

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



For the most part, he was just pretty average for an SCSC swimmer. Certainly not a superstar...and we certainly had plenty of those. Kind of a quiet guy, but always with a ready smile. I remember him as a hard worker. Tim Elson and his sister, Tessa, were like most swimming families. Daily swim practices, fitting in homework and holding good grades. Weekends were eaten up by swim meets that in those days ran until 10 PM sometimes, with moms and dads timing, officiating and helping out where they could.

What he may have lacked in terms of being a gifted swimmer, Tim more than made up for with his guts and tenacity. He started swimming "late" by most standards at the ripe old age of 13, and at SCSC that put him way behind the curve. But, it wasn't

in Tim's nature to give up. By the time he was twenty and ready to retire, he was just hitting his swimming stride. After 8 years as an SCSC member, he'd been a Jr. National participant, a Sr. National participant, and he competed in the 1976 Olympic Trials. Once in college, he went on to compete at NCAA's, and was even a starter for an NCAA Final Four Water Polo team at Pepperdine.

Swimming had such a positive impact on his life that he became the Head Coach at Pepperdine University for 15 years, and he invented the Freestyler Hand Paddles!

Today, Tim is the Vice President of Finis, Inc, The Leader in Technical Swim Product Development. He is happily married and has two young children.

Recently I had the opportunity to catch up with Tim and ask him about his thoughts on swimming.

Question: What has swimming meant to you?

A: Outside of my parents, swimming has influenced me positively more than anything else I've done in my life. It's shaped who I am in so many ways. Who I am today, what I do, what I enjoy doing, all comes from swimming. After college I became a swim coach for the next 20 years, and now I'm still in the business side of swimming. Let's just say without swimming I would be a completely different person.

Question: When you think of your personal experience at SCSC what comes to mind?

A: Incredible pride for having been a part of the best swim club in the world. I also have distinct memories of how difficult it was to compete with the very best swimmers in the country, in that freezing cold pool! I used to tell people (only half jokingly) the reason I went to Pepperdine instead of Stanford was because at the time Pepperdine had a hot tub and Stanford didn't. In the final analysis swimming at SCSC gave me the confidence to feel like nothing I ever do in my life will ever be too tough, because SCSC and swimming is what tough is all about.

Question: Did you always dream of making the Olympic team? Why or why not is that important?

This is the hardest question for me. I certainly wasn't a star at SCSC, but being a good, or average swimmer at SCSC was like being a star almost anywhere else. The competition was so tough when I was a kid that dreaming about the Olympics seemed almost impossible. My problem was that I was a real late bloomer, and really didn't think I was any good until I made Olympic Trials in the 100 free, which turned out to be my last year on the club at age 20. So my swimming career pretty much ended right when I was getting good. But I honestly believe that that dissatisfaction is what spurred me on to coaching, and helped me be a better coach. So to answer the question, I think almost everyone at SCSC dreamed about the Olympics simply because it's a very pleasant thought to be going through your mind while you're in agony, and of course, we

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were very influenced by our team mates who actually did go to the Olympics. Is it important to dream? What else is going to make you jump into a dark cold pool at 6am? Absolutely.

Question: What advice do you have for swimmers just beginning their journey?

This is the easiest. Don't give up, be relentless, try hard every day, stay the course. In a word: perseverance. The best lesson, of many I learned from swimming, is to persevere. I have two small children, four year old daughter, 18 month old son, and if they could learn that lesson the way I did, I would know that they were going to be successful in anything they do.

Out of the Blue is 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.