

SWIMMER PROFILE: DAN SNYDER

By
Elaine Krugman



If you had to guess how much training yardage the fastest 50 fly'er in the men's 35-39 age group (in 2022) puts in during a typical week, how much would guess? This swimmer also ranked second in the 100 IM, and fourth in the 50 free and 100 free. Care to make a wager? Hint: He won't be winning the Go the Distance award any time soon. Read on to see how close you came to the correct answer...

Swim Atlanta (SAMS) member, Dan Snyder, is the swimmer in question, and that 50 Butterfly clinched him the Georgia State Record. He also holds the state's record for the 200 Breaststroke.

In all, the Philadelphia native has earned 76 Top Ten achievements, since 2017, and was an All-American in Short Course Meters, for 2020.

Dan is no newcomer to the pool, having started as a four-year-old in New Jersey, swimming summer league. He moved to Atlanta at age 12 and swam for Swim Atlanta in high school and during his freshman year at Georgia Tech. Dan then decided to take a break from swimming until joining Masters, in 2017, and training with Swim Atlanta back at the Georgia Tech pool.

What lured Dan back into the pool after all those years? Curiosity. He asked himself, "What could I do now?" Dan had missed swimming and didn't have anything else to fulfill his desire for competition.

When asked what his goal was when he returned to competition, Dan replied, "Not to embarrass myself." He had swum middle-distance events in high school and wanted to see how he would do racing shorter distances, such as the 100 IM.

Dan wasn't happy with his race times at first, but he improved those times at each meet and saw positive progress. Asked if that success as a Masters swimmer surprised him, he said, "Yes, for sure, especially considering how different my training is. Sprinting was never really on my radar as an age group swimmer. I

think that's because things were very different 20 or so years ago. We put a ton of yards in..."

Back in those earlier, heavy-yardage days, Dan hung with a fast-swimming crowd. He grew up in the same neighborhood as Olympian Amanda Weir and her younger brother Caleb, and drove Amanda to practice for several years. Dan also coached their neighborhood summer league team.

Next, the coach/swimmer relationship between Dan and Caleb flipped when Caleb became the coach of the Swim Atlanta group that trained at Georgia Tech. Dan trained with Caleb as his coach, in 2021, for about one year, but he developed shoulder issues swimming 3-4,000 yards every other day. Dan asked himself, "What can I do different?" He started looking into Ultra Short Race Pace Training (USRPT), the same method of training Olympian Michael Andrews utilizes while being coached by his father. Dan trains "USRPT Lite" by swimming even less yardage and just three times per week.

Now, for the answer to the weekly training yardage question you have been wondering about...

Dan swims a 200-300-yard warm-up, and then does four to eight sprint 25's or 50's, each session, for a total of 1,500 to 2,000 yards per *week*. Yes, you read that right; not per day, but per week!

As Dan explained about his atypical Masters training regimen, "My times have continued to improve, a little bit by a little bit. I swim as many meets as possible. In the year 2022, by the numbers, I did 16 meets, 69 races, and 36 of them were Masters best times... I am very happy with how the year went, racing as much as possible." His focus in practice is all-out speed and concentrating on the details of his technique. "I feel like there was just so much more margin for error when I was trying to put the yards in, [during] a heavy period of training, and then trying to time a taper. I was like, well, what if I was always tapered? I want to feel good for every meet and go into every meet feeling like I can go a best time... My shoulders have never been better since I got back in the pool, so I am happy about that."

In addition to changing how much he trains, Dan has altered his stroke style as well. As he explained, "I have completely changed my 50 freestyle stroke to a straight-arm, no-breathe freestyle, which is completely different from what my freestyle looks like at the end of an IM."

Although the sprinter is focused on the 50 freestyle and 100 IM as his core events, he races 50's of every stroke and sprinkles in some 100's and even 200's. Last year, he swam the 100 freestyle under 50 seconds for the first time.

When it comes to setting goals, Dan doesn't have his sights set on being first in the rankings. Rather than setting a goal to be top-ranked, which he feels is unrealistic due to the number of Olympians and former top collegiate swimmers in his age group, he aims to be in the top five in each of his events by the end of each season. Dan explained, "Those [top rankings] are great to see, but it's really about putting myself in the best position to get a best time at every meet. If there is just one event that I go a best time by one-hundredth, that's enough to completely change by perspective of the meet and consider it a success."

One example was at a meet earlier this year. "I went to the Charlotte meet (in January 2023), and the 50 back was something I would always do in high school, leading off relays. I went a life-time [best] 50 back in Charlotte. So, coming out of each meet, a different event comes into focus, and that helps keep it fresh and interesting."

That is also what Dan enjoys most about swimming. "There is always something to take away from every meet and from every practice... I can finish a race-pace set or an event, and there is something new that I had never thought about before for that particular stroke or event that you can take away. Just the fact that it's ever-evolving; there is always something new to focus on to challenge yourself to do and to work on. No two races are the same; that keeps it continually interesting to me."

Dan aims for consistent improvement and concentrates on "the little things." He added, "Now that I am pain-free, I can focus on weight training as well, and if I am focusing on sprinting events, the two go hand-in-hand; so, I feel like I've got a lot of opportunity still ahead of me."

In the future, the record-breaking swimmer plans to take those opportunities nationally and globally. His favorite meets are USMS Spring Nationals. "They always have them at great pools, you're always guaranteed to have a ton of rest between events, and they are able to fill up a bunch of heats in each age group; so, you're always racing your age group. That's not the case at just about any other meet, so that's really cool how it brings everybody together. I went to my first Masters Nationals, in 2018, at Indy; and, I have gone every year since. Long

course, I like going to Nationals as well, but this year I am planning on going to Worlds.”

There is another reason Dan’s favorite meets are Nationals: They are inspiring. “It’s just incredible when you have a full heat of 80-somethings or 90-somethings [at a Nationals meet] that have been swimming all their lives, or maybe they didn’t start until they were 70; just the fact that it’s a life-long sport that brings thousands of people together, several times a year, for Nationals or World Championships. That environment is great. I can see myself sticking with Masters the rest of my life. And, I hope I can.”

Dan’s favorite Masters memory was at a local meet, rather than at Nationals, though. As he remembered, “I have always loved relays, and it has been very hard to get a crew together to do them consistently. At the end of 2021 at the Trout meet at Georgia Tech, I was able to get three other guys (Bruce Leete, Ryan Shanteau, and Matt Mills) together to do some relays, and we broke some state records. There are so many teams in Georgia, and I’m doing my own thing anyway; so, I don’t have that same exposure to the team aspect of it. I would love to do that some more.”

While wrapping up our conversation, Dan added some advice he would like other swimmers to think about: “Don’t be afraid to try something new. If there is anything in the back of your mind or kind of nagging at you, it’s probably worth pulling on that thread. I thought I had hit a wall; my body just can’t train for this sport anymore to hit the goals that I want; and, I just found a completely different way to do it that works for me. So, don’t be afraid to try something new. And, one last thing for the [aspiring] sprinters out there—oxygen is overrated!”