

Swimmer Profile –Lauren Minchew

By Elaine Krugman



As a breaststroker who loves swimming butterfly and backstroke, my inconsistent freestyle frustrates me the most. When I see beautiful-looking freestyle technique, I'm captivated and in awe. Lauren Minchew has that stroke.

Lauren and I didn't meet until we shared a bench at the Spring Splash meet at Georgia Tech, last April. I had never watched her swim at past meets, but when I saw her race, I stopped dead in my tracks and watched. To me, it was poetry in motion. As it turns out, Lauren puts a priority on her stroke technique. "I was never amazing at swimming, but I have always worked on form. I really enjoy learning the technical parts of swimming and trying to be the most streamline in the water and make it look flawless. I still don't understand how I don't get very fast in the water even though it's pretty and the form is nice. I'm still working on that," she explained in our interview.

One of the drills she credits for her pretty stroke focuses on keeping her head still and in the proper position in the water. This video explains the drill that is done by placing—and trying to keep—a hand paddle on your head as you swim:

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=hKIaIwNDeaQ>

Lauren is no stranger to the pool having started summer swimming when she was a small child and year-around training when she was 13. At Brenau University, in Gainesville, Lauren swam for two years before leaving the team and university due to not being able to afford continuing her education. "I was a national swimmer in the mile and 400 IM," she said about her swim team experience.

Following college, Lauren taught swim lessons and coached at Chattahoochee Gold (in Woodstock) for four years; however, she had quit swimming herself. In addition to having a packed schedule, her son was born. In all it was seven years that Lauren didn't swim, so she got out of good physical condition.

It wasn't until six months after taking her next job at the Northwest YMCA that Lauren got back into the pool for herself rather than just teaching and coaching others. "I really missed it... I was really depressed without it, and when I got back into [swimming], it was like, oh my God, I remember doing this, and it was so amazing! I can't stop doing it!" It was tough coming back, though, especially because of the changes she experienced in her body following childbirth that affected her strokes. "I had to completely change the way I swam breaststroke. I was like, 'What is this?' I was a lot more buoyant; it was very difficult."

Three years ago, Lauren joined U.S. Masters Swimming and just recently aged up to the 30-34 age group where there isn't a lot of women to compete against at Georgia meets. "I want there to be more competition in my age group, because I really don't have much of competition right now," she said, adding that Stephanie Lemmons (Swimmer Profile, November, 2017) is her only competition at most of the meets.

Being in the 30-34 age group isn't so bad though, considering who her competition would be if she were five years older: Britta O'Leary, Georgia LMSC Chair. "I'm so excited that we're exactly five years apart, because we're never in the same age group!" she said about the 2018 USMS top-ranked speedster in seven events and #2-ranked 200 breaststroker and 200 IM'er in the World.

Lauren is also an IM'er with her favorite event being the 400 IM. She also enjoys distance freestyle, but not backstroke, even though she is good at it. "I always feel like I'm flailing around like an idiot trying to make it through the water... My mom took a video at Georgia Tech [Spring Splash meet], and I actually thought I looked like a pretty decent Backstroker."

That Georgia Tech meet turned out to be a successful one for Lauren, because her faster race times brought her closer to achieving her goals. "At Georgia Tech, I dropped a lot of time in everything, so that was nice; but, I want to be better than I was in college. In college, I did a lot of physical therapy, because I was very broken. I had shoulder issues, back issues, one of my ankles was messed up; and, now, I don't have any of that pain anymore, so I'm trying to do better than I was then. But, my body is so different. I was thin, and I have a lot more fat on me, because I haven't trained in so long. To try to get back to that, I'm actually pretty close on most of my events, but I want to go to Nationals next year... I want to go and do good, so that's one of my goals, to train really hard and see what I can do. I want to blow my own mind, because I always like being in my comfort bubble. So, I feel like if I train hard and can blow my own mind, it would be like, wow, I can be good at this."

That "comfort bubble" Lauren describes is her biggest personal challenge. Although some people have a fear of failure, Lauren is one who fears success. As she explained, "I'm scared to show myself that I can be amazing at something. When I was 14, my coach said, 'Lauren, if you actually tried and got out of your comfort bubble, you could be swimming a :55 in your 100 free.' I laughed in his face. I was like, there's no way in hell I would be able to do that! He was right; I probably could, but I was still in that comfort bubble. At my last meet in college, I swam 100 freestyle, and I finally broke 1:00. I was like, this is pathetic."

To achieve her goal of beating her college race times, Lauren trains six days per week. Her daily sessions consist of a combination of two of either swimming, running, or body-weight exercises. She says she "hates" running; however, it helps her with her breathing, kicking, and getting strong pushes off the walls in the pool. "A lot of people think [being a good swimmer] has to do with only swimming. Last year, I swam all the time. I'm doing better now with not doing as much in the water. I'm a more well-rounded athlete, like I can run, I can do body-weight training, and I only get to swim three times a week," as she describes her current training routine.

Of the three types of training she does, swimming is her favorite. "...it's what makes me feel a whole lot better about myself. It's very stress-relieving... I've always been kind of a loner, so I like the quietness of swimming, and that it's my own individual thing. I've never been like, let me play a team sport. I don't like the spotlight on me like that."

In recent months, though, Lauren had some challenges that affected her enjoyment of swimming. As she explained, "This past year was really hard, because Muriel [Lancaster, coach of the Northwest YMCA Grey Fins] left. I was the assistant coach, and I felt like I was obligated to step into coaching, which was really

hard for me, because although I really like coaching, I would rather be swimming. I wasn't able to swim with everybody. While I was watching everybody from the pool deck, I was just miserable. When I would get into the pool to practice, I was by myself. I wasn't able to practice with the people I had been practicing with for over a year." In addition, at the same time Muriel moved, Lauren separated from her husband and changed employment to a full-time job, so she could support herself and her two children.

Overall, though, Lauren's return to swimming has been a positive experience, especially since joining USMS. "The whole thing about Masters swimming that I like the most is everyone is so accepting, and it doesn't even matter if it's your biggest competition. It's like one big family. Everyone is cheering for everyone, and it doesn't matter what team you're on, what age group, who you are." Lauren also likes that the Athletes Without Limits special needs team participates in Georgia Masters meets. "I love that; it's awesome!" In addition, she likes that the swimmers at the meets are at many different levels, from beginning on up. Meeting new people, though, is something important for Lauren, because she finds that difficult outside of the swim community. "It's a very comfort-zone place for me [at the swim meets]. It always feels like home, and I can just walk up and talk to anybody. I've made some of my closest friends that I have now at Masters swim practice."