

Rollers get waterlogged

Fake log makes big splash in pool

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Logrolling conjures up images of lumberjacks atop long, splintery logs on chilly northern lakes. But don't tell Sanibel resident Jean Baer.

She does the sport on a blue, foam log in a warm Captiva swimming pool.

A former logrolling champion from Wisconsin, Baer can't kick the habit.

In fact, this summer she's teaching the lumberjacking skill to guests at South Seas Plantation, where she is the

director of sports and leisure.

If someone had told her as a logrolling girl that one day she'd be rolling a fake log amid palm trees, she would have scoffed. Some people in Wisconsin today might do that if they could see the Florida version of their beloved sport.

"I've never heard of a foam log," said Marilyn Matush, executive director of the Lumberjack World Championships in Hayward, Wis. "That's so bizarre."

Next month, 12,000 spectators and 200 competitors will be drawn to Hayward for the July 26 championships where the Super Bowl of logrolling is held.

See **LOGROLLING / 3B**

LOGROLLING

■ **TERMINOLOGY:** Logrolling also is called birlinging.

■ **HOW:** Two logrollers step onto a floating log and spin it with their feet until one falls off.

■ **SUPER BOWL EQUIVALENT**
The Lumberjack World Championships in Hayward, Wis., July 26-28.

■ **TV:** The next chance to see it is 3 p.m. July 23 on ESPN for the Loggers' Jamboree at Loon, N.H.



MARC BEAUDIN/News-Press

ROLL ON: Jean Baer demonstrates her talent on a foam log at South Seas Plantation.

OUTDOORS

LOGROLLING: Fake logs create fun in the pool

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That's where Baer, 34, was pitter-pattering on a log in 1983 when she took third place in her division. It was a highlight for the Eau Claire, Wis., woman who started doing it at age 11, teaching it at 14 and wishing for her own log at 16.

"Some people got a prom dress; I got a \$400 log," said Baer, who recently practiced at South Seas' pool on the fake log. The log was invented two years ago by a Canadian who simply named it The Log.

The image might make some pioneer lumberjacks roll in their graves. The sport dates to Colonial times, and the object is simple: Stay on the log and make sure the opponent doesn't.

Logrolling is one of many lumberjack sports, such as ax throwing, that have their origins in American history. As settlers pushed westward, so did lumberjacks, who had camp competitions and also used their skills on the job. The first record of regional competitions for logrolling dates to the 1880s.

Today it has evolved into a legitimate sport.

"It's offbeat and legitimate," ESPN spokesman Dave Nagle said. "Those two terms are not mutually exclusive. It's a sport."

The sport is associated with lively events held in places such as Webster Springs, W.Va.; Albany, Ore.; and — of course — Hayward, Wis.

But Florida does not rank among its popular states. It probably wouldn't even be here except for Toronto inventor Ken Bailey, who one day found himself watching a cartoon with two characters on a log in a river.

"I thought if I could put that in a pool and make it safe, it'd be really fun," said Bailey, who sold his first log two years ago.

Baer moved to Lee County with her husband and her 14-foot log in 1988, and she gave up the sport in



MARC BEAUDIN/News-Press

ROLLIN', ROLLIN', ROLLIN': Jean Baer, left, director of sports and leisure at South Seas Plantation, shows Monique Parisi, an activity coordinator at South Seas, the techniques of logrolling.

1990. The salt water ruined the log. She realized logrolling was not compatible with her sub-tropical lifestyle.

But some South Seas staffers attending an aquatics conference last year spotted Bailey's invention and brought her a brochure. "I was all over it," Baer said. "I had to have it."

The foam log is in the resort's pool three times a week for guests to try. Baer makes it look easy. She

confidently dances on the log. She can splash water in her opponent's face with one foot while continuing to roll with the other. Although the foam log is a little slower than real logs, it's more forgiving when she falls.

But that's rare. In her prime, she could logroll solo for 30 minutes.

That's not so for first-timers, who fall after only a second. Monique Parisi, a South Seas activity coordi-

nator who has logrolled for a year, said frequently up to 40 children and adults line up to try it. Most survive two seconds to one minute.

It's a sport that takes physical prowess and precision. And, despite the palm trees and swimming pool, the foam log version of it vaguely recalls the lumberjacking mystique.

"That's what always lured me to it," Baer said. "It takes you back in time to lumbering days."