

SWIMMER PROFILE: FORREST “JACK” LANCE

By, Elaine Krugman



There are many swimmers who join United States Masters Swimming (USMS) later in life, because they are no longer able to comfortably play sports or run. Injuries or age-related physical issues send many athletes to the pool for rehab and participating in a more sustainable form of exercise. This was the case for Forrest “Jack” Lance, who suffered from arthritis and stenosis in his back and chose swimming to increase his mobility following back surgery in 2022.

Jack, a former sponsored competitive racquetball player, had never competed in swimming; however, the Oakland City pool where he grew up in Atlanta was his favorite go-to place as a child. In high school, he worked as a lifeguard and Water Safety Instructor at East Point City pool. Later, in his mid-30’s, Jack trained with Swim Atlanta for nine months to prepare for an Olympic-distance triathlon. He didn’t enjoy that experience, so he quit swimming and triathlons.

Choosing to forget the triathlon experience and remembering instead how much he enjoyed swimming as a child, he headed to the campus pool at University of Georgia (UGA) with the goal of increasing his mobility and improving his health. In search of a coach to teach him good stroke technique, he met Mary Owen Howell. “Coach Mo” watched Jack swim freestyle and encouraged him to join Masters.

He reluctantly joined the Athens Bulldog Swim Club (ABSC) in September 2023. As Jack explained, “After the first two sessions, I said, ‘No, no, no; I can’t do this!’ and she said, ‘Yes, yes, yes you can; I am going to get you through this.’ So, she (figuratively) held my hand through the first month or so and got me into it.”

“November came, and [Mo] said, ‘You need to compete at the December Georgia Tech meet.’ I said, ‘No, no, no; not me!’” But when he talked with his 11-year-old granddaughter, Ava, an accomplished gymnast, about his reluctance to compete, she said, “You ought to try, Grandad.” He hasn’t looked back since, competing in 13 meets in his first year in Masters, including Grown Up Swimming and Georgia Golden Olympics.

At that first competition, the St. Nick's SCM meet at Georgia Tech, Jack said, "It was a hoot! I showed up a few minutes late and one of my teammates came and said, 'We were worried about you. We're glad you're here, because we've got a relay in five minutes! I said, 'Wait a minute! What do you mean, we have a relay? I didn't sign up for a relay!'" The Bulldogs were short one swimmer and needed Jack to fill the slot. He also swam the 50 and 100 freestyle.

After the meet, one of his teammates congratulated Jack on winning. Jack said "I didn't win. I placed 7th in my last heat, and I'm happy with 7th out of ten. That means that I wasn't last, I finished the race, and I didn't lose my bathing suit!"

As it turned out, he learned from Coach Mo he had swum against other age groups in that heat and had placed first in his 75-79 age group, beating out another swimmer in both the 50 and 100 freestyle events.

When asked if he was surprised at his progress in such a short period of time, "Yes. When people ask me about my swimming, I tell them, 'Well look; I'm used to being over my head, and I've learned it's amazing how fast you can swim to prevent from drowning,'" adding that his strategy is to outlive his competitors. "If I outlive my competitors, I won't have to swim so fast! If I don't outlive them, it won't matter because I have enjoyed the journey."

Jack is all in when it comes to his training and taking care of himself, so I wouldn't be surprised if he *does* outlive his competition. When he first embarked on his training, he said, "I'm going to do everything I can to overcome this back issue and arthritis, and if I hadn't done that, I would be in terrible condition right now...I invested in my health."

As a result, Jack tells everyone he meets if they have muscular or joint pain, get in the water. You don't have to be a swimmer. Merely get in the water and walk, exercise, relax or take an aquatic class, and after a while, you will feel better.

The 76-year-old former civil lawyer and part-time magistrate judge swims with the ABSC for one hour on Mondays, Wednesdays, and Fridays, and an additional hour of private coaching. On Tuesdays and Thursdays, he works with a strength coach in

the weight room, and afterwards, he does an hour of mobility exercises. On Thursday afternoons, he trains for an hour with a stretching and mobility coach.

