



Greetings from the Deck

The 2005-2006 season capped off with the State of Ohio Championship at the new Bill and Mae McCorkle Aquatic Pavilion. The new natatorium is a state-of-the-art facility at The Ohio State University and home to the Ohio State varsity men's and women's swimming and diving teams and varsity synchronized swimming team. The pools and facility were completed in 2005.

A total of 236 swimmers competed in the meet. Over 38 different teams from different LMSC's attended. The large team winner was the O*H*I*O Masters Swim Team and the small team winner was the Anderson Barracuda Masters. It was great to see this large meet take place in our LMSC. And a big round of applause goes out to the host of the meet, Ohio Splash, and specifically Sophie Dryer.

Generally speaking the summer months are a time to reinvent yourself. There are not as many meets, but more open water swims, which provide new and exciting challenges. I am excited about this summer; I age up into a new and challenging age-group (35-39). This doesn't mean that I am wiser or faster, I am just older and still swimming. This is one more year to do something I love, swimming.

Happy Swimming ☺

CJ

Hydration re-visited



In 2004 the Food And Nutrition Board of the Institute of Medicine released new Dietary Reference Intakes for water, sodium and other electrolytes. The recommendations are for the average adult, who could be sedentary or just mildly active. For athletes training regularly it may be necessary to modify these guidelines.

The Institute of Medicine recommends that adult males consume 3.7 liters of fluid daily, while female adults should consume 2.7 liters. The Institute of Medicine advises that fluid intake be driven by thirst and by consuming beverages at mealtimes. This recommendation does not benefit athletes who should rely on more than thirst to maintain

adequate hydration. Body fluid levels are already low when you feel thirsty.

Sodium recommendation focuses on the prevention of high blood pressure, with sodium intake being limited to 1500 mg daily. Research indicates that reducing sodium intake along with a high potassium intake can help prevent the increase in blood pressure that comes with aging.

As an athlete, hydrating before training and rehydrating after training is a top nutritional priority. Make it a daily habit to carry a water bottle to encourage steady fluid intake. Remember that juices, milk, yogurt and fresh fruit are hydrating. Clear urine during the day is a sign of adequate hydration (urine is more concentrated in the morning so check it during the day).

The Institute of Medicine acknowledges that its sodium guidelines cannot be applied to most athletes. Daily sodium loss through urine is about 25 mg daily in a sedentary person but can range from 460-1800 mg in an active person. How much sodium an individual loses is a product of your sweat rate and sodium loss. Sodium can be replaced with a sports drink containing sodium or with the sodium in your daily diet. You do not need to replace all the sodium you lose during training; consume just enough to prevent sodium levels from dropping too low. If you are being treated for hypertension check with your doctor regarding sodium intake.

And don't just take that water bottle to practice!! Keep it full and with you all day long.

2006 XI FINA

World Masters Championships

The XI FINA World Masters Championships is less than six months away. The Local Organizing Committee is continuing its work to make the championships the best for the athletes and the best remembered Masters Championship event.

Meet books have been sent out to all USMS LMSCs, and to all USMS clubs. They have also been sent to all the 191 Federations in the FINA family. The meet book is also available online at <http://www.2006FINAMasters.org>. We hope that all swimmers will look at the book and consider competing at the championships.

In the book and on the website are qualification times for the championships that should have been achieved within the past two years. If you have not swum in a long course meet in the past couple of years, Mary Pohlmann worked on the translation of the qualifying times from short course yards to long course meters. Swiminfo.com also has a conversion program for short course meters to long course meters. Those times can also be used as a goal for swimmers who have trouble meeting the USMS LCM Qualifying times. Online registration should be available by the end of February.

The Organizing Committee wants to encourage athletes to enter the meet and for the first 1,000 competitors who enter the meet, the Organizing Committee will have a nylon bag with the meet logo on it. Swimmers will be able pick up the bag when they register at the meet in August.

The Organizing committee is trying to encourage camaraderie by having the relays on one day. The relays will take place in the Belardi pool (an all deep-water pool). Teams will have to submit their entries along with a time by the meet deadline – June 3rd. However, the final names for the swimmers do not have to be submitted until 1PM the day before the meet.

The organizing committee wants coaches to be recognized, so for any team that has 20 swimmers entered, the coach will get a XI FINA World Championships coaches shirt. This Speedo polo shirt will only be available to coaches whose teams send 20 or more members.

Also, for teams that have 50 or more swimmers entered by April 15th, the coach will get a Speedo swim bag.

