

Out of the Blue : Sharing insights and positive perspectives about the sport of swimming from those that have lived the experience. By Cynthia Owens



SCSC alumnus, Mike Bottom, is recognized as one of the finest coaches in the world today, and certainly the finest sprint coach. Mike was recently named Head Coach of the University of Michigan's Men's team.

He is a former World Record holder, an Olympic qualifier, a three time NCAA team championship member, a four time National Team member, and a four time Olympic coach....and he got his start right here as a young boy swimming for Santa Clara Swim Club!

He was an outstanding swimmer, but he is even more renowned as a coach. Mike has been mentored by best coaches in the sport, including Doc Councilman

(Indiana), George Haines (UCLA), Peter Daland (USC), Mark Schubert (USA Swimming National Team Head Coach) and Nort Thornton (Cal). An impressive one half (nine) of the 18 Olympic medals awarded in the Men's sprint events (50m and 100m freestyle) from 1996 to 2004, were won by athletes that Mike Bottom coached. And, he added yet more in 2008.

Mike graduated from USC with a Bachelors degree in psychology, with the highest grade point average among student-athletes. He then went on to graduate summa cum laude with his Masters in counseling psychology from Auburn University. In addition, he concluded all his course work for his Ph.D. in sport psychology in 1998. Today, Mike is happily married to Lauralyn. They have two young daughters, Dublyn and Macaiah

Mike has very fond memories of his SCSC experience. I recently had the opportunity to talk to Mike about his perspective on swimming.

Q: What has swimming meant to you?

It's been a pathway of life for me. From the time I was five years old I've always been in the water. Even after my competition days, I'd use swimming to recapture my focus in life. Transitioning to coaching has been an avenue to extend my personal growth. Swimming has been my life. It has taught me all the lessons I've learned...and opened doors to meet the great people I've met. Swimming has been my "opportunity" in so many ways, both in and out of the pool.

Q: When you think of your personal experiences growing up at SCSC, what comes to mind?

George Haines; and the wonderful family he provided for us as a team. The life lessons we learned from him, not just about swimming, but about ourselves as individuals, are things I will cherish forever. George truly cared and was genuinely concerned about how we grew as young men and young women. He stressed commitment, values and standing up for what we believe. Most importantly, George taught us about going the extra percentage to reach our goals; especially when we thought there was no more left to 'go.'

SCSC, back in "the day;" (the late 60s early 70s), was a unique place, full of Olympians. We got to see them, observe them, and be inspired. I think it is extremely important for swimmers to have that kind of inspiration; just being around 'greatness' is a wonderful motivator.

Q: Did you always dream of making the Olympic Team? Why or why not is having that dream important?

Yes! That was the reason to be there! It was that dream that captured my interest, and resulted in my dedication and commitment. I grew up here watching Spitz, Schollander, and Roth. Two-time Olympic breaststroker, Brian Job even lived at our house for a while! We always housed athletes at the SCSC

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International Meet...and got to know Olympians as real people. We'd see what they ate, how they stretched, what they wore. We'd laugh with them, and get to know them. It was so great! It really was an inspiration for us. These athletes actually lived out our dream. They made it real.

I believe that as an 8-11 year old the Olympic dream is important part of the process, and it has to be balanced with FUN. That is the coach's responsibility. Regardless of where you end up, you always start with the dream. And then, you go for it. It pulls you to be great in school, great in the pool. The dream of Olympic greatness helps shape a positive attitude in life. For any youngsters out there, I'd also like to say that I am convinced that in order to reach your dream, you have to get good grades in school...not just swim!

As you move along through your process, one of lessons swimming teaches you is to re-evaluate. Self evaluation teaches you about yourself; your goals and your strategies along the way. This is the point at which you reap extraordinary value in the process or journey competitive swimming provides, whether you actually become an Olympian or not.

Q: As a coach of the best swimmers in the world, what advice do you have for our SCSC swimmers who are just beginning their quest?

Dream big dreams, pursue those dreams to your fullest, and you will find your way!

Out of the Blue will become a regular monthly feature in our club newsletter to showcase stories of inspiration, motivation and humor from those who have strong ties to our great sport.