

An old college sport gives

By JOHN D. STOKES
Special to The Log Cabin

LITTLE ROCK — Six years ago, a doctor told Rick Field he needed to do something to get back into shape. Four years ago, Marvin Schwartz needed something to help him feel good about himself.

Both found what they were looking for in a sport they had competed in through college. Now, both have reached the top 10 in their age groups in United States Masters Swimming.

Field is ranked No. 1 in the country in the 100-meter breaststroke (1:18.92) in the 45-49 age group. He ranks second in the 50-meter breaststroke with a time of 35.57 and in the 200-meter breaststroke in 2:57.26. Last year, Field attained a No. 5 ranking in the 40-44 age group with a 100-meter breaststroke time of 1:19.91.

Schwartz, swimming in the 35-39 age group, ranks sixth in the 800 freestyle in 10:25.81 and 10th in the 400-meter freestyle at 4:55.15. He is also 10th in the 1,500-meter freestyle in 19:35.33.

Field, 45, had not swum competitively in 20 years and was "smoking and had high blood pressure" when a doctor talked him into getting back into the pool.

"Here we are six years later," he said, "and there's no smoking, no blood pressure problems and I've lost about 25 pounds."

Field said he swims because he thrives on competition.

"The challenge in staying with something like this is to keep it fresh," he said. "You don't get the competitive juices running as freely in swimming as you do in other sports. It's tedious. Anyone who does it for a long time has to really work at keeping it fresh."

Field, a general manager at CCX Network Inc., has his methods for overcoming the tediousness.

"I keep establishing goals," he said. "When I first started, it was to win a national championship (which he accomplished last summer in the 100 breaststroke in the masters championships). My challenge now is 'What is my next goal?' Right now, I'm trying to make a commitment to making the world championships in Australia."

Schwartz, 39, had a different motivation for his return to competitive swimming.

"I was at a point in my life where I needed some positive

reinforcement," he said.

He had been swimming at the Westside YMCA in Little Rock and had seen results of Arkansas masters meets in the newspapers and decided to give the competition a shot.

"I had been intrigued (by masters swimming) and had wondered if I could do those times again," Schwartz said.

In his first meet, he set four state records and he's been a regular ever since.

"I'm at the point now where if I don't hit a personal best every time I compete, I'm disappointed," he said recently during a break at the state short course masters championships at the Little Rock Racquet Club.

Masters swimming also allowed Schwartz to meet Field and that eventually brought him to Conway with a public relations job at CCX.

Schwartz now has become challenged by swimming faster than he did in college.

"When I first started (masters swimming), it was just to get in control of something," he said, "but then I started reading stories about guys (former Olympic medalists) in their 50s who were swimming faster times now than they did 30 years ago.

"My times now are within seconds of what I swam in college. There's really no limit. I'll turn 40 in September and I still want to swim my fastest times ever."

Schwartz is determined to go faster and faster while Field is active in promoting physical fitness.

"When you exercise, you feel better about yourself and are healthier," Field said. "And, a side benefit is that you may lose a little weight and look better."

Field, with the aid of Charles Morgan and Phil Carter at CCX, was instrumental in the development of the company's wellness center.

"I have to be careful because I'm so competitive, a true believer in fitness and the wellness center is for people who don't really believe," Field said. "But my message has always been that you need to get into something and understand what commitment is and make it.

"We're trying to sell a better way of life, and hopefully, because of regular exercise and proper diet, I'll be around to watch a few more television shows."