



# Georgia Masters Newsletter

## Swimming in Georgia

### November 2018

#### *Swimmer Profile -- Mark Rogers*



By Elaine Krugman

Matching yellow “Livestrong” bracelets. That was what caught my attention when Mark Rogers and I were warming up in neighboring lanes at the Marist Swim Meet, in 2011. “I like your bracelet!” I said to Mark, as I lifted up my arm to show him my identical wrist band. We have been buddies ever since, cheering each other on at the many swim meets we have competed at together over the past seven years.

Our swimming backgrounds prior to joining Masters were something else we had in common. Neither of us had swum competitively before joining

our high school swim team, and we both left the sport for many years before returning to the pool (It was 27 years for Mark and 31 for me).

A running injury was what led Mark back to swimming. “In my 40’s I tore and ruptured my Achilles tendon and had reconstructive surgery. I said that I was never running ever again. (In 2009), I ran into (Grayfins coach) Muriel Cochran at the Northwest YMCA, and she started my journey. I was walking into the Y and I saw her leading a swim class, and I thought I should do that. The next Saturday, I introduced myself and started my journey with her.” Mark explained.

It wasn’t long after his return, though, that Mark learned about U.S. Masters Swimming and joined. “I had never heard of Masters Swimming in my life. I was in class with Muriel, and a guy who I ended up training with swam at Georgia Southern when he was in college. He recommended I go to this meet—the St. Nick’s meet—in 2009. I had no idea what I was doing; I had no clue. I did the 1000 first, and I needed a counter. I asked this guy if he would count laps for me, and then he introduced me to Walter Leen. That’s when Walter recruited me.”

“When I was at that first meet at Georgia Tech, I won high points in my age group, not knowing what this was. I was really surprised that I was competitive at my age! I’ll be 53 this year. I’m not very fast, and sometimes it surprises me that I am able to do what I do.”

It took a while, though, before Mark got used to being a competitive swimmer again and diving off the blocks for his races like he used to do in high school. “When I got on the block the first couple of years, I would always say the same thing: ‘Dear God, don’t let me (mess) up!’ It took me a long time to get comfortable in competition. Now, my goal is to do the best that I can, and if it’s a meet

that has awards or ribbons, I want to win,” Mark said, adding that he has another goal: “My hope is to be 80 years old and still going off the blocks. I want to do this until I’m a shriveled up old man!”

That’s a realistic goal, especially if Mark is able to continue managing a health issue that has become an obstacle on occasion – asthma. As he explained, “At the Y where I swim with Muriel, the air quality is not the best, and there are times I struggle. When I go to Auburn or wherever, I will leave the pool deck and go outside to get fresh air, because the chlorine gas will irritate my lungs. I have to manage what I do. Every once in a while, I’ll forget, and my body will send me a signal. I have my inhaler with me on the deck, and I have to have it with me when I race. There were two meets where I was doing an event, and I had to stop. What happened was just so bad that I couldn’t overcome it. Two years ago, I was doing the 400 IM at the Auburn meet, and I had an asthma attack during the butterfly portion of the event. I struggled to breathe. I finished – I wasn’t very fast – and Muriel had to give me my inhaler. That was awful! I turned to do the last 25 of fly and all of a sudden, I died. I had a panic attack, and it freaked me out. Now, before a big meet, I go to my pulmonologist and make sure my lungs are ok,” Mark explained about his condition.

Asthma doesn’t keep this enthusiastic competitor out of the pool, though, and he has a solid training schedule to prepare for the long events he prefers racing at meets. In a typical week, Mark trains 3,000 – 4,500 yards per session during early morning workouts at a couple of different pools. “Being a school teacher, I can’t leave the building and go train during the day. So, during the school year, I train on Tuesdays, Thursdays, and Fridays, 5:45-6:45, and then on Saturday and Sunday mornings. When school is not in session, I go six days a week.” Two of those weekly sessions are coached by Ryan Bried at Ace Aquatic Club where Muriel also trains. In Summer, during long course season, he swims at Mountain View and is coached by Pat Eddy.

Mark has nothing but great things to say about all three of the coaches he trains with throughout the year, especially Muriel who he also took a Level 1 and Level 2 Masters coaching class with, in 2016. As he explained, “I had never really been coached in this sport; I had no idea what to expect. Muriel by far has been the biggest influence in my coaching life. She literally has saved my life. She has helped me as a swimmer, she has helped me at meets; it has led to competition and meeting great people. She introduced me to a world that I never knew existed, and I love competing; it’s a blast! I really enjoy it. Ryan Bried, himself a very accomplished swimmer, has given me tips and has helped me to become a better swimmer.”

About Pat Eddy, Mark said, “The great thing about Pat is that when he talks to you, and he’s giving you advice and encouraging, he’s always just focusing on you and the things you are doing. He’s so great in that way. Even when he’s telling you what you can do better, he’s doing it in such a positive and encouraging way.”

Muriel, Ryan, and Pat have also helped Mark to become a better swim coach at the high school where he teaches. “I have taken what they have shown and taught me, and I apply it to my high school swimmers. I write up the workouts for the team, and I always try and think about what Muriel, Pat, or Ryan, have said. I try to give lessons on what they have taught me,” Mark said, adding that when he is assigned drills at workouts that work well for him, he’s enthusiastic about sharing them with his high school swimmers.

“I love being a high school coach. I love my kids. This is my fourth sport that I have coached in all of the 25 years I’ve been a teacher and a coach, but swimming is the one I really like, and the sport I do competitively. It is very enjoyable. There’s this one young lady. When she started three years ago, she had almost no confidence. She was really a timid kid. She’s now a junior, and I teach her in class. She has come a long way and has gained confidence. It’s cool to see a kid grow up.”

In addition to Mark's love of coaching high school swimming, his nine years in Masters as a competitive swimmer has been a wonderful experience for him. Describing what he likes most about it, Mark said, "When it comes to the swim meets themselves, it's the people you meet. I've been pleasantly surprised that a lot of people are really nice to each other, so I really enjoy that. I enjoy the competition part. I love swimming and competing, but it's the social aspect of getting to know people. We all get along really well." In addition to the people, Mark likes winning those medals. "I should give a shout-out to Walter (Leen). He helped me figure out [what events to swim to win medals]. I got two Top Ten medals at (2011 Summer Nationals at Auburn), because Walter recommended what I should do to get a medal."

As it turned out, it was at that meet that Mark looks back on as his favorite Masters memory. "What was really neat was that my father was there, and he used to drive me at 5:30 AM to swim practice in Chicago to the high school I attended (New Trier East), in the dead of winter. And, upon getting an extra medal, I got to give that medal to my father. It was really cool. He kind of teared up a little bit," Mark shared.

The other favorite memory of that meet was the surprise Mark got from his family. "I got up on the blocks to do an event, I looked up, and my wife and kids were holding cards, 'Go Mark!' and 'Yay, Dad!' Mark laughed, and then added in a more serious tone, "My wife, Cindy, is the center of my life, and she has done a lot for me; more than just swimming and letting me do what I do. She means everything to me."