Beach.

Today, Martin “Mr. Fix It” Smith lives in Virginia Beach, Virginia. He is the Dance Director and Senior Instructor at DanceSport Virginia, where he enjoys teaching, performing

in shows, and dancing Pro-Am in all disciplines and at all levels. He is the Membership Director of USA Dance Chapter #6008—Tidewater, Virginia, and also serves on the USA Dance Nominations and Elections Committee. Martin is available for ballroom coaching and lessons and can be reached at DanceSportVA.com.

But, if you want a lesson, you better schedule it in advance and check the weather. On that rare summer day when it is not too hot, the water is nice and warm, and the waves are just right, Martin might just decide to grab his Maui Jims, summer vest, and surfboard...and leave his dance shoes on the shore.



Martin hanging with friends between heats.