

The Chairman's Corner - March 2013

By Jon Blank

What is the most important thing one can do as a Masters swimmer? Is training for competition, (which may provide less overall cardiovascular benefit than pure fitness training) the ideal? Are stroke drills better than interval training? I submit that these questions, though important, matter less than the one thing I believe to be the single most necessary for each and every Masters swimmer.



We as US Masters swimmers are a diverse community with regards to age and station in life. What we do have in common with one another is the love of swimming, and the luxury of participating in the sport. It is this aspect of Masters swimming that, to me, underscores the most important thing each and every one of us can do for swimming.

NC Masters swimmer and Olympic Gold Medalist Cullen Jones wasn't always the fastest kid on the block. As a matter of fact, he nearly drowned as a young child. When I was a high-schooler, one of my classmates waded into an on-campus pond simply hoping to refresh and cool down after track practice. He drowned at age 16, because no one had ever offered him the chance to learn how to protect himself in the water. I will never forget the memory of his memorial service at school: my classmate's empty chair at half court in the gymnasium, draped with his track suit, his school portrait, and a floral arrangement. Cullen Jones remembers his near-drowning too. He, along with USA Swimming, has established an instructional swim safety program for youngsters, the "Make a Splash" Foundation. I strongly urge every one of us to support this effort, whether through volunteer effort or by donation.

Having said this, I also believe that there is more that we as Masters swimmers can do. The "Make a Splash" Foundation is focused on children and adolescents. Yet the parents of many of these kids are themselves unable to swim. We as Masters swimmers have a real opportunity to make a difference - let's help adults who can't swim learn to do so! Several years ago, Raleigh Area Masters initiated a program through our city's Parks and Recreation department to teach adults, particularly those in underserved areas, to improve their water safety. It helps our team (lane rentals are discounted to reflect volunteer hours), it helps our city (which now can offer a valued service at little or no cost), and it helps safeguard our community. I am proud of RAM for this good work. I challenge you to go to your local public pool and work with community leaders to develop an adult learn-to-swim program. To me, that is the most important thing you can do as a Masters swimmer!