Swimmers will also be able to enter, yet change their times until the meet entry deadline date. The LOC blocked over 26,000 room nights in hotels on the San Francisco peninsula for the meet. The rooms in the Palo Alto hotels have been pretty much booked, but there are great deals on hotel rooms in Santa Clara and San Mateo. We are sure that you will always be able to find rooms for the meet, but if you want rooms that are close to the meet venue, now is the time to book if you have not booked. Now is the time to do it. When booking a single room, your Visa or MasterCard will not be charged until July.

If you are booking ten or more rooms, contact Shannon Sullivan (shannon@2006FinaMasters.org)

Shannon has a lot of experience of working with teams.

For traveling and car rental, there are discounts available for some airline and auto rental firms. Information is in the meet booklet. When making the reservation you must use the discount code that is in the meet book. The airlines are expecting a good summer this year, so seating may be tight. If you think that the price of gasoline will be going up make your reservations now.

The meet will have many social activities so that swimmers can gather and meet. Americans will be hosting the meet, so it will be time to extend American hospitality to visitors from foreign lands. While the success of the meet will depend upon 100,000 Masters Swimmers making 100,000 individual decisions about coming to Stanford for the championships, I hope that you decide to come to Northern California, to have fun, compete and enjoy the camaraderie that is Masters swimming.

The Organizing Committee looks forward to meeting you in August at Stanford.

Places To Swim in Ohio

Attention all Teams and Clubs!!!

Have you been to the Places to swim page on the Ohio or USMS website? If so, are all the workout groups in your area up to date? Would you please check this information and let Scott Goertemiller know if there is a need to be updated?

Go to the USMS website at www.usms.org and click on Places to Swim. Filter out your LMSC and all the places currently listed will appear. If there is one that is out of date, click on "edit a place to swim", make the appropriate changes and click "submit" and then the information for that program will be up to date

A Calorie is a Calorie...

By Edward H. Nessel, R.Ph, M.S., MPH, PharmD.

It may be that most Americans are obsessed with being thin, but if you look around you'll see that most are overweight. In fact, at least one-third of the adult American population is approaching obesity (depending upon height, at least 20 to 30 pounds overweight), and nearly one-half are considered overweight. This is more than a 10%

increase from the 1980's, and the number continues to climb.

We also know that several potentially catastrophic diseases can arise from being overweight. For example, coronary heart disease (CHD) and diabetes are now both definitely linked to an expanded waistline. We also know that those wanting to partake in athletics will definitely be at a disadvantage carting around more non-muscular body weight than they should.



So how do we reduce our nation's fat and your waistline? Consistently inserting moderate to vigorous exercise in the daily/weekly schedule is a proven way to fight the bulge.

But if you don't follow a low-fat diet, in conjunction with your regular exercise program, you may be waging a losing "battle of the bulge."

There has arisen of late a major dietary controversy over what type of foods (or which type of diet) actually causes the most harm in regards to increasing body fat. Atkin's Diet followers believe that it is mainly carbohydrates (simple and/or complex) that produce the unwanted fat, while consuming fatty dishes and protein at will is the way to body leanness. There have been weight-loss situations on the Atkin's Diet; enough so as to make many stop and consider is this a possible avenue to permanent weight loss. They should also ask the big question: is this the safest way to a permanent ideal body weight?

To lose weight, the obvious should be clear: take in fewer calories than you burn up with activity; or to put it in a more logical way: burn up more calories than you take in throughout the day, the week, the year. By this I mean consistency. Going on a diet should not be the goal of the weight-loss seeker; entering into a life-style change in eating describes what should be the intended objective.

Many health professionals say you have to go on a low-calorie diet to lose weight; true but too simplistic. They say "A calorie...is a calorie...is a calorie" and "All excess calories will be stored as fat." Be cautious of these warnings. They are only half-truths, and are not the main issue when dealing with weight control. You do not eat calories, per say; you eat carbohydrates, fat, and protein. And each of these food groups are utilized and stored differently by the body.

What is a Calorie?

A kilocalorie (Kcal... 1000 calories) or what we conveniently refer to as a calorie, is a measure of heat energy. Scientifically, it represents the amount of heat needed to raise the temperature of one kilogram of water (slightly more than a quart) by one degree Celsius. For example, a can of chicken noodle soup with 90 calories per serving has the chemical energy in one serving to raise the temperature of 90 quarts of water by one degree Celsius, or 1 quart of water 90 degrees. But if the can of soup is actually chemical energy that produces heat, what happens when you eat it?



