



Paul Munnich, O'Connell Masters



Clark Thomas



Paul Munnich, O'Connell Masters



Sam Christy, O'Connell Masters



2011 Summer Nationals

Fast Swimming,
Southern Style

By Susan Dawson-Cook

Swimmers traveled from as far as Australia to Auburn University's James E. Martin Aquatic Center to compete in the 2011 USMS Summer Nationals. More than 680 swimmers, including Olympians Colette Crabbe, Mark Gangloff, Misty Hyman, Yoshi Oyakawa and Chris Stevenson, participated in the four-day event. Laura Val, 60, put the gears in motion, snatching world records in the 50, 100 and 200 fly and the 50, 100 and 200 free. By the meet's end, swimmers had obliterated 34 national records (33 individual and one relay). In the end, the Sarasota YMCA Sharks Masters took first place in the local team standings, with Georgia Masters winning the regional clubs division.

Blue and orange NCAA title banners decorated the natatorium, reminding Masters swimmers of the hometown college team's

swimming prowess and generating excitement among Masters swimmers as they waited to churn out fast times in fast water. Although amped up during relays and hotly contested races, the energy level overall was pleasantly mellow. Decksides, swimmers mentally prepared for races, swung their arms, laughed, sampled Hammer Nutrition gels, and hugged friends. The loudest cheers erupted when the most senior members of the Masters swimming family approached the finish.

Youthful voices abounded in the stands. When USMS Executive Director Rob Butcher wasn't swimming breaststroke or commenting, he toted his 7-month-old twin boys, Maks and Beckett. Many swimmers wanted to hold one of them for "just a minute." Nadine Day's young daughter, Nalani, spent the meet poolside. "It's not just about



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medley relay with Noriko Inada and Gordon and Dillon Taylor of Phoenix Swim Club.

Limitations Don't Cramp Their Style

For some, the opportunity to compete in nationals felt like a special gift. Roderick Sewell, 19, who swims unattached, is a double amputee. He swam the 100 free and 100 breast. He dove off the blocks and propelled himself through the water with only his arms. "I started swimming when I was 10 years old," he says. His desire to overcome an innate fear of the water led him to take up swimming. He offers words of wisdom to others facing restrictions. "Learn to work with what you've got."

Larry Day, 60, of Michigan Masters celebrated his return to health by setting world records in the 400 IM and 200 fly. "I had a heart attack three years ago, and never thought I'd get to swim again, let alone dream of breaking world records. It's a joy to be here," he says.

Christine Frederic broke her left arm, right leg and dislocated a shoulder demonstrating hurdles for middle school track athletes. Extensive injuries landed her in a wheelchair for three months.

"My team members drove me to physical therapy and practice for two and a half months during my recovery," Frederic says. "Without my coach and my team, I never could have made it." Tip-toeing back into the racing scene wasn't Frederic's plan. Instead,

she dove into the Auburn waters with gusto, throwing down Southern Masters records and best times in five events, placing as high as third in her age group.

Denise Brown, 52, of Michigan Masters, broke her foot 17 weeks before nationals, but fogged on anyway. "I've been in a boot and a bone stimulator," she says. Pushing through pain during the start and while kicking, she placed third in the 800 freestyle. "I think Masters are a pretty tough bunch.

If we really want to do something we find a way to do it."

A car accident and serious fall left doubts as to whether Maine Masters swimmer Diann Ustal, 65, would ever walk again, let alone swim. "I tore all three hamstrings, broke my shoulder, tore the rotator cuff, tore the meniscus in my knee," she says. Sports medicine professionals put her back together. After extensive rehabilitation, Ustal surprised herself by breaking a world record in the 50 fly.

Ustal credits her amazing rehabilitation to swimming. "It's a message we need to get out because it's [swimming is] one of the safest sports and it's a full body workout and you can do it at all ages. It's just a gift."

Swimmers such as Anne Dunivin, 95, of Georgia Masters, weren't inclined to let age impair their participation. "I've been swimming all my life but not competitively until the last few years," she said after a backstroke race. She pointed a finger at interviewer Hyman

competition—it's about having fun," Day, 41, Danville Y Silver Dolphins, said with a smile. Twelve-year-old Jeanne Frederic calmed her Southern Masters swimmer mom, Christine Frederic, 47, before her races.

Camaraderie and support from family and friends didn't impair performance—if anything, it ramped it up to a whole new level. "We've been seeing records fall left and right here—the energy is through the roof," said Olympic gold medalist Misty Hyman, just moments after Val set a world record. In addition to commentating in daily videos, Hyman swam butterfly on a winning mixed

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and said, "You have to keep on and not stop and get back when you're 80, see?"

Long Course vs. Short Course

The 100 breaststroke is 62-year-old Oregon Masters swimmer Allen Stark's favorite event, yet it was the 200 where he took control of the race during the third 50 and finished with a world record. "Although I was too exhausted to stand, I was so excited I don't think my feet touched the ground," he said. Long course is for swimmers, not turners. Short course is a breath holding contest," he said. Long course is "the world gold standard distance. If you want to test yourself against that standard, you swim long course."

Marty Mennen, 75, of Indy Aquatic Masters, hit the wall victorious in the 400 and 800

freestyle as well as the 100 and 200 backstroke. "I went 13 seconds faster in the 800 than my seed time. I feel really good," he said after the event.

He took up Masters swimming in 1972 and says, "I prefer long course. I think the conditioning is better."

