

Swimmer Profile – Faith Pescatore

By Elaine Krugman



I had never met Faith Pescatore; however, I knew I wanted to interview her after reading her submission in the April, 2020 newsletter for the “What Have You Been Doing?” article. I was impressed by Faith’s enthusiastic motivation for staying physically active during the COVID-19 lockdown. Nothing was going to keep her sedentary and away from the water!

Faith’s enthusiasm for swimming and need to swim is so similar to mine, I told her during our phone interview that I felt like I was interviewing myself! This was Faith’s reply when asked what it was that she enjoyed so much about swimming: “It’s the breathing, and almost like meditation; it’s very meditative, because you can’t really solve the world’s problems when you’re in the pool. You’re focusing on one thing... To me, it’s a form of meditation and relaxation. I have tried to do regular meditation, but I’m too antsy. Swimming is my meditation. I can go to the pool feeling so bad, having had an argument with somebody, or just be in a bad mood and feel lousy; and, I always come out feeling fantastic for the rest of the day. I am addicted to the endorphins, I would imagine. At this point, I can’t go more than a day without swimming. I like the way it shapes my body, and I like feeling strong.”

When the coronavirus lockdown went into effect last spring, Faith started swimming in her small outdoor pool. “I was desperate to swim because that’s my lifeline. I’m a crabby mess if I can’t swim; so, my husband heated up the 40-foot pool. I calculated that I needed 130 lengths to do a mile; so, there I was, in my backyard pool; back and forth, back and forth, doing 130 flip turns to get my mile in. Our heating bill was off the charts, but it was worth it, because I was sane!”

There are many other sports this life-long athlete participates in as well. “I’ve been athletic all my life; that’s my thing. I’ve been doing yoga for twenty years, and I am an advanced yogi. I do two yoga sessions for an hour and a half, twice a week. That’s incredible for swimming; it’s so good for your mind and your body.” Faith also golfs 18 holes, twice a week, and cycles the hills in her neighborhood for about an hour, once or twice a week, to help strengthen her lower body. She also does weight training, focusing on strengthening the muscles in her back, for proper stroke execution in swimming.

That’s not all, though. Faith is learning how to play pickleball, a sport that should be easier on her serving shoulder than tennis, which she played for twenty years at the UTSA 4.0 level. After two rotator cuff repair surgeries, she decided to retire from the sport.

Finally, for recreation, Faith enjoys kayaking on Lake Lanier at least once a week—something she started doing at the beginning of the pandemic.

Swimming, however, is Faith's greatest fitness passion, and an activity she has done her entire life, thanks to being raised in a family of excellent swimmers. Her family had a backyard pool, a family membership at a nearby pool, and also lived near the beach, in Maryland; so, they spent a lot of time in the water.

Faith has always been a swimmer. "I started fitness swimming at the local YMCA when I was about 20, and I never stopped—and, I'm 63. I love it, and I have never missed a week of swimming unless I was sick. I'm religious and dedicated to it. [Swimming] has been a constant in my life, and I can't imagine ever stopping," she said.

In the 1990's, while living in Ohio, the swimming enthusiast competed in three Olympic distance triathlons and several relay triathlons with friends. It wasn't until Faith's daughter, Skylar, got into competitive pool swimming that Faith tried racing between the lane lines as well. Skylar's team would have parent competitions, so Faith would race against the other parents—something she found she enjoyed. "I realized I really wanted to compete, and I felt like I was good enough. I had heard about the National Senior Games, and I had never done a serious meet. I was reading about it, and I thought, I'm going to find out what kind of times these ladies have. I looked at the times, and I went to the pool and timed myself." After comparing her times, Faith discovered, "Wow, I could really be competitive in these races!"

After years of Faith cheering her daughter on from the stands, all the way to the state championships where Skylar was the youngest competitor at 14 years old, the tables were turned. Skylar became the inspiration for Faith to try competing in "real" competitions. Her daughter coached her on stroke and flip turns, and then took Faith's place in the stands to cheer her mom on in the 2016 Georgia Golden Olympics, the qualifying meet for the 2017 National Senior Games. She placed second in both the 50 and 500 freestyle events (55-59 age group), at the state meet.

