

FINA World Championships Return to U.S., Aug. 4-17

> Veteran swimmer Kathy Casey says the best part of competing in a world championship meet is learning that swimmers from around the globe speak a universal language in their love for the sport.

Casey, a USMS swimmer since 1978, has competed in a couple of FINA World Championships, beginning with the 1992 meet in Indianapolis. She has also traveled abroad several times to compete in other events. A native of Tacoma, Wash., Casey and her swimmer husband Walt Reid won't have to travel nearly as far to compete on an international stage this year with the XI FINA World Masters Championships coming to Stanford, Calif., Aug. 4-17.

It's the first time the event has been in the United States since that 1992 meet in Indianapolis. The championship hasn't been held in North America since 1994, when Montreal hosted the bi-annual event.

With the beautiful San Francisco area and the world-renowned Avery Aquatic Center at Stanford University as drawing cards, championship organizers are expecting the largest meet ever, with the goal of exceeding the 6,000 athletes who competed in the last championship in 2004 in Riccione, Italy.

Early estimates put the number of competitors as high as 8,000 athletes from 60 coun-

tries, participating in swimming, diving, water polo, synchronized swimming and open water competition. Michael Moore, chairman of the Organizing Committee and of Pacific Masters Swimming in the San Francisco area, emphasizes that Masters swimmers shouldn't be put off by those large numbers.

"This isn't just for the elite swimmer, it's also for the competitive swimmer," says Moore. "The conditions are great. Stanford has fast pools and the chance to compete in an international competition is just special for everyone involved."

Staging an event with so many competitors is manageable, Moore says, because of organizers' considerable experience running competitions and because of the outstanding facilities at the Avery Aquatic Center, including four pools. He also expects nearly 1,000 volunteers to be on hand to help run the event.

"There are a lot of big numbers being thrown back and forth and people think, 'Oh my heavens, I'll never survive something like that,'" says Jim Miller, USMS immediate past president and a pivotal figure in the championship returning to the United States. "But the way the meet is run, the way it's spread out over such a long time frame, it divides up nicely so the days won't be so long."

Miller had just been elected USMS president when FINA (Federation Internationale De Natation, the international aquatic sports governing body located in Lausanne, Switzerland) leaders approached him in 2001 about hosting the event

stateside. Thus began a three-year process that ultimately landed the prestigious international meet back in U.S. waters. In a cooperative effort with representatives from the national organizations for diving, synchronized swimming and water

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Asian Art Museum of San Francisco >>> One of the world's largest museums devoted to Asian art, holdings include nearly 15,000 treasures spanning 6,000 years of history. Details: 415-581-3500; www.asianart.org

Beach Blanket Babylon (at North Beach in San Francisco) >>> A zany musical spoof of pop culture, now in its 31st year. Details: 415-421-4222; www.beachblanketbabylon.com

Don Edward San Francisco Bay National Wildlife Refuge (Newark, Calif.) >>> The first urban National Wildlife Refuge in the U.S. today is a destination for viewing diverse wildlife and habitats. Details: 510-792-0222; www.desfbay.fws.gov

East Bay Regional Park District (Oakland, Calif.) >>> A network of 65 regional parks, recreational areas, wilderness, shorelines, preserves and land bank areas with a variety of outdoor activity opportunities. Details: 510-562-PARK (7275); www.ebparks.org

Golden Gate National Recreation Area (San Francisco) >>> Home of the world-famous bridge, this national park features natural historic and man-made attractions. Details: 415-561-4700; www.nps.gov/goga

Mission San Francisco De Asis (San Francisco) >>> The oldest intact building in San Francisco, built in 1782, is a historic survivor of the 1906 earthquake. Details: 415-621-8203; www.missiontour.org/sanfrancisco

Presidio of San Francisco >>> A historic collection of 500 buildings, coastal fortifications, a national cemetery and an historic airfield, as well as marshes, forests and beaches are all part of the allure of this eclectic site. Details: 415-561-4700; www.nps.gov/prsf

San Francisco Botanical Garden >>> An urban oasis of plants, flowers and horticulture educational resources. Details: 415-661-1316; www.sfbotanicalgarden.org