Georgia Masters swimmer Kristin Aziz, 46, also prefers long course swimming. Short course makes her "feel like a hamster on a wheel. In a long course pool, I can get into my rhythm better," she says.

Leslie Livingston, 50, who swims for Patriot Masters, tore down the course in the 50 backstroke, kicking up a spout of water and touching in world record time. Short course meters is Livingston's favorite for both training and competing. She does "loads of 25s underwater with fins" and says, "I'm all about the dolphin kick." Long course 50s pump her up though, "because there's nothing to interrupt the momentum." Longtime Mas-

ters swimmer Marian Coakley, 74, of New England Masters, shares Livingston's passion for long course 50s. "I just like to bomb for the end," she says.

Coach and Walnut Creek Masters swimmer Ahelee Sue Osborn, 53, snatched victories in the 100 and 200 backstroke. She warned of potential detriments of long course swimming. "There are very few people who can keep the intensity they do in short course because they don't have the wall to come off and reset their body position and get their tempo going again. You drift off in your mind and also your technique."

Coping with Prerace Jitters

Many swimmers struggled with prerace jitters, but psychiatrist Allen Stark says jitters might be necessary. Stark is well practiced at taking himself to an optimal frame of reference. The body responds to excitement and anxiety similarly, he says. "If you are going to swim your best, you want to be

a bit in the fight-or-flight mode. Not, 'Oh, my event is up.' I have a set routine that I go through." After rehearsing each race "stroke by stroke visualizing success," he chats with competitors. It's "part of building excitement," he says.

Frederic found her daughter's company calming. "She'd be singing camp songs or telling me something her friends said and I wouldn't be shaking so bad. She kept me from worrying." Jeanne, a butterflyer, enjoyed watching her moa swim, especially the 200 fly, which she hopes to swim soon.

"I get nervous like an 8-year-old at the first age group meet," Mennen says. "I become a basket case half the time." He once got so uptight he ended up behind the blocks with his suit inside out. "I would love to relax and go and swim and have fun, but it doesn't work that way for me." Reading and talking to teammates helps him relax a little between swims.

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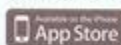
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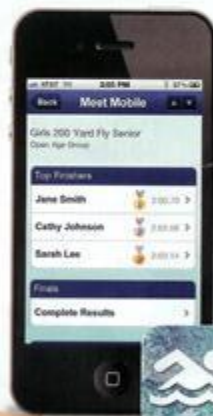
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Nerves become an issue for Aziz before her races and, outside her optimal level of nervousness, she doesn't swim well. At Short Course Nationals in Atlanta in 2010, her races were on track until she attempted to work herself up before a 500 free and overdid it. "I ended up adding 5 seconds to my time."

Aziz likes to socialize for a while and then quiet down and "mentally go through my race. I see my dive, visualize how my stroke is going to feel. I feel jumpy inside; anticipation and excitement. The right level of nervousness allows you to have that focus."

Jan Hinson, 57, swims with the Birmingham Swim League. A former University of Southern Mississippi intramural swimmer, she's had her share of butterflies before races. In the old days she'd line up behind the blocks too early, which brought excessive anxiety. Now she listens to music on her iPod before her race to relax. But don't talk to her behind the blocks. "I don't

like to chit chat right before a race. That distracts me."

Prerace, Livingston is typically "worrying and a little nervous." She blames some of her nervousness on tapering. As her training decreases, she feels "jittery and edgy." Now that's she's used to it, "I don't worry about my worrying," she says with a smile.

Celeste Lind, 52, Area Tallahassee Aquatics, stood out on the blocks with her zebra swim cap. A former collegiate swimmer who now trains with her son's team, Lind dove back into the swimming scene this year. "My youngest went off to college and I needed to find something I am passionate about," she says, smiling. "Thus, swimming it is." Masters works well with her lifestyle. "I love the part where swimming is for life; you can enjoy swimming when you are an old lady, you can do it your way. It makes it a lot more fun."

"For me a little bit of jitters is good; a lot is not good at all," she says. "I have to be happy and

excited and bouncy." Lind placed fifth in the 400 free and 200 IM.

Indy Aquatic Masters swimmer Sally Newell, 74, started swimming to get fit after breast cancer. The 50 breaststroke, in which she placed second, is her favorite race. "A good friend of mine said 'You should not be permitted to swim the breaststroke because you're only swimming with one,'" she jokes.

"I think if you don't get a little nervous, you're not going to swim as fast. I always swim faster at Nationals than at a home meet," she says. "I just want to do my best." Newell gleams much support from family. "They are very proud of me. I have a granddaughter who swims" (Newell has 11 grandchildren). Her family quips that Sarah is her favorite "because she's the swimmer."

A Great Place to Race

Georgia Masters swimmer Tana Selby, 52, enjoyed returning to Auburn to race. She was one of several alumni, includ-

ing Mark and Ashley Gangloff, who attended nationals and came back to race in their old stomping grounds. "I went to school at Auburn and it's just special." She added her name to the block wall where other Auburn alumni had signed. "It was exciting."

One hundred Auburn volunteers in orange T-shirts worked with race officials to keep the meet running like clockwork, and calmed swimmers' nerves with their polite and cordial ways. Meet director and Auburn University Athletics Operations Manager Sarah Stallkamp walked the deck focused, yet always had a minute to greet swimmers.

"I love the South; the people really are very intentionally cordial," Ustual says. "Having Masters Nationals here has been great; it's been a great venue."

>>> Susan Dawson-Cook is a regular USMS Nationals competitor, freelance writer and personal trainer living in Tucson, Ariz.

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