To help prepare her for the National Senior Games, Faith joined USMS (United States Masters Swimming) and trained with Coach Kai at the West Gwinnett Park Aquatic Center. She also competed in a couple of local Masters meets. At the National Senior Games, in Birmingham, in 2017, Skylar cheered her mom on to a 7th place finish in the 500 free, and 13th in the 50 free, in the 60-65 age group. "Coming in 7th (in the 500 free), when I hadn't done any training, was super exciting to me," Faith said of her first national competition.

After the tables completed their turn by mother and daughter, Jan Murphy, a columnist with The Wall Street Journal, took an interest in their story and wrote about their experience, on March 17, 2018. "It was my 15 minutes of fame!" Faith laughed.

Since then, Faith has continued training under the watchful eye of her coach at the West Gwinnett pool. "Coach Kai is the best coach. He really emphasizes pulling from your back muscles (to protect the shoulders from injury) He has perfected my technique to the point where I was at a stroke clinic, and the coach pulled me aside and said, "Your technique is so good, you could be teaching this class."

"Coach Kai has really concentrated on pulling with your forearm, not your entire arm; making sure your elbow is raised. and your forearm is like a paddle; pulling from your back muscles; pointing your hips down to the bottom of the pool on each side, and gliding. Gliding has reduced my stroke count from 18 to 15; so, he is focusing on that, and making sure each stroke counts. He's an excellent technique coach."

Faith emphasizes quality over quantity when she trains, so she does a lot of stroke drills. In addition, she works on her flip turns with fast dolphin kicks off the walls. “This last year, I accomplished two things that I really wanted to get in place before the National Senior Games, and that is making sure I have a really fast flip turn, and I can undulate to almost the 15-meter mark now,” the 5’11” tall, 63-year-old explained.

The Finis Tempo Trainer is a swim aid Faith likes using in her training to help her with proper pacing. Her goal for the 2021 National Senior Games is to race the 500 freestyle in 7:40, so Coach Kai has her training 4 x 25-yard sets of freestyle on :23 intervals, as a starting point to prepare her to reach that goal. She is gradually adding yardage to eventually be able to achieve her goal.

To improve her core strength for those fast dolphin kicks off the turns, Faith does 10 minutes of vertical dolphin and freestyle kicks while holding one-pound weights above the water. When I commented how fit she must be from those vertical kick sets, she laughed and said, “Aside from the corona (virus) belly I think a lot of people got over these past few months, I don’t think I have anything sagging!”

In addition to competing in future National Senior Games meets, the retired physician’s assistant looks forward to participating in local swim meets again. She especially enjoys the developmental meets at West Gwinnett Aquatic Center, which she says are more relaxed and low-key. “I’m not really that great with pressure; I get a little too nervous.”

Another experience Faith looks forward to enjoying again is teaching other adults how to swim. As she explained, “I got my Adult Learn to Swim (ALTS) certification a couple of years ago, because I kept thinking about how much I love swimming; and, how many people would come up and say to me, ‘I wish I could swim as well as you;’ or, ‘I am getting older, my knee hurts from running, I can’t play tennis anymore, and I need to pick up a sport that will help me stay fit for the rest of my life. So, because of that, I felt I needed to do this. I need to teach people how to swim.”

Faith practiced what she learned on three ladies at her neighborhood pool. One of the ladies could only swim a couple of strokes when she started, but with Faith’s patient instruction, she was ultimately able to swim the entire length of the pool. “That was a great experience,” she said, adding that she would like to teach lessons at the West Gwinnett Aquatic Center after she earns her Water Safety Instructor certificate. “I really enjoy teaching a lot; it’s so gratifying.”

About her future in the sport Faith loves, she concluded, “Even if I’m not competing, I am always going to swim for fitness, I hope, as long as I’m alive. I see myself swimming into my ‘90’s, if I live that long. I also feel like I am giving back and showing other people the joy of swimming. I’ve already done that with three students, and it was really rewarding.”