

Swimming's not just for little kids

What is swimming?

- A recreational activity.
- A safety skill.
- A competitive sport.
- A fitness outlet.
- An art form.
- A prerequisite for other aquatic activities.
- All of the above.

The answer, of course, is all of the above. Combine most of these, throw in socializing, and you have Masters Swimming.

Masters Swimming was organized by Ransom Arthur, who had coached Navy teams of various ages while an officer in the Navy Medical Corps. He developed the concept of a continuing program for adults which emphasized training for health reasons, with competition as an added incentive.

The first Masters swim meet was held in Amarillo, Texas, in May, 1970. During the early '70s, loosely organized Masters swim groups sprang to life all over the country.

About 20 years ago, a "fun relay" for adults was the entertainment for an age group

Health
Styles

**Peggy
Ebbing**



swim meet in Warren. My children somehow survived the humiliation of seeing their mother swimming one leg of a relay wearing a pink bubble gum swim cap and a size 44 green cotton vintage 1930 swim suit (I weighed about 110 pounds at the time).

It took several years to recover my dignity, hone my aquatic skills and enter my first "real" swim meet at the ripe old age of 38.

A few meets were held in Arkansas in the 70s; and, interestingly enough, there were as many novices as ex-competitive swimmers in the beginning.

Excitement and apprehension combined to inspire such comments as "When the start-

ing gun fires, my toes will probably lock on the starting block and I'll just swing down and hang like a sloth." (That same swimmer was seen furiously sipping Kaopectate in the locker room).

What we all discovered was that our backgrounds made no difference. True equality is standing at poolside clad only in a skimpy nylon or Lycra suit with wet, stringy hair, encouraging each other and feeling real joy for each swimmer's accomplishments.

By 1982, when Ron Bank arrived in Arkansas to find no organized Masters Swimming organization, records had been toppling all over the U.S. Swimmers from 20 to 90 (yes, 90!) had been competing in five-year age increments for a dozen years. A national newsletter created a sense of unity, and meets attracted swimmers from great distances. Records were set in Long and Short Course National Masters swim meets. The charismatic Bank set out

to organize an Arkansas chapter of Masters swimmers; and, with the help of several dedicated swimmers and coaches, swimmers from all over the state were registered.

Lap swimming was replaced by solitary and group workouts; two or three meets were held each year and a real sense of comradeship was felt by all.

Ida Hvalacek of Mountain Home began to keep records, and short- and long-course standards were set with the purpose of giving Masters swimmers a gauge to judge their efforts.

The club's motto "still crazy after all these years" is only surpassed by the club's philosophy: "age, cunning, deceit and treachery can defeat youth and skill." Fun, dedication, serious effort, teasing and taunts are at once central to Masters events.

Dick Bower, a nationally acclaimed swim coach, writes: "Swimming enthusiasts all

over the world are currently amazed and somewhat puzzled by the swimming performances of older swimmers ... competitors are bettering their lifetime best collegiate times.

"We must realize there are other ceilings more limiting than age, and most of these can be raised. These are the ceilings imposed by inadequacies in strength, conditioning, skill, rest, diet, motivation and confidence, as well as the often-present problem of overweight.

"Raise these ceilings and you will get closer to your real potential."

The next column (in three weeks) will be devoted to the particular benefits of swimming and how to start an individual program. The main advantage of swimming is that anyone can swim to some extent, since swimming is a matter of proper technique. Age, weight and disabilities are not limiting factors in this sport.