Where Does It All Go?

The protein in the soup (coming mostly from the chicken), which equals four calories per gram, is broken down and then reassembled to replace protein in your body lost by routine cell turnover, especially in the muscles. Some of the protein is also used to make enzymes and other key chemicals needed to make your metabolism work

Suppose you add up all the protein in your daily diet and it comes to more than your body needs. What happens then? The calorie counters say it is all turned into fat. But this would call for some monumental biochemical processes to occur, and the scientific literature does not support this type of metabolism. What happens is that the excess protein is oxidized, which means it is burned off and converted to compounds that are eliminated from the body (assuming the kidneys are up to the task).

What happens to the fat in your soup, and from the other foods you eat? Some replaces lost tissues such as cell membranes and certain cells in your nervous system. The rest is first utilized as energy for body function and movement. But since fat is the highest food energy source (providing nine calories per gram), it is quite easily stored as such by the body for later use. Nature has always provided this biochemical energy pathway. The trouble with all this is that the body's ability to store fat is seemingly limitless. People who consistently eat more fat than they can burn up keep storing it day after day...getting fatter and fatter.

The fate of the carbohydrate in the chicken soup (coming from vegetables and pasta), and from the rest of the daily food intake is more interesting. A little carbohydrate (CHO) is utilized in cell turnover, but the majority is consumed for muscular energy. Although it only produces four calories per gram,

carbohydrates provide the "high-octane" readily-usable fuel the body needs to move through all the demands we choose to put it through. Thus, a diet consisting predominately of carbohydrates will provide plenty of energy upon demand.

What if you eat too much carbohydrate? The calorie counters say it is simply turned into fat. However, the scientific literature tells a different story. Some extra carbohydrate can be stored as glycogen,



which is the breakdown product of carbohydrates and the storage component of glucose; glucose is the prime energy source the body seeks to move muscle and everything else attached to same. This

glycogen is stored somewhat in the muscles proper for an increased ready supply of energy and stored to a greater extent in the liver, which is the second line of defense against energy drain.

If one eats more carbohydrates than the body can store, the rate of oxidation increases. The body "turns up the heat" and the basic metabolic rate (BMR) is raised burning carbohydrate faster. Only when the body has filled all possible stores and turned up the burners full blast can it begin converting some of the extra carbohydrates into fat. And by this time, very large amounts of food would have had to be consumed.

Results from clinical nutrition studies show that the conversion of carbohydrate to fat in healthy physically active people is minor, compared to storage of dietary fat. The body only readily converts carbohydrate to fat if the body is deprived of fat, or it needs more fat as in the third trimester of pregnancy, or it has MUCH more caloric intake than it needs on a daily basis.

What has come to be of tremendous benefit to those who train intensely on a regular schedule is the scientific discovery that a certain proportion (4:1) of carbohydrate to muscle-friendly protein (whey) can have a synergistic effect in powering the muscles and allow them to recover faster and more completely than they would otherwise be able with carbohydrates alone.

What Should You do?

The evidence that counting grams of fat is the key to weight control is well documented. The mechanism for the process is logical and true, and the scientific literature supports it. The evidence that simply counting calories is the way to go is

inconsistent, seldom corrected for the known influence of fat, often flawed, and there is no mechanism to explain how those excess calories contribute to weight (except for those from fat), that is consistent with human biochemistry.

It is very hard to overeat on pure carbohydrate foods because they are bulky and often contain a lot of water. A good rule of thumb is if you are in good health, have a normal metabolism, and exercise regularly, consuming one gram of fat for each kilogram (2.2 lbs) of body weight (or target body weight) will not add on the pounds Americans seem to be so attached to.

It is never a pleasant situation to cut out your favorite foods to lose weight; that is why so many diets fail. The best way to lose weight and keep it off is to remove as much fat from the diet as possible. Always select the low-fat alternatives; your taste buds will become accustomed sooner than you think. Choose several servings a day of fresh fruits, vegetables, breads and pastas (minus the high-fat spreads or sauces) with a complimentary amount of quality protein and as little fat as you can get away with. There will always be too many opportunities to consume fats; work at dodging them as you would anything that would jeopardize your working out.

Ed Nessel is a pharmacist, biochemist and physiologist who coaches age group and masters swimming at Rutgers University. He is the USMS National Librarian and was selected the 1998 USMS Coach of the Year.

