

## **Swimmer Profile –James Breen**

By Elaine Krugman



Growing up in Evanston, Illinois, James (“Jamie”) Breen was fortunate to attend a high school with an excellent swimming program and coach. It was a great start to what has been a lifelong love of swimming.

Following high school, Jamie majored in radio and TV at Northwestern University where his father taught. Thinking he wasn’t a fast enough swimmer and his swimming career was over, he hadn’t considered trying out for the swim team.

During the first week of classes, Jamie ran into a former high school teammate on campus who became the captain of Northwestern’s swim team. He wanted to know why Jamie wasn’t trying out for the team. Jamie replied he didn’t think he was good enough, but, he was told otherwise

and was encouraged to try out for the team. Jamie ended up swimming for Northwestern University for three years until he ran up against time conflicts with his editing work for school. He still loved to swim, though, so he played water polo on the club team instead.

Following college, Jamie swam occasionally while working in investment management and then for his own financial company. As he became more entrenched in his career, got married, and had a family; he had less time to swim. Twenty years had passed before returning to the water.

“Maggie, my daughter, I thought had a bit of talent, and she had a muscular build, big shoulders, great joint flexibility and she seemed to like the water pretty well. I took her to Dynamo. I thought that would be a good place for her to go. I would be sitting there watching her practice... she did it dutifully for two months. was driving her home one day, and talking to her about all the things I had seen her do, and I said, “This is great! Don’t you love this?” She looked at me and said, “Dad, if you think this is so good, why don’t you do it?” Jamie laughed.

The swim dad didn’t want to put pressure on Maggie to do what she didn’t enjoy, but he realized he really missed swimming. His life had calmed down enough by 2006 that he joined USMS and was able to fit in swimming sessions at Ansley Golf Club where he is a member. The pool at the club is closed from October until March, though, so Jamie started swimming at Dynamo with their Masters team.

“I came out of (swimming) retirement with just a dreadfully bad stroke (recovery too close to his body with his right arm and over-rotating on the left). This year, I went back

to Dynamo in winter, and I was swimming with Rebecca Carpenter, and Stacy Simms; they're the new coaches there. Stacy videoed me on her phone, and I was telling her something like, 'Well, I think I'm ok under the water, so it's ok.' She was like, 'Dude...!' Other coaches have told me stuff, but there was something about the way she said that this is what you have to do; I've been able to fix it. I'm swimming faster now than I probably have in ten years. The pool meet bug may bite again; we'll have to see! I age up this year; I'll be 60." Jamie has increased his training yardage this year, currently swimming over 4,000 yards, 4-5 times per week. "It's amazing to me how much endurance is coming back," he said, adding that he is "cautiously optimistic" about his future prospects in competition.

When asked about the type of training Jamie has been doing, he replied, "I try to break it up by days. We have three organized workouts a week right now at Ansley Golf Club, where I have been swimming. We do a little bit more fast stuff on Mondays, more distance stuff on Wednesdays, and we try to do IM stuff on Fridays. I get in either one or two times a week outside of that; and, when I do, I try to do a lot of backstroke (to train for the 200 Backstroke in future competition)." (In college, Jamie competed in the 200 Butterfly and 400 IM.)

On days when Jamie isn't coached with a set workout, he relies on USMS. "I love the workouts that you can get on the Masters website. I'm kind of on my own, and when I am making workouts for myself, they tend to get stale; so, the workouts you can get on USMS are a [great resource](#)." Dryland training hasn't been part of Jamie's routine in the past; however, he plans on adding strength training, yoga, and other stretching for a well-rounded program. He is also considering hiring a personal trainer.

Over the past few years, Jamie has been swimming more open water with his improved freestyle stroke. As he explained, "Part of the reason for moving towards open water for competing is it's a fresh context for me; and, if you have never swum a course before, it's a best time by definition." Jamie also enjoys the solitude of swimming in open water.

The open water enthusiast has swum the [St. Croix, U.S. Virgin Islands 5-Mile \(Buck Island to The Buccaneer\)](#) race five or six times. "They do a great job, and it's just beautiful. It's been a lot of fun doing that. It gives you something to point at when you're training. I have [also] done the [Big Shoulders Race in Chicago](#), which is a 5K race in Lake Michigan. I've done that a few times... I'm [going to do] a [relay swim around Key West](#)." He has done the entire Key West swim once. In the future, Jamie would like to compete in the [Bermuda Round the Sound Swim](#). He has also been talking with his college teammate about swimming the Strait of Gibraltar. "Apparently, the bureaucracy of the Gibraltar swim is pretty intense. You have all kinds of red tape that you've got to go through; but, it's supposedly a beautiful swim, so I'm thinking of that as maybe a precursor to giving the English Channel a try. Actually, before attempting the English Channel, I think what I would probably do first is try the Catalina Island swim, and then the Channel."

"There's a great book [by Marcia Cleveland] about Channel swimming, and it's called [Dover Solo](#). It kind of goes through the [training] process. I guess it would be true whether I do Catalina or the English Channel; you've got to pretty much put everything else in your life on the back burner for six months. You have to train for it very seriously, particularly if you are old. That includes a lot of work on acclimation. You want to give it the respect it's due; and, it's a hard, hard thing. But, with the right training, I think it's doable." Good luck, Jamie!