

SWIMMER PROFILE: TED HAMMOND

By

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Although it had been ten years since Ted Hammond competed in a swim meet, the new Georgia Masters member managed to win all of his races and break three state records at his first Georgia Masters competition. Those St. Nick's SCM Invitational race results, last December, also placed him 6th in the nation in the 50-Meter Freestyle, and grabbed the 10th spot in the USMS Top Ten in the 100-Meter Freestyle.

At the time of our (March) phone interview, I had not met my new GAJA teammate; however, he was referred to me by Joe Hutto who insisted Ted would be a great interview and is a great addition to our team. Joe wasn't wrong. Two entertaining hours later (and a sore stomach from laughing so much), our interview ended with me realizing that all of Ted's hilarious stories would be lost in my writing. You had to hear them first-hand, in his voice, rather than a written quote.

Try to imagine this scene where Ted swam on his high school co-ed swim team: "It was at this old YMCA that was probably built in the 20's, 30's or 40's. It was in a basement, and it was a 17-yard pool. It had a ceiling that if you stuck your hand up, you could touch it. It was probably about three normal lanes wide. There was never a meet in it, because you couldn't do it," he said, adding that back in those days, the older men used to swim naked at those old YMCA pools, and they shared the pool with the co-ed swim team.

Following his unusual high school swim team experience, Ted went on to college for dental school and continued swimming for fitness. One day, while swimming at the campus pool, the coach asked him if he would join the team. Not wanting to repeat his high school experience of being required to swim long events he wasn't interested in, the sprinter refused, explaining, "I always got stuck doing the junk I didn't want to do!" The coach persisted, however, during another swim

session; so, Ted asked him, “Well, can I swim what I want to? Can I swim the 50 Free, the 100 Free and the 50 Fly?” The coach replied, “You can swim whatever you want,” so Ted relented and joined up. As he explained, “The team was already in session, and I was a walk-on, like a nobody. I swam my first meet, and I was in the outside lane, in Lane 8, and I won the 50 free!” Ultimately, he wound up being captain of his small, Division 3 team.

Competitive swimming became a grind, though, especially the late evening workouts that caused Ted to nearly miss his much-needed dinners in the college dining room. “We would get out [from practice] with just enough time to run over while the cafeteria was still open. It would close before you could go back and get seconds; and, when you’re twenty-years-old, you’re starving! And, when you’re swimming, you’re starving; and, you can never get enough food! Then, when I would try to study at night, I was exhausted, and I couldn’t keep my head off the table,” he laughed.

After college, burned-out Ted swore his swimming days were over.

In 1980, Ted graduated from dental school and joined the U.S. Army where he served as a dentist for 34 years. From 1998 to 2004, he was stationed in Alaska and didn’t have many options for exercising during the frigid and snowy winter months. Running and cycling were out, so Ted decided to swim. “I reluctantly went to the pool on base, a nice (indoor) 25-yard pool. I get in the outside lane and these people showed up—these adults—and they were called ‘Masters swimmers.’ I didn’t know anything about them. These guys on deck said, ‘Hey, do you want to swim with us? I said, ‘No, I’m not doing that ever again. I’m not going to do that team stuff. I was a swimmer in college.’ Then, I was in there a few days later and there was this team again. [They asked] ‘Can you share your lane with this one girl here?’” Ted agreed and was pleased they were compatible lane mates. As he explained to me, “Then, the hook got set. You didn’t actually have to go to practice, or you could be late to practice, you didn’t have to be there twice in a day, you could swim what you wanted to; and, after the meets, invariably one of the swimmers had a party, and there was pizza and beer, and it was all fun! And, you had time to eat after working out! It was the best, most honest, most fulfilling group of people I have been around in my life. Everybody wanted to work hard and everybody wanted to play hard. Nobody was condescending; it was wonderful!”

So much for the burned-out collegiate swimmer not ever wanting to swim again. He was hooked.

Following retirement from the Army in 2015, Ted told his wife they had to move to a community with an indoor pool. They landed in Greensboro, Georgia, where Angel Martino, captain of the 1996 Women's Olympic Swimming Team, is the swim coach and has offered much-appreciated butterfly stroke technique tips to Ted.

Paying it forward, this Top Ten sprinter likes to share his knowledge with others. At the Auburn meet, Ted shared some breaststroke tips with Joe Hutto that Joe immediately applied, resulting in a five-second time drop in his 200 Yard Breaststroke race. As Ted explained, "What I enjoy most is that I can give the stuff I know to other people. If I'm in that pool, and I'm swimming, and somebody says, 'Can you show me something?' That's always to me a great excuse to stop and help. I love doing that!"

Much of Ted's swimming knowledge has come from studying stroke technique books. One book he recommends is *Total Immersion*, by Terry Laughlin. "I read his book and changed how I swam and made myself swim wiser and longer and sleeker. That book is appropriate for adults because what he says in there applies to us." Another book the stroke technique student spoke highly of was, *Swim Speed Secrets*, by Sheila Taormina.

It was evident to me during our conversation that swimming is a great passion for Ted—something he enjoys tremendously during his four weekly training sessions that total about 12,000 yards. He does his distance training with a triathlete group and sprint training on his own, always deep in concentration. "I've never swum with headphones on, because I'm always thinking about what I'm doing," Ted said about his quest to improve his strokes.

What Ted enjoys most about swimming, however, is the excellent physical conditioning he has gained from his training sessions. "Once I started swimming in the military, I mostly just swam (for fitness); but, we have to take a physical fitness test every six months that you have to pass. It's running, push-ups, and sit-ups. I never had to do any of that stuff. I didn't have to do the running, the

push-ups or the sit-ups, because of swimming. It took care of all that for me. I'd go take the test, and I would always max out on the test and do great. And, it was just because I swam. Swimming did that for me, and it can do that for other people, too."

A prime example of a person who benefitted from his many years of swimming was another swimmer that Ted met while competing at the 2008 USMS National Championships, in Oregon. As he explained, "I was in a Nationals meet, and I go in the locker room. There was this 90-year-old guy sitting on the bench. He had his head down, and he looked kind of glum. I chipperly said to him, 'Hey, how did you do today?' He said, 'Oh, I won everything I swam.' I said, 'Well, you should be really happy about it; you're doing great!' And, he said, 'Well, the truth of the matter is I've been coming to these meets for 40, 50 years, and I was never one of the really good swimmers. And, I was always struggling to be one of those really good swimmers. Now I win, because those other people that always came in ahead of me—they're either dead, or they're sick, or they're physically disabled, or mentally disabled; but, they're not here.' And, I said to him, 'Swimming isn't about winning the events. It's about giving you the ability to win in the game of life. You're on this bench today, because swimming got you into this locker room today, and swimming got you where you're at. It wasn't the events that you didn't win or even the events you did win today. All the practice that you did pushing through gave you life. And, that's why you're 90 and alive, and you're fit.' He appreciated that, and I will never forget that time; because, you and I can be that guy, or you and I can be the guy that's not there. That was a humbling time for both of us. I learned from him, and he learned, hopefully, from me."