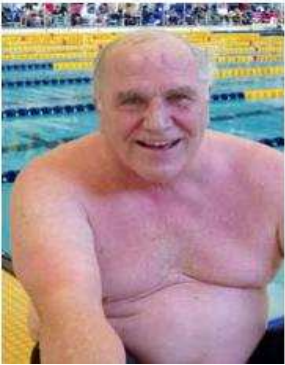




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Swimmer Profile – Stan Delair



By Elaine Krugman

If you have been to a regional swim meet over the past five years, you may have seen a swimmer in his 60's walking on deck with the aid of crutches. That was Stan Delair, and he wants people who are curious to know he contracted polio as a child. "I had polio when I was three years old, a couple of years before they had a vaccine," he explained.

Polio didn't hold Stan back from being an active kid, though. "I learned to swim when I was four or five years old at the YMCA. An interesting fact about the YMCA back in those days was that the swim lessons [for boys] were all given in the nude. They did this starting in the 1920's and up until the 1960's. They didn't do that for the women; it was just for the men," Stan said, encouraging me to look it up. Sure enough, my Google search confirmed this odd fact!

While growing up, Stan spent a lot of time in the water during the summers, but never competed on an age group swim team. He took a chance anyway and tried out for his high school squad. The freshman was surprised he made the cut, because their team was top-ranked in Nebraska. Due to the stiff competition, though, Stan didn't get much opportunity to compete at meets.

Following high school, Stan was invited to try out for the swim team at the University of Nebraska where his former high school coach was now the head coach. As Stan explained about the offer, "I thought, If I'm going to keep swimming in college, I want to go someplace where I can compete (rather than sit on the bench). I went to a smaller school, a state college in northern Nebraska and swam there for two years."

Following college, Stan swam only sporadically. About one of his swimming stints, he said, "I set the American Record for my classification in disability at age 66. It didn't last very long; some 24-year-old came along five months later and beat it." Stan also qualified for the Paralympic Trials; however, he did not participate.

Five years ago, he decided to return to swimming once again. "I was badly out of shape and out of breath, so I gradually built it up to where I could swim a whole mile! I got to the point where I thought, 'This is great, but if I do this on my own, I'm kind of lazy and I won't do as well.'" Stan decided it would be better to train with a coach and team, so he joined Masters and the Stingrays in 2013 and trains with them Mondays, Wednesdays, and Fridays at 5:30 AM. Additionally, he swims 23 days per week on his own. Stan swims a total of 10 – 12,000 yards per week, usually swimming 1,500 – 2,000 yards per session, when he swims on his own. "I don't think for me personally that racking up a lot of yards is the right way to go," he explained, adding that fatigue is the major factor, and when he gets tired, he stops to rest. Stan's the oldest swimmer on the Stingrays, and he finds it difficult to keep up with the younger swimmers in their 20's.

Although he limits his yardage in workouts, this freestyler tackles the mid-distance and distance free events at meets. In college, Stan specialized in the 500 and 1650 free, and although he told himself when he joined Masters that he would never compete in those events again, he has ended up doing just that. “I did not enjoy doing the 1650 when I was in college, and I said that nobody is ever going to get me to do one of those again, but I guess they did! I’m still not crazy about it, but I’ll do it. I kind of have to do it, because without a kick, I’m not very good for sprints, so I have to focus on the distance events.”

As he has gotten older, though, this determined swimmer has made some changes in his 1500 and 1650 race strategy—something many Masters swimmers find they need to do as they age up: give up flip turns in favor of open turns, and breathe every stroke. “I just don’t have the lung capacity anymore to do flip turns for 60 or 66 turns,” Stan lamented, but added that switching to open turns, increasing his distance per stroke, and breathing every stroke has helped improve his race endurance.

That’s the nice thing about swimming backstroke, and one of the reasons Stan adopted it as his second stroke—you can get as much air as you need! It is also a stroke he could swim without a good kick; although, as he describes his backstroke, “It’s a work in progress!” The work he has put in to improve his stroke technique has paid off, though, because he beat out five of his competitors in the 200 Yard Backstroke to take home a bronze medal at the 2017 National Senior Games.

As Stan looks ahead to future meets, he has one goal he hopes to achieve. “When I hit 70 (in two years), I would like to go to Nationals and make a Top Ten or two.”

In the meantime, he is working towards that goal by competing in meets about once each month. In addition to swimming in Masters meets, Stan swims with the Shepherd Sharks, a team of Paralympic-classified swimmers sponsored by the Shepherd Center. Located in Atlanta, the private, not-for-profit hospital specializes in medical treatment, research and rehabilitation for people with spinal cord injury, brain injury, multiple sclerosis, spine and chronic pain, and other neuromuscular conditions. Stan is the oldest swimmer on their adult team and has traveled throughout the country to compete with them at Paralympic meets.

Between swimming with the Shepherd Sharks and Stingrays, swimming has been a very positive experience for Stan, since returning to the sport in 2012. As he listed off his favorite things about Masters, they included, “The camaraderie with the people, you get to meet a lot of nice people at the meets, the people I work out with, and you’re doing something worthwhile that’s good for you. The health benefits are obvious. Since I have started swimming, I have had a lot more energy and stamina.”

With a list of benefits like that, it looks like we will be seeing Stan competing in area swim meets for years to come!