San Francisco Exploratorium >>> The famous interactive museum of science, art and human perception. Details: 415-561-0360; www.exploratorium.edu

Yosemite National Forest (Yosemite National Park, Calif.) >>> A spectacular array of mountain-and-valley scenery, including the groves of giant sequoias, the world's largest living things. Details: 209-372-0200; www.nps.gov/yose

Other Resources

- "Let's Go" Guide to San Francisco www.letsgo.com/destinations/north_america/sanfran
- San Francisco Visitor Facts 415-391-2000 www.sfvisitor.org/visitorinfo/html/VisitorFacts.html

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polo, Miller developed a task force to actively pursue the bid, searching for possible sites and putting together the finances. "There's the cooperative effort of all the aquatic sports that goes into that," Miller explains. "But by far the one [organization] that actually bankrolls this thing is Masters swimming. USMS basically underwrites the meet with the understanding that money will come back as the entries start coming in."

United States Aquatic Sports, of which USMS is a part, is the

official host of the event, along with the local Bay Area Organizing Committee from Pacific Masters Swimming, which is the physical organizer and meet host.

Online registration (www.2006finamasters.org) began in February and continues through June 3. Moore encourages swimmers to sign up early and USMS has reserved 22 local hotels at reasonable prices (information available on the same web site) to help ease participants' travel

arrangements. Hotels closest to the Avery Aquatic Center will fill first, he says.

Moore adds that Stanford (Palo Alto) is approximately equal distance from major airports in San Francisco and San Jose, Calif., so air-travel decisions can be made based on price or availability. Airlines, including American, Continental, Delta, Northwest and United, are also offering discounts on their published airfares for FINA participants.

Bringing the FINA champi-

onship back to the United States provides "an opportunity for the athletes in the U.S. to participate in something they've probably only dreamt about," says Miller. "Any international event is fun. It's very different. It's not the same people who have sat next to you at U.S. Nationals the last 20 years. It's an international flavor and it's just very exciting."

At the Montreal championships in 1994, Casey remembers helping a participant who was having trouble



San Francisco Convention & Visitors Bureau Photo

Jeremy Woodhouse/Photodisc Red/Getty Images

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Stanford University

Stanford's Avery Aquatic Center includes four pools: the Avery Stadium Pool, the Maas Diving Center, the Belardi Pool and the Baker Recreation Pool. The complex has seating for 2,530 spectators and has a new state-of-the-art scoreboard by Daktronics at the north end.

because it's such a great event." Likewise, participants will have a chance to compete in a world-class swimming facility. Stanford's Avery Aquatic Center includes four pools: the Avery Stadium Pool, the Maas Diving Center, the Belardi Pool and the Baker Recreation Pool.

The complex has seating for 2,530 spectators and has a new state-of-the-art scoreboard by Daktronics at the north end. The Avery Stadium Pool is 37 meters long and 20 meters wide. It tapers from 2.9 to 4.1 meters deep and features dual one-meter and three-meter Maxiflex springboards on the south end.

The Maas Diving Center Pool is 25 meters wide, 17 meters long and is 4.3 to 5.5 meters deep. The pool features

with her locker and couldn't speak English or French. Communicating through informal sign language, Casey was able to help, and later the woman gave Casey a T-shirt from her native country, Argentina.

"The cultural traditions of other people have been so interesting to learn," says Casey, a high school teacher. "We had experiences way beyond swimming, way beyond anything I ever expected."

The ceremonies, festivals and parties are fun-filled, exciting events that are as enjoyable as the competition, notes Casey. A specialist in the backstroke, breaststroke and distance freestyle, she says the chance to see and/or compete in other events is also a major motivation for some Masters swimmers at the World Championships.

"It's different than Nationals," agrees Mary Pohlmann, M.D., recently retired from her medical practice in Carbondale, Ill. "There are all different kinds of aquatic events, and you can watch or participate. I've competed in synchronized swimming before and I enjoy watching that competition."

Pohlmann has competed in



Stanford University

five FINA World Championships, including the last three, and she likes what she's hearing about the facilities at Stanford and the setup of the event.