Age Grading

By David Nordstrom

Two recent articles, Swimming World's "Holding Back the Years" by Phillip Whitten, March 2005; and USMS SWIMMER's "Records Topple at USMS Short Course Nationals in Fort Lauderdale", July – August 2005, prompted me to attempt to further quantify performances vs. age. The running community has an age-grading scheme that allows runners in any age group to "adjust" their times to another age group. So if you are a 70 year old, you can use a formula to find out what your current time would be as a 25 year old with the age adjustment. In some road races, awards are given to best equivalent times (a 70 year old with a 25 min 5K beats the 25 year old with a 22 min 5K). As far as I

know, we swimmers don't have an age grading system. This is an attempt to develop one.

The articles mentioned above have to do with general population vs Masters' expected yearly decline in performance. The general rule is that the overall population declines at approximately 1% per year after age 25 for about 40 years. Then the rate of decline increases. The article showed that Masters swimmers did much better than that. The USMS Swimmer's article featured – in part – Richard Abrahams, who showed that a life time best at age 60 (24.46 – 50 yd fly) completely destroys the decline prediction graph.

So what is going on here? A 60 year old man going 49.14 in the 100 free? Now THAT'S not normal, Richard! But we can get a feel for what "normal" is for Masters swimmers by looking at results. What I looked at were the 5th place times on the Top Ten list for 2004. (At the time, 2005 results were not complete). Why 5th place? Because there are always a few "Richard Abrahams" at the top of every age group that are not at all "normal" – even for Masters. I used the 5th place time in every age group for every event for both women and men to compute a ratio using 1.0000 for the fastest time. Example: the fastest 5th place time in the women's 100 free was 53.61 in the 25 – 29 age group. That time has a value of 1.0000. In the 55 – 59 age group the 5th place time was 1:06.62 or .8047 as fast as 53.61. So if you went 1:06.62 as a 58 year old, the equivalent time for a 28 year old is 53.61 – according to actual performances in the national top 10 in 2004. Conversely, if you went 53.61 as a 28 year old, your equivalent time as a 58 year old is ...1:06.62. There were 12 age groups with a completed top 10 list for women and 13 age groups with full listings for men. Since there are 18 individual events, there are 450 comparison ratios in the table.

The purpose of age grading is for motivation – what does your time as a 58 year old mean? How fast is that swim if I were 28? or 78? You can compute your equivalent time for any age – even compare your times now as a 58 year old with your times in college. Hopefully, even though you are getting slower, you'll see that your age graded "adjustment" shows you're doing pretty well – especially as

compared to the general population.



To calculate your age graded time for any event:

1. Divide the 4 digit multiplier in your age group by the 4 digit multiplier in the age group for which you want to see your equivalent time.
2. Multiply the result of step 1 by your current time.

This will give you the age graded equivalent time for the other age group.

That's it. It works in all 450 cases. It's based on factual 2004 data. The ratio tables will change in the future based on new data; but, for now, you will be using the actual current (2004) data to compare performances. (And keep in mind that Masters performance data is far superior to what you can expect from the general population.)

The system isn't perfect. As stated earlier, many more swimmers are competing for that 5th place in the 19 – 49 age groups than in the 50+ age groups. But as time marches on, the youngsters will get old and the participation in all age groups will be a lot closer to equal. Therefore, the validity of the ratios will increase with time – as long as the data tables are upgraded periodically. (Since we are starting with 2004, perhaps every 4 years – every Olympiad – would be appropriate.) The ratios are not perfect. But they are a lot better than guessing; and guessing is all we have at present.

Just wait. In 30 years, the 70 year olds will be blowing the doors off today's 70 – 74 age group records. The 70 year olds may be faster than today's 50 year olds. Why? Let's compare today's 40 year old with today's 70 year old. Today's 40 year old was likely a high school senior swimmer in 1983. The 70 year old was a high school senior in 1953. How many high school and age group teams were there in 1953 compared to 1983? How about today's 80 year old? Do you think he/she was competing for a good high school swimming team during WWII in 1943? All the swimmers that are 65 or older today had drastically fewer opportunities in

their youth to build a good technical foundation for lifetime competition in swimming. The ratio tables of the future will look nothing like today's tables. We will see some REALLY fast 70+'s by 2035. Phillip Whitten illustrated that the drop-off rate doesn't get to the "normal" 1%/yr until age 70. (And by age 70, the drop-off rate for non-athletes is much higher than 1%). I predict that the drop-off rate in the future will never get to 1% for Masters swimmers.

