

Swimmer Profile – Kim Hurst

By Elaine Krugman



Imagine going to USMS Spring Nationals hoping to place in the top ten in one of your events, so you could win a medal. (You're seeded in the top ten in your two best events; however, that is no guarantee.) Now, imagine not only winning a medal, but winning *four* of them including a silver and bronze! Oh, and by the way, you did that in the top of your 45-49 age group. And, at 49 years old, it's well past the age when most swimmers had swum their best-ever Master's times.

Kim Hurst not only accomplished all of that in Mesa, last April, but she did one more thing most Masters swimmers can only dream about: Kim raced her best-ever Masters times in all six of her races, and she has been in Masters for nearly twenty years! In the 1000 free, she beat her previous best time by more than twenty seconds!

"I had set some time goals before I went [to Mesa] based on what I had done. I had decided last August that [competing at Nationals was] what I wanted to do, and so I had my meets picked out leading up to the Nationals meet," Kim explained. Between August and April, Kim competed in five Masters meets to prepare for Nationals and set Nationals time goals in the process. Kim also wanted to win medals, and she knew she had a good shot. "When the psych sheets came out, I was seeded in the top ten for two events. Of course, that doesn't always mean anything, but I had a good shot in my 1000 and 500, because I was seeded 4th and 8th." Kim ended up placing 2nd in the 1000 and 3rd in the 500. "I was super happy about that!" In addition, she placed 8th in the 50 free, and 5th in the 200 free, so she took home some serious hardware.

What made winning those medals extra special was that Kim was especially motivated to do well in memory of her older brother, Steve, who she lost ten years ago. Steve was an excellent swimmer, and it was a passion they shared growing up. "I remember thinking when I was in Mesa, 'This meet is for Steve.' He would be so proud of me. That's kind of cool, too, that I can know that he would be proud and think it's really cool that I'm still swimming. Some days, I just remember that, too, when I'm having a rough day, and I don't want to go to practice."

As a result of Kim's success at Nationals, she landed in the 2019 USMS Top Ten, ranking 5th in the 1000 and 9th in the 500. She is also ranked 8th in the 1650.

It seems as if this late bloomer as a Masters swimmer has gone full circle, because she was also a very good age-grouper, especially when she was 8-10 years old. Kim started swimming at age 5 and competed for Dynamo from age 7 through high school.

By the time she graduated, Kim was burned out on swimming and didn't dive off the starting blocks again until she joined USMS at 30 years old. It wasn't long after that this new Masters swimmer started working for the Sugarloaf location of Swim Atlanta, in Lawrenceville, and competed on their Masters team. Kim coached for 15 years, became the assistant manager for their swim school, and then got promoted to manager four years ago. "Swim Atlanta is my second family," Kim says affectionately.

Curious as to what drew this enthusiastic swimmer back to the sport after so many years away from the pool, I asked Kim. She replied, “I was 21 when I had my first child, and then three years later, I had my second child. I had completely stopped exercising and gained the baby weight with the first one and never took it off. I gained a little bit more with the second one. Before I knew it, I [weighed] 250 pounds; so, what drew me back in [to swimming] was wanting to lose the weight.” She lost over 100 pounds in just over one year. “Once I got some of the weight off, I became very active, because I realized how much better I felt. It was ten years ago when I started to lose the weight. I’m proud of that, because it’s not easy. Anybody trying to lose weight, I always have sympathy for them, because it’s hard; and, the hardest part is keeping it off. Finding something that you enjoy doing that’s active obviously helps keep the weight off and makes you feel better, which makes you eat better. It just all kind of goes together. That’s what swimming has done for me. I do other things also. I do a little bit of weight training and walking; but, the one thing that I am very consistent with and that I enjoy the most is my Masters practice every morning.”

“I love it. I love the people and I love having a coach on deck. I can swim a little bit by myself, but I do so much better when I have someone telling me what to do and having my teammates by me. We all push each other and have fun doing it,” Kim said about her coached Tuesday thru Friday practices. On Saturdays, she works out with a loosely-organized group of teammates who follow their coach’s written plan for the session. “Amazing!” is how the Swim Atlanta Masters swimmer describes her coach, Jordan Jones. “I told my coach a year ago that [going to Spring Nationals] is what I want to do, this is my goal, and I want you to help me get there. He was on top of it. He knew exactly how hard to push me without pushing me away from it. He knew where I needed to be. He’s awesome. He’s in tune with everybody. Every Masters swimmer, it doesn’t matter what level, he’s so in tune with what their needs are and what their goals are, and what their intervals should be. He’s a really, really good coach.”

When Kim first joined Masters, she was unaware there were competitions. Then, once she learned about Masters swim meets, she had doubts about competing again. The thought of it intimidated her, but she signed up anyway.

After she went to her first meet, Kim was hooked. “Once you go to one or two meets, number one, there are so many different levels [of swimmers] there; you will never feel out of place,” she said.

“I don’t remember specifically thinking about competitions when I first started back to swimming. That wasn’t my reason for swimming. It was more for weight loss and exercise. After a year or two into it, I realized I could actually do something with this and that it would be fun; and, I could meet new people and go different places. Then, once I did one or two meets, I don’t think I have ever looked back. I love them.”

“The main reason I swim is for exercise and the way it makes me feel; but, at the same time, to keep myself accountable, I will sign up for meets as often as I can, because I know it makes me work harder,” Kim said.

It isn’t just the hard work she puts into each 4,000-yard session in the pool that has made Kim such a successful swimmer. As she explained, “Number one, it’s consistency. I rarely miss a practice...

Swimming is my life right now, and I hope it will be for years to come. Also, the last ten years, I have taken a lot of time to figure out my body and what I need to do to keep it healthy, and what I need to do to keep the weight off.” She also does light weights 4-6 days a week to keep her shoulders strong and prevent shoulder pain. “Ever since I added that to my routine, I have no more shoulder pain. I think that has also helped me to be successful. For any sport, I think you have to do something outside of [the sport] to help you in the sport.”

“Another thing I have worked on is being a confident athlete. I used to be so intimidated when I would go to these meets and kind of doubt myself. I have worked on that the last couple of years. You have to go in confident,” Kim said, adding that she recommends other swimmers read the book, *The Confident Athlete*, by Tami Matheny.

It is that confidence, on top of the years of hard training, that has made Masters Swimming such an enjoyable experience for Kim. “As a Masters swimmer, all of it has just been awesome. From the people, to the coaches, to the meets; I have no bad memories at all. It’s so much different as a Masters swimmer. If your coach gives you a set and you don’t like it, well, guess what? You change it!”

Ultimately, it was Kim’s experience at 2019 Spring Nationals that made it her favorite Masters memory. “I had some concerns going into it. Will I be able to race for four days? Will I be good for the first day or two, and then what’s going to happen after that? But to go in and be able to race well all four days and feel good—even at the end I never got sore... Even though this was my latest meet, I feel that it’s going to be the highlight for a long time.”

Since Kim plans to compete in future Nationals meets, I see more Masters highlights coming down the road, well into her senior years. “At these National level meets, I see these people in their 60’s, and 70’s, and 80’s; and, these men and women that are still racing, and they’re doing great. That is so inspiring to see that. I want to be that person, 80 years old and still racing.”