

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



In the world of aquatics, the number of athletes who have successfully transitioned from water polo to competitive swimming can be counted on two hands. Fortunately for SCSC, one member of that elite group belongs to us! Kurt Krumpolz didn't start swimming competitively until he was almost 19 years old. He attended UCLA as a star water polo player during the school year, and swam for George Haines at SCSC in the summers. His story is nothing short of remarkable and inspiring.

It was during one of his summer's with Haines that Kurt qualified for the Olympic Trials in 1972. That accomplishment was, in and of itself, remarkable. But what followed is now

famous lore. During the preliminary heats of the 400m freestyle, he shattered the world record by 1.6 seconds. It was an incredible feat! Seeded first going into finals, with a brand new world record, no less, made the reality of securing a berth on the United States Olympic Team a near certainty. However, fate had a different plan. Unfortunately, Kurt worsened his time in the Finals heat, was not a top 2 finisher, and did not earn his berth on the US Olympic Team.

However, not one to be defeated by "failure", Kurt went on the following summer to qualify for the World Games, and set another world record in the Men's 800m free relay, winning a gold medal, and earning a silver medal in the 200m freestyle.

While at UCLA, Kurt was a 3 time All-American in water polo, a 4 time All-American in swimming, as well as a member of two NCAA championship teams. In 2008 Kurt was inducted into the UCLA Athletic Hall of Fame.

Swimming has stayed with Kurt his whole life. He worked for Speedo for 21 years, and was a consultant for the 2004 US Olympic Trials in Long Beach, California. His son, J.W., now a senior at USC, won a silver medal last summer at the Beijing Olympic Games for water polo, and in December 2009, J.W.'s team won the NCAA's in water polo. Kurt's two daughters, Katy & Kari, are also both accomplished polo players. Today, Kurt works for Bettertimes, a small swim accessory company doing sales and product development.

I recently had the chance to catch up with Kurt. Here are some excerpts from our talk.

Q: What has swimming meant to you?

K: My perspective is somewhat different than the majority. I did not swim seriously until college. Prior to that I just swam to stay in shape for water polo and swim on the HS team. After a successful freshman year at UCLA Santa Clara team members Carl Thomas and Steve Doyle talked me into coming up to swim for George. It turned out to be a great move. After a short 4 year career at SCSC (summers only), I was able to parlay my success into a job with Speedo. I was at Speedo for 21 years and was in charge of the Sports Marketing and Accessory Departments. During that time I was able to attend all the Olympic Games and World Championships etc as we sponsored USA Swimming and other Aquatic Federations. Swimming instilled a work ethic and discipline into my mind that carries over to the business career I have had so far.

Q: When you think of your personal experience swimming at SCSC, what comes to mind?

K: For me, having never swum on a team prior to 1972, the atmosphere at SCSC was a whole new experience. Swimming with the talent that was in the pool that summer was, humbling, to say the least. But, the most important aspect was the friends that I developed while swimming at SCSC. Some of my closest friends in my life are from this club. Plus, just swimming for George and the SCSC made all of us want to excel, as the previous athletes before us did.

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

K: The Olympics were always a dream that I had. I did not succeed in that goal, but yet when I look at the good fortune I had during my career I can get over it. It helped to have my son win a Silver Medal with the Beijing Olympic Team in Water Polo. That really gave me some closure to the goal I never achieved. It is important to remember that only 26 Men or Women make an Olympic Team every four years, those odds are worse than playing in the NBA, MLB etc!!

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

K: Swimming is a sport that is individual, but a team sport at the same time. It is not subjective. The clock is always your judge. Enjoy the friends you have and will meet. Learn from your coaches and their wisdom. Learn to prioritize your time, work hard and most of all have fun

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.