The average age for women's top performance was 28.5; for men, 29.7. But the biggest difference in gender was the diversity within each sex. Virtually all of the men's top performances were within the 25 – 29 age group. For women it was nearly evenly split between the 19 – 24, 25 – 29, and 35 – 39 age groups. There were no women's top times in the 30 – 34 age group. The women actually peaked at the 35 – 39 range before showing a near linear decline. The men stayed nearly level until the 40 – 44 age group before starting a steady decline. Starting nearly even at the 40 – 44 age groups, the women then declined more than the men. This likely reflects fewer opportunities in the past for women to be involved in learning the skills of the sport.

The future of Masters swimming will look nothing like the present. As stated earlier, as today's baby boomers age up; the competition opportunities of their youth will show up as very fast times compared with today's older age groups. Abrahams' 49.14 in the 100 free as a 60 year old is just a preview of things to come!

This statistical analysis is informal and imperfect. It is an early attempt to quantify trends in performance vs. age. Hopefully, some of you with expertise in this type of research will refine this analysis to help add to the body of knowledge about aging. Perhaps every 4 years (Olympiads) we can update the data and see what happens. I strongly believe that the future data will demonstrate that aging doesn't have to lead to nearly as much decline as "normal".

Web Tools For You!!!

Did you know that we have tools in place on the USMS website for the local organizations to provide current information and updates, which are not being used? As a service to your membership, the below areas should be updated on a regular basis. If your LMSC/Club does not have a volunteer in place, it is highly recommended that you appoint

someone or at least spread the word so the appropriate people know of these pages.

1. The **places to swim** database – there is a great amount of wrong pool/workout/contact information listed on the Places to Swim page. Suggestion - send an email to your club contacts, workout group coordinator, and facility operator asking them to view/update their information.
2. The current **top times** database – there is a volunteer who posts the meets. Our volunteer can't post a meet if it is never sent! Suggestion - follow up with your meet directors, encouraging them to submit their information.
3. **Calendar of events** - there are tools on the website that allow you to list an event. Suggestion – let your meet directors know this page exists; it may generate more swimmers at their event!

The Communications Committee is interested in seeing that these tools be used and our information is as complete and accurate as possible.

Fitness Corner

fit·ness (n.)

1. The state or condition of being fit.
2. Good health or physical condition, especially as the result of exercise and proper nutrition.
3. SWIMMING for FITNESS; the best way to a healthy exercise routine!

Less than one-third of USMS swimmers identify themselves as "competitors" -- but we all swim because we love swimming and want to be fit. Swimming is one of the most popular forms of aerobic exercise, and it is an excellent activity for anyone who wishes to get fit and stay fit. USMS provides resources and activities to help swimmers maintain a lifelong interest in swimming. The USMS Fitness Committee is dedicated to studying and developing fitness swimming activities for the general membership at the national level. This committee is also dedicated to providing resources to educate adults on the fitness benefits of swimming.

Goal Setting and Fitness Events

Setting goals for yourself is an important part of an individual fitness swimming program. Your goals may involve one of the following: reducing your time required to swim a certain distance, being able to swim a certain distance in one outing, swimming a certain accumulated distance over several weeks or months, learning to swim a new stroke, or a number of other interesting possibilities. What is most important is to have a goal that you are trying to achieve. USMS sponsors postal fitness events throughout the year to help our swimmers set goals for themselves.

USMS Fitness Events

The USMS Fitness Committee is planning some fun, challenging events for this year. These events will be less competitive in nature, and can be done any time at any pool. You can use an event to set a goal, which will make your time in the pool more interesting, challenging, and fun. Your goals may involve any number of possibilities, such as learning to swim a new stroke, swimming faster, swimming greater distances, or logging your distance over time. Having a goal is an ideal way to enhance your exercise and fitness experience, so consider trying one of the USMS Fitness Events.

This month's article was submitted by Masters swimmer Martha Katzeff of the Bronx, New York. Katzeff participated in her first swimming competition three years ago at age 50.

Life in the Slow Lane

by Martha Katzeff

I love to compete. I swam in my first competition at the tender young age of 50.

Until then, I had been a runner for 22 years. Knee surgery was the end of my daily running regimen and the start of cross training. I had always loved to swim in my younger days, but as an adult with work and family responsibilities it was far easier to put on running shoes and go out the door for an hour.