"They're doing some smart things like holding all the relays the same day," she says. "[The championship in] Germany was long but Italy wasn't as bad. We'll have competitions going on in two separate pools simultaneously, and they didn't have that at Munich. I hope U.S. swimmers won't be discouraged to come



Stanford University

FINA at Your Fingertips

Organizers for the XI FINA World Masters Championships have set up a web site to answer questions about the Aug. 4-17 meet at Stanford University's Avery Aquatic Center.

Registration, travel and hotel information, in addition to news, event info and sightseeing tips are all available at www.2006finamasters.org.

The deadline for entries is June 3. All Masters competitors must be registered with a FINA Member Federation and provide proof with a Masters license or club registration card.

For specific questions about eligibility and rules for the championship, the entire meet book is available online, as well, at www.pacificmasters.org/fina/meetbook.pdf.

a dive tower with Mondo surface platforms at 1, 3, 5, 7.5 and 10 meters. Dual one-meter and three-meter Maxiflex springboards flank the tower on either side. The Belardi Pool is 50 meters long, 25 meters wide and tapers to a depth of 3.4 meters in the center. The Baker Recreation Pool measures 50 meters long and 22.7 meters wide, and varies from 1.4 to 2.6 meters deep.

"When you talk about an event this size, you're going to need at least two 50-meter pools," says Moore. "USMS spent about a year looking over different venues and Stanford's Avery Aquatic Center stood out as a tremendous venue."

Moore notes that for the first time at a World Championship, the setup at the host facility will allow participants from each sport "to see, cheer and support athletes" in the other aquatic sports.

The open water competition will be held in a protected cove at Robert Crown State Beach on the scenic San Francisco Bay in Alameda, Calif.

The 2006 FINA World Masters Championships begin with three days of training, followed by opening ceremonies for all sports on Aug. 3. Swimming competition opens with the 800 freestyle for men and women on Aug. 4. The 200 backstroke, 100 free and 100 breast competitions are Aug. 5. The 400 individual medley, 200 free and 50 fly are scheduled for Aug. 6. The 50 free, 200 IM, 100 fly and 50 breast take place Aug. 7.

The 200 mixed medley, 200 mixed free relay, 200 free relay and 200 medley relays are all on Aug. 8. The Aug. 9 schedule features the 200 breast, 100 back and 200 fly; while Aug. 10 has the 50 back, 400 free and the closing celebration for pool events.

Open water competition is scheduled for Aug. 11 with a 3-kilometer swim. Training for diving and synchronized swimming begins that day and continues on Aug. 12. The 1-meter and 3-meter springboard events are Aug. 13-15, and the 10-meter platform competition is Aug. 16.

Synchronized technical routines are Aug. 13-14, and free routines and solos are Aug. 15. Free routines and duets are Aug. 16. Free routines, trio and team competitions are Aug. 17.

Water polo begins onsite training Aug. 4-5, has preliminary competition Aug. 6-9, and the finals and consolation, Aug. 11-12, with a closing celebration on Aug. 10. A closing celebration for the entire competition in all disciplines—what Miller terms "an aquatic festival"—is Aug. 17.

Because of FINA's international rules, the youngest USMS swimmers, age 18-24, won't be eligible to compete in the world championship. The cut-off age is 25. For synchronized swimming, the cut-off is age 20, and for water polo it's 30, representing the participant's age as of Dec. 31, 2006. Standard qualifying times in all events and age groups are available online (www.2006finamasters.org/index.php?topic=

meetinfo), but even without qualifying scores, swimmers can compete; they just are not eligible for a medal.

"The qualifying times for the World Championships are easier than those for USMS," adds Pohlmann, "which means a lot more people have the opportunity to compete.

Meeting so many swimmers from all over the world just makes it all so special." Moore says planning social events for interaction among all the participants is a major priority, and part of the allure that indeed makes Worlds so memorable for those involved.

"It's not just competition

we're after," he says. "It's just a great chance to meet swimmers from around the world."

Miller agrees, adding the passion for the sport is similar from country to country and that it's multiplied at a multi-dimensional competition like the World Championships.

"It's really the entire complement of aquatic events for Masters," says Miller. "It's such a broader picture than the majority of short course meets you'll see. The United States hasn't held this event in over a decade and it was clearly our time. Now we want to make it the biggest and best event ever." <<<<

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