

**SWIMMER PROFILE**  
**BRIAN ROBBINS, GROWN-UP SWIMMING**  
By, Elaine Krugman



While attending the U.S. Masters Swimming (USMS) National Meeting in Houston, last September, CEO Dawson Hughes officially announced that [Grown-Up Swimming](#) had [joined the USMS family](#). I had remembered hearing about it from former Georgia Masters board member, Ian King, before he moved to California and got involved in USMS at the regional and national level. He participated in Grown-Up Swimming before joining USMS and had a blast at their events.

When “Head Grown-Up,” Brian Robbins joined in on a recent Georgia Masters board Zoom meeting to tell us about his fun summer adult swimming league, I immediately requested an interview to hear more about these social meets and get to know the person who refers to himself as “Head Grown-Up.”

Meet Brian Robbins, a kid at heart at 34, married, and three kids of his own. Brian grew up swimming summer league in Atlanta, and then joined Swim Atlanta and was taught swimming by Maria Thrash. He went on to swim for Georgia Tech for four years, and then retired from competitive swimming. As he explains, “I found out very quickly that as an above average high school swimmer, that the NCAA was full of those, and I scored I think about 12 points in four years’ worth of dual meets. 12 total points,” he laughed. “By the end of that I was ready to be done. I wasn’t ready to be done with swimming, but I was ready to be done with not being great at swimming... My typical line is that I scored 12 points in dual meets in four years of college, and I was part of the team that won two Georgia Tech Swimming & Diving chili cookoff championships. Those are my two feats,” he joked. It was at that moment I got a taste of Brian’s sense of humor, and I knew this would be a fun interview!

Following graduation, Brian moved away from the Atlanta area, and then returned and got involved with the Atlanta Swim Association (A.S.A.), the kids summer swim league, as a referee and announcer. A.S.A. then asked him to be a league director for an Atlanta adult swim league. At the time, they had 100 adult swimmers and the league could use some help getting organized.

“I spent a couple of years kind of cleaning up some of the operations, and it grew super-fast. In 2019, word was spreading to other cities; somebody in Charleston wanted to start something similar. Atlanta was growing where it made sense to separate from the kids, so we split off, and I formed ‘Grown-Up Swimming’ to absorb Atlanta and bring it nationally. We’ll yada-yada the pandemic...” he laughed.

“Last year, we were in seven cities across the country and had almost 1,100 swimmers nationwide; 570-ish in Atlanta, and it has just been a blast. So, now we’re partnering with U.S. Masters Swimming, and we are trying to get this thing in every city across the country.”

When asked how that partnership came about, Brian replied, “Britta O’Leary approached me... You’ll hear her say a million times, ‘Trying to build bridges;’ building bridges between USMS, Georgia Masters, and what is now Grown-Up Swimming,” he said, explaining that he responded with reluctance, because he didn’t know if it would be a good “culture fit” between the organizations. Eventually, Bill Brenner (USMS Senior Director of Club and Coach Development) got involved to build out a partnership, which led to Bill introducing Brian to Dawson Hughes, CEO of USMS. The entire process took about two years, but they finally ironed out the partnership.

Brian’s on board now being part of the USMS family. “I’m happy; I’m really, really happy! It all comes back to that first meet in 2017 as the league director. I’m at Medlock Bridge, in Johns Creek, we’ve got the music playing, there’s a tiki bar serving ‘lime slushies,’ and everybody is having a blast. I think everybody needs access to this. Whatever it takes. Let’s do it... I’m tickled to death that we now have the opportunity and backing to do it. What more can you ask for?”

“There are two big reasons to work together [with USMS] One, it’s a feeder program. You have all these people that are swimming and competing in the summer. Very few of them are USMS swimmers, but maybe some of them will convert to swim year around... The other one is to serve what USMS labels is the non-competitive fitness swimmer—having a place for them to land in the summer and do something super laid back—well, as laid back as a 25 ‘fly sprinting can be—that they can kind of get those competitive juices flowing. It’s just something that is super fun to do.”

What is a typical Grown-Up Swimming meet like? As Brian described, “In Atlanta, pretty much all our meets are on a Friday night, you show up to the pool, we’ve got the music playing, most of us are praying that the weather holds off (he laughs), some of us are praying for thunder depending on what they signed up for to swim. We’ll do a half hour or 45-minute warm-up, and there will probably be just under 200 people at the meet. About five minutes before the meet starts, we’ll clear the pool, and call for the multi-gen relay, ‘If you’ve got your family here, just line up behind the blocks. Choose a lane, any lane. If all the lanes are taken, we’ll line up for the next heat. Depending on how many people you have in your family, you can do a 25 (yards) or 50 each, but don’t do more than 100 total... We are going to do a ceremonial multi-gen relay. The kids are handing the pool off to us grown people...’ Then the real competition starts. It starts off with the 200 Medley Relay. We have a couple of different meet formats. The most popular one is the sprint format, so it’s 25’s of each stroke, 100 free, and 100 IM, and then we’ll do a mixed free relay. The Atlanta mixed free relay is you [must] have at least one female, one swimmer over the age of 40, and you can’t count one person as both of those...

Then, we transition to the 50's, and at this point, there has probably been thunder, so we'll probably take a break and let the weather clear. Then, we'll finish with a 200 free relay." For more details about the meets, [click here](#).

To keep the swim meets at no more than 200 people and the timeline to about two hours, Atlanta is split up into north and south divisions with the possibility of more divisions being added this year.

Although food trucks were on site during previous years, the team captains are talking about having concession stands run by the kids teams, since the food truck offerings were expensive for family budgets. Brian also would like the atmosphere to be reminiscent of his childhood summer league meets, which included concession stands. "It allows the pools to have a little fundraiser and get some revenue out of it... Just do good old-school [concession stands]... give me a bag of Skittles, and see if I can keep it down. [Hot dogs] in the tin foil, nachos with the super gross cheese, Air Heads, and Fun Dip. Pretty much the people who are eating before the meet is done are the 25 and under crowd... If you were born before 1995, you probably aren't eating those nachos until you're done!" he joked.

"The social aspect of it is why people come. Yeah, there's a championship, and the top three teams get trophies, and if you swim on the champion team you get a champion's towel. But, people are there because it's social..." Swimmers are encouraged to bring their families, so it's a great way to spend time with your family on a Friday night and be active at the same time.

Asked what he enjoyed about swimming, Brian thoughtfully replied, "There's a bug that you get with swimming. It's a love-hate relationship, yes, but for me there's a strong nostalgia thing. [While] growing up, swimming was one of the first things I was good at athletically. I think back on being around a pool in the summer as some of the happiest times ever, and there's a value in reliving that... Being around the pool is great in general, because Atlanta is hot... and there's something about swimming that you can go in and get your heart rate up, stay fit, but not have my knees go out." As a father, Brian also wants to recreate those same summer memories around the pool with his own family.

"The ultimate goal is to make [Grown-Up Swimming] accessible to everybody in the States. There are 70+ metropolitan areas with one million people in the United States, and I would like to be in all of them... We want it to be an option for all Masters swimmers. If you are a Masters club, have a summer league aspect of your club... Everybody loves swimming; you wouldn't be swimming for a Masters team if you didn't. So, you just go show up on Fridays, swim some 25's, and just be social. That's the main goal. Give those clubs another way to build a community around their club and what they're doing."

“If folks want to start a team anywhere in the metro area, reach out to me, if they want to join, but don’t know what that’s like yet, reach out me; when in doubt, reach out to [brian@grownupswimming.com](mailto:brian@grownupswimming.com) . We’ll find a spot for [you].”