I rekindled my interest in swimming after the knee surgery and during my daughter's swim team days. I took several private lessons from her coach and began swimming in earnest after a 30-year hiatus. Soon after, the manager of a pool company told me

about Masters Swimming (explaining to me what it was first) and I found a team to join. I was convinced that my two or three times-a-week, 45-minute lap swimming put me in the "good swimmer" category. What an eye-opener that was! I had absolutely no idea that many Masters swimmers started out as competitive high school and college swimmers.

At the coach's suggestion, I attended a stroke clinic before I went to an actual practice. Right then and there, I suspected that I might be out of my league, but persevered. When I did attend my first workout, I didn't know what to expect. The coach suggested that I start in Lane 1 at the end of the lane. Having no idea what he was talking about, I just got in the water where he was pointing. In the lane already were five women who had clearly been swimming together for a long time and, to me, looked extremely intimidating. The coach wrote the workout on the board and I looked at all those numbers, turned to one of the women in the lane and said, "What's that??" After collectively rolling their eyes, one of them explained the sequence to me. Still completely clueless, I got behind the last woman, started to swim and tried my best to stay out of everyone's way. It was touch and go for me for about 2 months. I sorely tried the patience of both the coach and the other women in the lane (yes, we were all women most of the time), but finally, got it.

With the help of weekly stroke clinics, which I attended religiously, and patient tutoring from my lane mates (who warmed up to me after they realized that I was there to stay and eager to swim), I became a die-hard Masters swimmer.

Along the way, I struck up a friendship with another new-to-swimming (she had just learned how to swim a year earlier!) die-hard, Masters woman. Together, we decided that we were going to compete even though we'd only been swimming a short time.

We signed up for a local meet and off we went. My husband was gracious enough to give up his Sunday morning racquetball game to drive us there and cheer. When we got there and saw all the swimmers, we were so overcome with anxiety that we could hardly breathe, let alone swim. We stood mesmerized, watching the first few events, and then it dawned on us -- that -- wait a minute -- a lot of those swimmers are not so fast . . . and not so young.

We ended up becoming meet junkies and competing together whenever we could. In the summer we plot out all the open water swims we're going to do (here in the Northeast, open water swim season is very short) and then tell our husbands that we're busy every single summer Sunday morning and hope that they will understand.

Four years and many competitions later, I'm still a lane 1 swimmer, but now I'm the engine instead of the caboose. One of the best things about Masters swimming is the inclusiveness of all ages and abilities. Our lane 1 became a close-knit group of women who from time to time met outside the pool for a "lane 1 dinner."

Last year, our team lost its pool when the building that housed it was sold. It was a devastating loss for all of us because there was no one pool available that could absorb our more than 100 swimmers. The team fell apart, although a large part of the team did merge with another local team. Sadly, our lane 1 group went its separate ways (although we still meet for dinner occasionally).

I joined a team locally known for its extreme competitiveness and landed in their midst just at the start of their gearing-up-for-Nationals training. It was quite a bit of culture shock for me to go, in the space of a week, from a mostly laid back group of swimmers to a flock of Type A personalities launching themselves into training hyper-drive. Still reeling from the loss of my other team, I threw myself into the fray and signed up for Nationals.

To the credit of the coaches of my new team, I was always given lots of encouragement and training for the competition, just as if I was one of the faster swimmers on the team, and, indeed, was the only representative from my lane on our Nationals team.

Upon reflection, I realized it took a lot of chutzpah for a lane 1 swimmer, and the newest member of the team, to even contemplate competing on that level. Nevertheless, I went to Nationals and even managed not to finish absolutely dead last in one of my events. The atmosphere in Florida was exhilarating. No one there ever questioned my right to swim with the "big guns" and the cheers were just as loud for the slower swimmers as for the record holders. (In some cases, louder!) I went home rejuvenated and ready to tackle whatever swim challenges the coaches threw at me. My coach asked me what my goals are for the coming season and I gave him quite an ambitious list and hope to meet as many as I can.

In the meantime I will continue to swim and cross-train with an eye toward the 2006 Nationals. The subject of Nationals came up in the locker room recently. One of the women mentioned several teams who had brought only their "best" swimmers to Nationals this past spring. This caused quite a stir among the rest of us. The general consensus was that bringing only the best swimmers goes against almost everything Masters swimming embodies. It flies in the face of the USMS rule that allows any swimmer to enter three events without meeting qualifying times, which levels the playing field. I certainly hope those teams reconsider their strategy and include their enthusiastic, not-quite-best yet swimmers the next time they go to a Nationals meet.

For me, competition keeps me motivated and focused. In fact, I look forward to entering Nationals at 90 so that I can enter six events without a qualifying time!