

Club Spotlight

SWIMMING FOR THE FUN OF IT

BY KARI LYDERSEN

Swimmers of all levels and abilities train with the Scottsdale Aquatic Club Masters team in Arizona for different reasons, but all of them seem to agree that the fun and feeling of camaraderie are the most important.

“Why they train”—rather than the more common “how they train”—is the real question for Masters swimmers at Scottsdale Aquatic Club, located in Scottsdale, Ariz., a suburb of Phoenix. Indeed, it is a question for most Masters swimmers nationwide.

They are no longer competing for college scholarships or for spots on a national team. After decades in the “real world,” trophies and medals have lost some of their allure. And for those who were serious swimmers in their youth, logging best times is not often possible.

Yet, they still do it.

Scottsdale swimmers train at a beautiful, state-of-the-art, outdoor long course pool appropriately named Cactus Pool, with several large cacti growing outside the facility.

In the winter, they’ll get up when it’s still dark and slip into the water in the pre-dawn chill, sometimes braving frosty temperatures and fog so thick that they can’t see the end of the pool. In the summer, because of the extreme heat, the water temperature can rise to 86-87 degrees.

Juggling careers, homes and families, these swimmers carve hours out of their week to spend time in the pool.

Why?

There are a number of reasons—as many, perhaps, as the 65 diverse members who train with the Scottsdale Aquatic Club. The team has swimmers who were high school, college and Masters All-Americans in swimming and water polo. You’ll even find a few Olympians who train or have trained in the desert oasis: USA Olympians Maryanne Graham (1972-76), Beth Barr (1988), Trina Jackson (1996) and Melanie Valerio (1996)



LEFT » The coach of the Scottsdale Aquatic Club Masters team in Arizona is Temujin Gold, a 24-year-old former college swimmer at Indiana University.



as well as Canadian Olympian Mike Whitaker (1972).

Some are serious Masters competitors or triathletes. Others just value the health benefits of staying in shape. But all of them seem to agree that the fun and feeling of camaraderie with their teammates are the main reasons why they train.

Gary Frickey, 50, who has been swimming on-and-off since he was 11, trains “to stay in shape and to hang out with my friends.”

“It’s all about the people,” says Rick West, 60, a former triathlete and Masters swimmer for 20 years. “There’s so much enthusiasm. We’ve been friends for years. It doesn’t matter how fast you swim—it’s very inclusive.”

West adds that many of the swimmers even have nicknames. “There’s a whole culture built out of it,” he says. “One member is known as 6:12, since he seems to somehow arrive at 6:12 every morning—even though practice starts at 5:30. During water polo games, he wears cap No. 9—the sum of his magic numbers (6 + 1 + 2).”

MIXING IT UP

The team does challenging sets—with practice times scheduled at 5:30 a.m., the lunch hour and in the evening—but Coach Temujin Gold, a 24-year-old former college swimmer at Indiana University, also makes sure to mix things up. He’ll throw in oddball drills that keep things interesting, call out splits and cheer on his swimmers constantly.

“He has much more enthusiasm than you usually see from a Masters coach,” Frickey says.

That goes for the swimmers, too. For example, the team logo—which is proudly displayed on their team T-shirts—was designed by one of the SAC members. Also, many of the drills used in workout were developed by the swimmers.

One of their favorites is a drill called “surfing,” in which the swimmers stand upright on their kickboard, hold it underwater and scull with their arms to make their way across the pool—with a 360-degree spin in the middle.

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SCOTTSDALE MASTERS — *continued from 29*

Then, there's the kicking contest in which the swimmers face each other and go board-to-board in the center of the pool to see who can push the other back.

Scottsdale Aquatic Club Masters also challenge each other to swim 50 yards underwater without a breath. Anyone who can do it is admitted to the honorary "Underwater Lodge," and those who swim 50 meters long course underwater actually get a special lapel pin.

During a trademark "Hour of Power" set—60 repeats of 25 fly without a breath on a minute—team members sing their college fight songs after every 10 repeats.

There is also a weekly water polo game, and the Masters team has been known to hold its own in friendly water polo matches against Scottsdale's senior age group team.

The club also has created a tongue-in-cheek manifesto on its website for an independent nation of Scottsdale Aquatic Club (SAC) members, called SACistan, for "swimmers standing on the starting blocks of a brand new age; swimmers who have found the courage, the heart, the character to swim in the pool of uncertainty; swimmers who swim with a new Torch of Hope—not about medals and trophies and championships...but about a new pool where competitors and water-aerobic ladies can one day frolic side by side; where triathletes and retirees can circle-swim in camaraderie and brotherhood."

Being a member of Scottsdale Aquatic Club is more than just about swimming. It's a lifestyle. Team members spend time together outside the pool, including a weekly Friday morning bagel feast after practice, miniature golf outings and going to Diamondbacks baseball games.

Why do they train? Did we mention that it's fun? ♦

Kari Lydersen is a USA contributor for Swimming World Magazine and writes for the Washington Post.



ABOVE » *Scottsdale swimmers train at a beautiful, state-of-the-art, outdoor long course pool appropriately named Cactus Pool, with several large cacti growing outside the facility.*