

Swimmer Profile: Jay Scoville

By Elaine Krugman



Lake Lanier resident, Jay Scovill, has always had an affinity for open water swimming—especially in lakes. Having been born and raised near Gary, Indiana, in the town of Ogden Dunes on Lake Michigan, his parents saw to it that he learned to swim when he was four years old. They wanted their young son to be more water safe around the lake where there was often heavy surf. Jay’s father, a former collegiate swimmer, was President of Gary, Indiana’s YMCA at the time, so he enrolled his son in swim lessons at the club.

Two years later, little Jay started competing on a summer team coached by Gus Stager, the 1960 U.S. Olympic

Swim Team coach.

His dad would come on Saturdays (after his morning work) dressed in a suit and tie. As the newbie remembered about that experience, “My very first race was one length of the pool. We had to dive in the best we could and get to the other end. Since we were little kids, they had two kids per lane. We took off, and I swam as fast as I could, but about half-way down the lap, I got a huge gulp of water and I stopped. Suddenly, there’s a big splash, and my dad is standing right next to me in the pool in his suit with his dress shoes on saying, “Don’t quit, Jay! Never quit!”

Evidently, Jay took Dad’s advice because he swam and competed through school. After Gus Stager’s coaching (using a 20’ prod to stop swimmers in their lane and correct them), he worked under the caring eye of Skip Bird, a northern Indiana icon in high school and age-group swimming. Captain of his high school team, his commitment to compete increased. The pool his Portage High School team used was located so far away from his school, the team took a 45-minute drive one way to get to the 20-yard 4 lane pool the 46 members of the team used. According to Jay, “The team could fit nine guys in a lane at a time. Passing in the lane involved grabbing and pulling the slower teammate underneath you. There would be a fog hanging over the pool from over chlorination. We all were coughing from the fumes by the end of the hour we had to swim.”

Reflecting back on the experience, Jay said, “The flavor of those years was not so much about getting into higher levels of competition. With the small pool and distance to even get there, the opportunity for fame as a team or as individuals was a struggle. The coaches, however, were all incredibly inspiring in spite of the limitations of access to workout facilities.”

Jay continued his education at Indiana University during the days of Mark Spitz’s reign at that school. Although he was invited to be a “walk on” under famous coach James “Doc” Counsilman, he decided not to join the team after his first trial workout. As he explained, “I went to the pool. There was a chalkboard that said just one thing, ‘17,000.’ That was the first day of workouts that school year. Swim— without goggles—in a chlorinated pool. Goggles didn’t exist back then, so the end result was burning, blood-shot eyes. No one gets much studying done that way. I swam it that first day, but unlike Spitz, I did not see Olympic gold in my future. That day was my last adventure in college swimming.”

Over the last twenty years, Jay has been swimming and sharing a lane with his wife, Helen, during the early mornings, before her work as a grade-school teacher. They met in 1998 at the Brenau University pool, in Gainesville, while swimming on the Lanier Aquatic Masters team. Jay later swam with the Brenau University Masters Swimming (B.U.M.S) until COVID-19 locked the 17 teammates out of the university pool. The university closed the facility to everybody except their women’s swim team. He now swims with Helen at Frances Meadows Aquatic Center, in Gainesville. They are joined with several other 5:00am swimmers. They are all in their 60’s and call themselves the “Olympic Nopefuls.”

“I would love to get more involved with Masters. I have kept my membership up. We are currently practicing four or five times a week. I am averaging 15-20,000 yards per week as well, so I am healthy.” Since Jay and his wife live right on Lake Lanier, Jay started open water swimming when the pools were closed. He really enjoyed the open water experience, so long lake swims of 6,000 to 13,000 yards have become a regular Saturday routine, following his weekday pool workouts. Since he has a good cold-water wetsuit, he hopes to continue doing those swims until the water gets down into the 40’s. Jay competed in the late 1990’s in a few meets, and again from 2016-2018. He plans on getting back into some races in the future. Regarding his goals, Jay said, “I’ve always been a sprinter. When I was in high school and college, it was 50’s and 100’s; I just think it might be fun to get involved with distance more.”

At this point, Jay is just very thankful to be able to swim and enjoy the health benefits of the sport. He was diagnosed as having C.I.D.P. (Chronic Inflammatory Demyelinating Polyneuropathy), which is a neurological disorder that can destroy the protective covering around the nerve bundles. This causes weakness, pain, fatigue, and numbness.

Jay has improved, though, and continues getting healthier after reading the book, *Autoimmune Solution*, by Amy Myers, M.D., and working with a functional health doctor to revamp his diet. In addition, the four-hour-a-night sleeper began getting more sleep.

In the future, he plans on competing in the Swim Around Key West, which is a 12.5-mile race. In addition, he says, "I would love to do a 10k or a 10-mile swim in Lake Lanier. It would be awesome!"

Meanwhile, reflecting back on his swimming years since that first plunge at the age of four, Jay said with gratitude, "The most important thing is to say 'thank you' for the amazing people that were and are in my life that are really like brothers and sisters to me. Coaches, teammates, even meeting my wife swimming has been a true blessing."