Jack's motto: "I'm going to overcome this or die trying!" Unfortunately, at the intensity he was training and competing, he was headed in that direction. Those 13 meets and too much anaerobic threshold training increased Jack's blood pressure and heart rate too high, so he is in the process of rethinking his training regimen for 2025. Meanwhile, he and his coaches are carefully monitoring his heart rate to keep it within the desired range when he swims.

Looking ahead to the 2025 competition schedule, Jack is considering competing at the National Senior Games as well as USMS Nationals. Before making that decision, he wants to see how he performs at the Auburn meet in February. "I try to focus on performance goals rather than outcome goals. Just go swim, do the best you can, and don't worry about the outcome. There's a concept I use called, 'N.A.T.O.' Not Attached to Outcomes... If you win or place, that's just icing on the cake," Jack said.

Another decision he plans to make is whether to tackle a fourth stroke: butterfly. He is currently grappling with that decision, because Coach Mo has been encouraging him, but he is trying to figure out whether he is afraid to try. "I wish I could tell you that I can swim all four [strokes] and feel a little more complete as a swimmer; but, then again, I'm trying to avoid being the normal perfectionist that I am and say, 'Look, this is good enough. I can swim three strokes, I have done extremely well with these three, and I need to focus on these for now and maybe pick up the challenge of fly a little bit later,'" Jack explained.

Meanwhile, the Athens Bulldog is enjoying the three strokes he swims. "It's just a pleasure for me to be pulling my weight through the water... It's just a pleasurable bodily experience. It's also relaxing... I try to finish every swim practice with a 50-yard elementary backstroke to relax. I call this a 'a poor man's massage.'"

Jack also enjoys engaging his body and mind in a positive way.

"In the Athens Bulldog Swim Club (ABSC)...I'm associated with a younger group that is committed to physical fitness. I think that's really important, and it has provided a social outlet..."

Jack enjoys the social aspect of being a member of the Athens Bulldogs. He especially likes encouraging the younger swimmers on his team. His advice: “As you get older, you need to stay around young folks. In Masters, you have young folks that have goals, they’re trying, they’re dealing with things, and I get to be a part of that. It’s good for my life.”

The encouragement goes both ways. Katie Roath, one of those “young” teammates, helped talk Jack into competing. “[She] saw me swim at practice my first 50-yard freestyle for time and she told me I needed to compete because I would ‘smoke them.’ She is one of the top ABSC swimmers. Her welcoming and encouraging me enhanced my Masters experience. My head Coach Laura Templin and all my ABSC teammates also welcomed and encouraged me.”

Jack wasn’t sure that he would be welcomed at first. He shared his concerns about being older and slower than the rest of the team with Katie. Jack specifically expressed concern about slowing down the more advanced swimmers in practice. Katie laughed and said, “if you slow down our swimming, you will be our hero.”

This put Jack at ease. “I’m 30 years older than she is, and here she is offering me encouragement... She was joking, but it really made me feel good... let’s laugh at ourselves... it enabled me to just walk away from all my concern about — ‘Well, how do I fit in with that crowd that I am older than and less talented than they are? What will they think of me?’ I try to keep a sense of humor about it and in the end laugh at myself.”

The fact that USMS is open to all adults with all abilities (and disabilities) is something Jack appreciates. He also appreciates all the swimmers and timers who have allowed him to hold onto their shoulders as he stepped onto the blocks at meets. Jack recognized other more talented Masters who have graciously helped and encouraged him. He mentioned Ted Hammond and Randy Russell who are accomplished swimmers and who have been especially helpful and encouraging to me, a novice swimmer.

And, then there is the fun and laughs he has had at those competitions. “One guy, when we were getting ready to race, told the timer, ‘You need to get rid of that stopwatch [and] pull out your calendar.’ I thought that was a hoot!”

Summing up his Masters experience, Jack reflected, “There are so many positives. It has been a good experience for me to enter [swimming] late in life...”

When asked what message he would like to share with others, Jack offered two pieces of advice: “If you are new to Masters, adopt an attitude of N.A.T.O., keep your sense of humor, and enjoy your journey with the many other wonderful Masters. And always remember you are never too old, like Ava said, ‘to try.’”



Jack and his wife, Glenda, his biggest fan for 54 years!