

Swimmer Profile – Margo Schneider

By Elaine Krugman

Although Margo Schneider has swum for fitness and recreation all of her life, the only competitive pool swimming experience she had before joining Masters was during high school, when she swam on a YMCA team in Chicago. She brought plenty of competitive open water swimming experience with her to Masters, though. In 1983, at the age of 35, Margo started competing in triathlons and had quite a successful career before retiring as a professional triathlete in 2004. Throughout her twenty-one years in the sport, she competed in over 100 triathlons, including four ironman's and seven world championships. At age 40, Margo became a



Qualified Elite Master triathlete and won prize money competing in Olympic-length triathlons (which consist of a one-mile swim, 25-mile bike race, and 10-kilometer run). The highlight of this triathlete's career was breaking her age group record in the 1987 Ironman Canada.

After retiring as a triathlete, Margo returned to swimming just for fitness until 2010, when the competitive spirit inspired her to join U.S. Masters Swimming at the age of 62. At her first Masters swim meet, which was a developmental meet, she entered the backstroke events and discovered she had a natural talent for the stroke. That became Margo's preferred competitive stroke, and she has swum her way into the Top 10 rankings in her age group. Just this past year, she ranked 3rd in the country in the 50 and 100 short course meter backstroke as well as in the 100 long course backstroke, in the 70-74 age group. (Margo also ranked 4th in the 200 backstroke and placed in the Top Ten in 50 and 100-meter freestyle.) In all, since 2010, this sprinter has achieved 24 individual and 12 relay Top Ten rankings.

None of those Top Ten achievements can match Margo's favorite memory of competing at the 2011 Summer Nationals, though. "It was my first Nationals at Auburn,

Alabama. It was really kind of exciting for me. I took first place in the 100 meter backstroke." And, that is what Margo enjoys most about Masters Swimming. "[I am] just trying to do my best and break some records for myself. That's all I try to do. I want to swim for something."

Although Margo's best event is the 100 backstroke, she is looking to mix it up a bit in 2019. "Right now, at the age of 70, I am really working on all my strokes and trying to improve them the best I can. Then, next year, what I am going to do is concentrate on one event (the 100 backstroke) and swim all of the different events I have never swum before for fun. It's just that I have to have some fun now."

"I will be swimming for the rest of my life, because I had so many bike accidents in (triathlon) training, and one almost cost my life. I've lost a lot of friends from bike accidents, so now what I do is

swim four times a week; and, on days I don't swim, I train on my Wind Trainer or Total Gym. I'm trying to keep all of my tendons and joints together!" she laughed.

Fortunately, Margo hasn't had any injuries due to swimming; however, she wasn't so fortunate in those bike accidents as a triathlete. She described one extremely scary one in particular: "I was doing a century ride in Florida, and I was riding with the pack (of riders), and the pack split. A woman drove her car in front of us, and I hit that car straight on. They said I was dead, so they airlifted me to the hospital. I just broke a wrist."

These days, Margo stays off the roads and opts to ride on the Wind Trainer, instead—much safer on those tendons and joints!

To round out her dryland training, Margo takes her two dogs on a morning hike near her Tiger, Georgia home before heading to the pool.

For her swim workout, Margo trains on her own and is self-coached, because there are no Masters teams in the Tiger area. In a typical one-hour session, she puts in about 2500 yards, all quality of mostly backstroke and freestyle. "I feel if I am going to do this the rest of my life, an hour is enough [swimming per session]," she said.

The downside of not having a coached workout, however, is not having somebody to watch your technique from up on deck. In particular, Margo said, "It's really difficult to know how well you're doing in your starts. Whether it's the backstroke or freestyle start; I would really like to have somebody coach me on that."

One self-coaching technique Margo uses to her benefit, though, is watching videos of the world's best swimmers. "I look at these Olympic swimmers and try to get a visual picture. I'm trying to get back to concentrating on my stroke and trying to better myself in [all of] my swim strokes" she explained.

When asked what advice she would give other solo swimmers, Margo replied, "I feel there are some swimmers that really need help on their swimming. They need to go back to their swimming lessons. They are swimming for swimming's sake, but they could really improve in the water. They should really start improving their strokes; not just being able to swim. That's what I believe. I think all swimmers should really be trying to improve themselves."

Margo puts in the hard work on improving her stroke technique with particular goals in mind. "I'm trying to beat my backstroke record. I have to make life a little bit more interesting in the pool," she said.

Although breaking her own backstroke records is Margo's primary swimming goal, she is also in the process of transitioning from sprint freestyle to the distance freestyle events. "I have always been a sprinter, but I am trying to change into more of a distance swimmer. I want to do different events that are longer."

For the time being, Margo is sticking to local competitions in pursuit of her goals. "I am always concentrating on my backstroke and setting my own records; so, I want to do quality meets such as Dynamo (St. Pat's meet); and, for long course, UGA or the one in Greenville, South Carolina are the best. My dogs are aging out, so I won't have them in a year or two, and I will be able to travel more; but, right now, I can't do anything really far just yet."

In the meantime, Margo is just happy staying safe off the roads and healthy in the pool. "I'm just blessed that I've got my health, and I just want to keep up my fitness... All in all, swimming helps me. Swimming is the best thing for me, and it's the best sport you could possibly be in. There are no injuries from swimming, and that's why I want to swim the rest of my life."