

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



At the 1972 Olympic Games in Munich, Mark Spitz made history. His unprecedented 7 Olympic gold medals, in 7 world record times, not only raised the bar of excellence for amateur sports, but more importantly, his achievement also inspired generations to come.

Shortly after the '72 Games ended, while the excitement was still fresh, Franz Mortensen and his dad attended a recruitment spaghetti dinner at De Anza Swim Club (predecessor to DACA). It was a meeting that changed Franz's life in ways, as a child of 8, he never could have imagined.

Franz joined De Anza that year and began his swimming journey. Born in Denmark, Franz and his family moved to the US when he was four years old. His family frequently traveled back and forth and he trained in both Denmark and Cupertino through the 1970's. Franz began his rise in swimming by capturing second in the 500 free at CCS, and placing 3<sup>rd</sup> at USA Nationals in the 200 freestyle.

From 1982-86 Franz attended UCLA on a swimming scholarship. In 1984, while at college Franz, was part of the NCAA championship 4 x 100 freestyle relay, which barely missed breaking the American Record! He was also a PAC 10 finalist, taking an impressive second place.

After graduating from UCLA, Franz trained at SCSC with head coach, Jay Fitzgerald; his teammates were our very own Dave Meck and Erik Colwill. He went on to earn his Masters of Science degree in 1994.

Swimming highlights include:

3 x World Championships (Guayaquil, 1982, Madrid, '86, and Perth, '91) – Consolation Finalist

3 x European Championships (1987, '89, '91) – Finalist in 100m free

Danish National Champion; a half dozen times.

Danish National record holder 100m free for 19 years; 1988 – 2007

Three-time Olympian; 1984, 1988 and 1992 (finishing as high as 13<sup>th</sup> in 1988 in the 100 & 200 freestyle)

Today, Franz is the President of Fastlane, Tek, Inc., ( <http://www.fastlanetek.com/> ) and is renowned for his expertise in timing systems. He has worked every summer Olympic Games in some capacity with IOC/ Omega timing results since retiring from swimming, covering multiple sports including swimming, diving, synchro, water polo, and sailing, and has even worked a Winter Games!

1996 Atlanta Games, for Organizing Committee as Results Manager

2000 Sydney Games, for IOC as Results consultant

2004-2008, Athens, Torino, Beijing Games, for Omega, in Results

Fortunately for us, he can frequently be found right here at SCSC, managing our website and ensuring our high tech functions run smoothly. Franz continues to swim with our Masters program, and his two sons, following in their dad's swimming footsteps, participated in our Learn to Swim program, and our age group program.

Recently I had the opportunity to catch up with Franz to talk about his thoughts on swimming.

## *Out of the Blue (continued)*

### **Q: What has swimming meant to you?**

**F:** Swimming has influenced most aspects of my life. From age group swimming in the 1970's to my business life today – swimming has, and always will play a huge role in my everyday existence. I started swimming at age eight in the exhilaration of Mark Spitz's success in the 1972 Olympics. Since then, I have been involved in so many aspects of swimming, the sport is literally part of my being: I swam age group and High School in Northern California and Denmark. I swam college at UCLA. I competed and travelled internationally for Denmark throughout my twenties. I swam masters throughout my thirties. I met my wife at the Atlanta games and now have 2 kids that swim. In the late 90's I started a swim meet timing business that continues today.

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

**F:** Growing up was a constant swirl of workouts, meets and team functions. This slowly transitioned into reasonable High School success and sudden college opportunities. But it was not until college, that making an Olympic Team became a dream. Part of this was my own naïveté. Throughout my age group years, I was more or less oblivious to the larger picture. I did not consider the importance of High School swimming until I found myself getting second at CCS. I had not considered what my college plans were, until a college coach suddenly asked me what they were. Equally shocking was making a World Championship team at the Danish Nationals. Suddenly I was going to Ecuador for a swim meet among swimming's best, rather than back to California to hang out with my friends for the rest of the summer. As the college experience unfolded, I found myself swimming with and competing against some of the best names in the sport. I was not beating them, but I could give some of them a run for the money. In 1984, I made the cut for the Danish Olympic Team, and just as suddenly as all the other milestones I had experienced, I found myself at the Olympics.

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

**F:** My experience is that you do not know when (or if) success will come and everyone as their own experience. Some swimmers are extremely successful as age group swimmers. Some mature very late. But most never achieve greatness in the classic sense of Olympic Glory and world fame. That is why it's so important to have fun along the way.