

Butterfly's Emergence Challenged 1950s Swimmers



Olympian **GAIL PETERS ROPER**, seen here in 1953, continues to hone her skills as a Masters swimmer at the age of 75.

> For 24-year-old Gail Peters Roper, a national breaststroke champion and record holder, Jan. 1, 1953, delivered devastating news. On that day, the butterfly stroke with the dolphin kick was legalized as a separate stroke for competition and thus added to the individual medley. The breaststroke retained its orthodox below-the-water arm recovery with the frog kick.

But Roper, a 1952 Olympian, had learned to swim the breaststroke with fly arms and the traditional breaststroke kick, maintaining a straight back. With the 1956 Olympics just three years away, and her sights set on winning a gold medal, Roper suddenly was "cut in half," she recalls. "When I tried to do the fly, I had it trained in me not to undulate. I could never perfect it." Now 75, Roper says she's never given up on improving her fly. "That's why I'm still a Masters swimmer today—I'm still trying to learn things."

The 1950s were tumultuous for swimmers. Burwell "Bumpy" Jones, M.D., a national record holder in the IM, was also a member of the American swim team at the 1952 Olympics in Helsinki. To continue in IM competition after the butterfly

officially emerged, he had to master the fly with dolphin kick and learn the orthodox breaststroke, the latter proving hardest for the University of Michigan swimmer. "I contacted a coach in Hawaii and trained with him one entire summer, and he taught me to swim the breaststroke," recalls Jones, who went on to set the 1955 world record in the new four-stroke IM. "I made it," he says.

But it's with a certain sadness that Jones, now 71, points to the disappearance of three-stroke medley records. "The old butterfly/breaststroke with the frog kick was much slower, he notes. So most of those records have been wiped out. "Kids today have never heard of it," he says.

Nevertheless, there are still many Masters swimmers who swim the fly with the breaststroke kick. "When we started the Masters program in the '70s, there were people who had never done a dolphin kick in their life," says June Krauser, who served on the original USMS Rules Committee that built in the rule exception.

World record-setter, Olympian and University of Michigan swimmer **BURWELL "BUMPY" JONES**.

When FINA moved to require the dolphin kick with the butterfly stroke a couple of years ago, some in Masters "got very upset and we got the exception," Krauser reports.

It was a victory for the frogs over the dolphins. <<<



Photo: University of Michigan Athletic Dept.; Bentley Historical Library

BACK IN TIME

1934: University of Iowa coach David Armbruster, devises double overarm recovery, or "butterfly," above the water for breaststroke.

1935: University of Iowa swimmer Jack Sieg develops skill of swimming on his side and beating his legs in unison like a fish's tail. He then develops the "dolphin fishtail kick" leg action face down, adding considerable speed to the breaststroke.

1936: A few breaststroke competitors combine butterfly arms with a breaststroke kick in the Summer Olympics in Berlin.

1936-1952: Breaststrokers perfect "butterfly breaststroke" with butterfly arm action and breaststroke kick, but the dolphin kick remains a violation of competitive rules.

1952: At the Helsinki Games, Australian John Davies wins gold medal in the 200m breaststroke, making him the last Olympian to win the breaststroke event using butterfly arm action.

1953: The butterfly stroke with the dolphin kick is legalized as a separate stroke for competition.

1972: USMS forms and Masters rules recognize that the "breaststroke or whip kick may be used exclusively or interchangeably with the dolphin kick while doing the butterfly stroke at any time during the race. However, when the breaststroke or whip kick is used, the arms must be recovered over the top of the water with each breaststroke or whip kick, except after the last such kick before the turn or finish."

2001: FINA approves technical rule disallowing breaststroke kick with the fly (not realizing impact on Masters). FINA Masters Committee requests and receives kick variation exception for Masters.

2002: FINA officially acknowledges in Masters rule 3.10 that "a breaststroke kicking movement is permitted for butterfly."

>>> Sources: International Swimming Hall of Fame, Australian Swimming Inc., American Red Cross, USMS Code of Regulations and Rules of Competition.