

## SWIMMER PROFILE: DOUGLAS CARRINGTON

By  
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Although Douglas “Doug” Carrington was a National Top 16 ranked YMCA swimmer when he was a teenager, once he got into high school, soccer became his primary sport, and he lost interest in swimming. By the time he was ready for college in 2000, he was ready to put swimming behind him and move on. As he explained, “I went down to Florida A&M (FAMU) for the summer orientation program for incoming freshman... I was walking around campus and saw they had a 50-meter pool. I didn’t see that in the tour and hadn’t heard anything about it; and, when I got there in late August, I thought,

I’ll go to the pool and do some laps. There were some other guys in there training, and they were [swimming] my speed.” When he got talking with them, he learned they were there on a swimming scholarship and were training on their own in preparation for the upcoming collegiate swim season, which would be starting up at the beginning of the school year. Doug didn’t know the university even had a swim team, so it piqued his interest. “I went to coach Jorge Olaves and said, ‘I saw some guys out there swimming and heard there was a team. What do I [need] to do to sign up?’” Olaves explained the process, and Doug followed through.

Since there were swimmers already plugged in to swim some of Doug’s favorite sprint events, he switched to 200 backstroke, 200/400 IM, and occasionally the 200 freestyle—all events which the team lacked depth in for Conference Championships. He didn’t mind, though; he was just happy to be contributing to the team. “I remember the first year; it was like a rebirth of my love for swimming again... my times were getting faster and I broke the school record in the 200 backstroke. I wonder what more I can do.”

Another highlight of his time at FAMU was the HBCU (Historically Black College/ University) Invitational. “The MEAC conference schools (FAMU, Howard and North Carolina A&T) competed in a midseason competition that brought together old age group teammates for a healthy rivalry and winner-take-all bragging rights for the season. As the competition rotated between the three HBCU’s annually, it was a great way to help with recruiting, as prospective swimmers got to see the teams in action.” For Doug, this was a highlight event he looked forward to very much.

Although Doug was out of eligibility after four years, he was in a 5-year dual-major program of electrical and computer engineering and had one year left at Florida A&M. He became an assistant coach of the swim team until the program was cut in 2006. To keep up his skills as a coach, Doug joined the Area of Tallahassee Aquatic Club as a summer league and age group coach.

In 2007, the swim program was brought back to Florida A&M because of Title IX, and Doug was asked to return as an assistant coach. After the head coach left in 2008, Doug was tasked with taking over the program. In the fall of 2008, he became head coach and worked hard to recapture the spirit from his years as a swimmer. He also participated in swim clinics and the first swim college knowledge event in Washington, DC. However, due to the lack of adequate funding and other frustrations with the university, Doug left the program after the 2010 season.

Around the same time, Doug met his wife, Renita, and moved to Washington, D.C. where she was living at the time. He became a government contractor doing IT contract work and swam occasionally after work. After two years away from the coaching deck, he came back to coaching again with the DC Wave swim team. He also took on coaching the older age group swimmers of a club team.

In 2014, Doug and Renita’s first child was born, and the long hours of a full-time job and evening coaching became too much to handle with a newborn. After two years of trying to balance it all, he told head coach Rob Green, “Look, I have to call it quits. I have a child now, my in-laws live in Atlanta, and we’re going to move to Atlanta to be closer to family. I’m done coaching until my children want to swim.”

After moving to Atlanta, Doug joined the Andrew and Walter Young YMCA, and Coach Ilonga Thandiwe recruited him to join the team. At the time, Doug figured it would be easier to get lane space training with the Masters team rather than on

his own. Now, he's hooked. "I really enjoyed swimming again. I didn't have the pressure of getting kids trained, and [going] to championships. I'm back to how it was when I was 8, 9, and 10 (years old)."

In 2017, Doug competed at Spring Short Course Nationals in Riverside, California. "It was a great experience! I did all the hard work, and it took me back to age group when I was at the Dutchess County, New York YMCA. Just going to the meet and realizing there were people out here that are 70, 80, 90 (years old) still swimming; it just changed the way I looked at everything, because I had never seen that before. This is a life-long sport that I had almost written off 15 years ago!" That meet turned out to be one of Doug's favorite Masters memories. He had explored the possibility of competing and combining it with family travel. That blending of family time with racing occurred in perfect balance during the afternoon of his 50 backstroke event. The Carringtons went to Laguna Beach to play in the sand and water, returning to the pool just in time for his competition. "That one race was like the crossover point for me. I got to do both things. It's not like one or the other, where I had basically been living all of the way up to that point..."

"Racing that day, shaved and tapered; I hadn't done that since college... but also my family is here; just all of those things mixed together, it was a possibility in terms of a lifestyle. I could enjoy swimming and be invested in it, but then also be totally invested in my family and my personal time."

Doug can't imagine swimming not being part of his life. "What I get out of swimming is the order it brings to my life, the kind of clarity in terms of how I handle my emotions. I know the difference between when I haven't gotten in the water and when I swim. My wife says that after I have a good practice, I'm chipper. If I don't swim for a couple of days, I'm kind of a grumpy old guy!"

"What I like about Masters is I'm doing what I was doing when I was 8, 9, 10, but now I'm just doing it as an adult. I feel like I have a hobby that is useful in life. I find that when I'm at work, and I have a problem, I can go to practice that day, get into a 10 x 100's set and just work it out. But, then I also get the benefit of—I got up at 5 o'clock, I get out of the pool at 6:45, I've worked out for the day, I feel kind of charged up. I feel like I've accomplished something before people start going to school or going to work. On top of that, I can still compete. If you have been a competitive swimmer, it's a loop between the two parts: practicing and competing. They kind of feed back on each other. So, you go to practice, you work

on these aspects of your race, of your stroke, your race strategy; and, then you go to a meet and execute. You see how it works.”

“I’m trying to get back to breaking a minute in the 100 (yard) backstroke, going under 2:10 in the 200 (yard) backstroke, and my other goal is to try and see if I can get into the top 5 in my age group in those events. Those are the things I focus on every season.” His longer goal is to swim his age in the 100 freestyle. Doug aged up to 40 this year, and he hopes to swim his age when he’s 49 by swimming the 100 free in 49 seconds. Perhaps that goal will be reached at an international Masters meet, in some far away country with Renita and the children cheering enthusiastically from behind the blocks! My goal going forward is to go to FINA World Masters Championships, so we can travel as a family to that country.”