

Swimmer Profile – Pam McClure

By Elaine Krugman



Pam McClure has periodically raced the three breaststroke events in the neighboring lane from me, ever since I first joined U.S. Masters Swimming in 2010. She would beat me in the 200, and I would beat her in the 50, but the 100 was always the closest. The COVID pandemic kept us from competing against each other over the past two years, but she would probably whip me in any race now.

For both of us, it's not about winning or losing; we enjoy pushing each other to do our best, have fun, and laugh about it afterwards. Pam is always one of the friendliest and upbeat swimmers at any meet, and we agree that the camaraderie among the swimmers is what makes any Masters meet so enjoyable.

It has been 16 years since Pam first joined USMS and trained with the Stingrays, in between running and training for 5k and 10k road races. Two years later, she decided to give pool competition a try. She hasn't looked back since. About her first swim meet, Pam said, "It was exciting, but very intimidating. My first meet was at UGA, and I had never gone off a diving block. It was exciting and enlightening, because I had no idea the events came up so quickly; but, it was so awesome, I wanted to do another [meet] immediately."

The new competitive swimmer became inspired to train for future swim meets. "I went to another Masters team within the Stingray group, because I needed to be around people that were competing; and, that energy was great," she said. "It took a couple of years to feel more comfortable (adjusting from fitness swimming to competing). I had to show up three or four times a week (to practice) versus, eh, two or three. Putting in the volume, specific training sets, sprint sets; it was different."

"Four years into more serious training, I started swimming with Coach Pat Eddy of Swim Atlanta Masters. He was instrumental in getting me to swim longer distances and participate in more meets each year. In addition, he started a charity event in December where we swim 100 x 100 Swim Against Cancer. We take the funds to someone in need and/or Children's Hospital of Atlanta (CHOA). It was a great way to give back and challenge myself to swim greater distance. Another way I've been able to give back is through volunteering as a Character Coach with Fellowship of Christian Athletes for a local high school swim team.

"It has been a journey. I've had several setbacks due to fracturing my foot while training for a marathon, a concussion from a head-on collision in the pool that was my fault, and a couple of bouts of early melanoma that required Mohs surgery. Ultimately, I think my biggest test was COVID. After coming down with a severe case that included 10 days of high fever, low blood oxygen, and many other symptoms for two solid weeks, I started coming back around the third week, thankfully. Four weeks after the onset of the virus, I got back to the pool. It was a challenge to swim 1700 yards in an hour and 45 minutes. Thankfully with much encouragement from my coach and

teammates, I eventually got back to my regular yardage. Coach Andy told me, “Pam McClure, your will is unmatched.”

“Shortly after I got back on my feet, my mother passed away unexpectedly in her sleep. I took one day off and returned to the pool. I knew I had to continue moving forward one stroke at a time. Little did I know that a teammate was carefully watching my comeback. And, sadly her mother passed away this past summer. She told me that she returned to practice like I did, because she saw how it helped me recover and get through the grieving process.” (Pam currently swims with Swim Atlanta, in Marietta, with Coach Pat Eddy.)

Pam’s will and determination has powered her through all of those obstacles, and she is swimming now more than ever. She currently trains for 90 minutes, four to five days per week, and totals anywhere from 4,000 to 5,000 yards per session. In addition, the 57-year-old works with a trainer doing strength-training twice per week for 30-45 minutes each session, mainly because of her osteoporosis diagnosis. Finally, Pam does a two mile walk/run once or twice per week to keep in running condition for the twice-annual 5k races she does.

Swimming is Pam’s passion, though, and breaststroke is her favorite stroke—especially the 200 distances where she won a Top Ten medal at the 2018 Pan American Masters Championships and swam her best times in the 50 and 100 breaststroke. Her goal is to make national qualifying times in all three breaststroke events for long course national championship meets. “Pat Eddy got me to swim the 400 IM, and I love it!” she added. She also won a Silver Medal at the 2017 National Senior Games in the event. In the future, Pam would also like to try some different events. “As far as racing, I really like the endurance [events], and I think I would like to focus on the longer freestyle races.”

To prepare for competition and to reach specific racing goals, Pam has this advice: If you can, join a Masters team and show up for practices! Communicate with your Coach and set goals. Work hard and sign up for a local meet and go for it! For swimmers (like me) who don’t live in an area with access to a team, she recommends getting workouts from a coach or from USMS that are available at www.usms.org. She also recommends competing and connecting with other swimmers, even in a group text to encourage one another. “Just keep swimming, keep training, watch videos, and self-motivation.” She suggests writing a training schedule, and then making yourself adhere to it.

When I asked her what she enjoys most about swimming with USMS, she replied, “Aside from the feel of the water and the health benefits, just the camaraderie that we have with all of the great Masters swimmers. Some of them are my best friends. And, the coaches. I have been really blessed to have great coaches.”

Although there have been a lot of great Masters experiences over the years, Pam’s favorite memory was of the 2015 USMS Spring Nationals in San Antonio, Texas. As she recalled, “I was so excited to see Olympian Matt Grevers with Anne Dunivin.* Walking past and getting ready for my events, seeing Anne—and, with Matt later—sitting in her chair, just relaxed, and so excited about the swim. I went over and wished her well, and she grabbed my hands. It was just so cool at her age (98) to see her so excited! Seeing Ann so happy and relaxed before her swim, really eased my mind about my 400 IM coming up!

The memories made and the benefits gained from swimming have been very positive for Pam, and she sums it up by saying, “Swimming has made such a major impact on my life. I’m self-employed as a Supply Chain Executive Recruiter for many years. Swimming has helped me stay in shape, organize my days, make lifelong friends, and give back to the community around me.