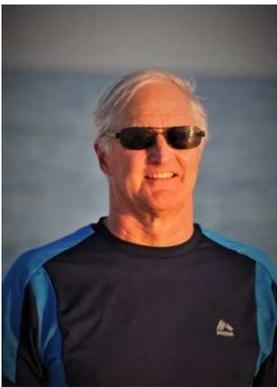


Swimmer Profile –George Welborn

By Elaine Krugman



George Welborn may be an unknown self described “mystery man” to his Atlanta Water Jocks teammates here in Georgia; however, that wasn’t the case in his native Chattanooga. As a 2011 Chattanooga Sports Hall of Fame inductee, he had developed quite the reputation for both his swimming and age group coaching.

For swimming, George’s resume of achievements is quite extensive, beginning with his age group years when he won the high points trophy three times at the Chattanooga Championship meet. He was also the state champion in the 100 meter butterfly. At McCallie School, he set school records in five individual events, was the state champion in both freestyle and butterfly, and was a two-time All-American, in addition to many other notable achievements.

The awards continued to accumulate when George went on to swim for Vanderbilt University. In addition to setting school records in the 50 freestyle and 100 butterfly, he was a member of a record breaking freestyle and medley relay team. George also qualified for the NCAA Championships three years and was elected captain of his swim team.

As a USMS member, the sprinter made Top Ten in the short course meters 50 butterfly (2002 and 2007) and 100 freestyle (2007), as well as the short course yards 100 butterfly (2017). He also held eight Georgia state records in butterfly and freestyle at the time he was inducted into the hall of fame. Two of those records (50 and 100 SCY butterfly) still stand in the 65-69 age group.

In between amassing all of those college and Masters awards, George took a break from swimming and competition for six years to establish his career, marry his wife, Jan, and raise their three boys, in Marietta.

George returned to swimming at age 30, getting in pool workouts while on lunch break from work. He joined USMS about five years later, and has been swimming at YMCA’s in town as well as when he traveled for work.

Except for those six years away from the pool, George has swum since the age of 9; so, I asked what keeps him coming back to the water again and again. “I have been motivated [to swim] for a number of reasons. My father had a very serious heart attack at age 53, when he was in the FBI, and I figured knowing how genetics works; I better keep in shape. I swim because I like to, I swim because I want to keep in shape, and I compete to see how much my body has deteriorated!” he said with a good natured laugh. He added, “I have always used swimming as my de-stress time. When you are starting and running businesses, there’s stress. I have always found [swimming] as a great way for me to cope with stress... I use that time as my think time, de-stress time, and sometimes I use it as my veg. time, and I just don’t think about anything but my stroke. That’s all I think about.”

George also explained, “I played tennis in ALTA for years, I ran for years, I ran the Peachtree Road Race several times; but, I just like swimming better. It’s a total body exercise, it doesn’t make things

hurt, like, I don't have shin splints and Achilles issues; or, sore knees or hips. It's a great cardiovascular exercise, you exercise the whole body, and I can use my Master's affiliation to trick myself into working out a little harder, because I have a goal to go to a time trial event."

"I have some [specific] goals. Every year when I'm the baby in my age group, I try to see how close I can come to the Top Ten; I think that's kind of a good motivator. The last time I did it I was 65, and I got one 9th, an 11th, and a 12th—I got close, and it made me feel like at least I wasn't on death's doorstep."

"[In addition], I would like to see how close I can get to one minute in the 100 butterfly when I'm 70. I definitely want to be able to break seventy seconds when I'm 70, but I would really like to see if I could go faster when I'm 70 than when I was 55." He said he'll be 70 in January, and he asked, "Did you know that every year that goes by, you find the pool gets longer?" Yeah, and the older we get, the faster we were!

Although Top Ten is a motivator for George, it has not been a top priority in life. His family and running his technology businesses have always been his main focus. He also enjoys playing golf and looks forward to being able to travel again, now that he and his wife have been fully vaccinated for COVID-19.

Currently, George has a routine of swimming two or three days in a row, and then taking a day off before repeating that schedule again. One of those days each week, he will swim 35-45 minutes nonstop, even though he is a sprinter. He trains alone, which has its advantages and disadvantages. "One of the things I miss is working out with folks like I worked out with in high school, in summer, and in college; but, the times just don't work for me. I'm not going to go somewhere at 6:00 in the morning. I spent many years doing that, and I'm not that motivated to do it now." He does, however, look forward to meeting his teammates at a future social event, such as a happy hour, once it is safe to do so.

The speedster's favorite race events are the 50 and 100 butterfly and freestyle. As he reflected on racing those events, he said, "When I was in high school, I was a two time All-American in those strokes, and when I was in college, our relay was in the top twenty in the nation, which is pretty good for Vanderbilt, since they didn't have any [swimming] scholarships... It was really cool to swim with people who swam because they loved to swim."

When asked George what his thoughts were on trying some other events in the future, he replied, "Many moons ago, I did the IM, and many moons ago I was a distance swimmer, until I turned into a sprinter. I have thought about swimming some distance and backstroke. I have always been a terrible breastroker. Even though I had some success in the IM, it was not because of breaststroke, I can tell you that! I have been working on breaststroke, but it's just not my favorite stroke. It doesn't move fast enough!"

Competing in travel meets isn't on George's bucket list either. "Traveling around and going to the national meets is just not my thing. I swim to stay healthy, and I use my competition as a motivator to push myself a little harder in practices."

George is also inspired and motivated by the mutually-supportive relationship he has with his younger brother, Jimmy. They grew up swimming together and went on to co-coach the same team for three years.

Although George was a sprinter, Jimmy was a distance swimmer. "Because we were both swimming, reinforcing each other, we both liked it, and were doing well at it; he reinforced my enjoyment of

swimming and I reinforced his enjoyment. When [Jimmy] was 52, he swam the Tampa Bay race, a 24-mile race. He swam it in 9 hours and 45 minutes and won by an hour-and-a-half. I was right there with him, but I was in a boat. When we finished, I was tired, and I had been in the boat! We were feeding him electrolytes, giving him peanut butter sandwiches, and counting his strokes per minute to make sure he wasn't slowing down too much. We were trying to guide the kayak and the boat to get him to the finish line... He had a big influence on my swimming, and I probably did with him, too," he said.

Before wrapping up our interview, I asked George what he enjoyed about USMS. He replied, "I enjoy and appreciate how organized the whole Master's program is. To be able to go look at all of my times I have done in the last however many years and see what they were, and see how people I went to school with are swimming—just the fact that they keep such meticulous records... Because they have that, it motivates me to work out a little harder knowing that I am going to compete... It used to be when [I] swam in meets, I wanted to win, win, win; but, now I look at it as this is for me, it's a time trial, and I'll give it my best. I'm not going to put any pressure [on myself]; I'm just going to do what I can do. I like that they have given me that structure to compete with that attitude."