

WORLD-CLASS COMPETITION

Aquatic Competitors Anticipate FINA Masters Championships

by Mike Ashley

The XI FINA World Masters Championships take California by storm Aug. 4-17, with more than 6,000 swimmers, divers, synchronized swimmers and water polo competitors descending on the idyllic venue of Stanford University's Avery

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Aquatic Center near San Francisco. *SWIMMER* caught up with several Masters athletes readying themselves for the international championship and two weeks of fun and inspiration.

Distance swimmer has

energy to share. Suzanne Heim-Bowen may be one of the busiest people at the FINA World Championships this August, swimming in open water and pool competitions, and cheering on her husband and her 80-year-old mother in their events.

"I'm really looking forward to it," she says. "It's going to be an action-packed 14 days."

Heim-Bowen, a Walnut Creek, Calif., resident, gravitated to the challenging action of open water early in her swimming career. She grew up in the San Francisco Bay area, and by the

time she was 19, she had set her first big goal in her new chosen sport: She vowed to swim the "Golden Gate."

One year later, at 20, she did it, conquering what she calls the San Francisco Bay's "character-building waters." Heim-Bowen, 22-time USMS All-American, has since shown her own character again and again, swimming the English Channel, Lake Geneva and other exotic locales in England, Italy and New Zealand.

"I felt like a drop in this big body of water and there I was swimming across of my own volition with the Golden Gate

overhead," she says, recalling that first big swim beneath San Francisco's landmark bridge. "And I was thinking to myself, 'Who has the opportunity to do this?' I had this wonderful view and I was with all these wonderful people swimming, too. It gave me confidence in my open water ability and from there, my goals just kept getting bigger and bigger."

Now a big swimming event is coming to Heim-Bowen. The FINA 3.0K Masters Open Water Championship takes place at Crown Memorial Beach in Alameda, Calif., across the



David Gonzales

Bay from San Francisco.

“There’s a lot of personal challenge and I like to race, there’s no doubt about that,” says the 49-year-old school psychologist. “I enjoy the discipline. I enjoy the dedication. I enjoy setting goals for myself and that’s why I’ve probably been able to stay in it as long as I have.”

After battling bursitis in her hips for eight months, Heim-Bowen is now back to a full training schedule—six days a week, mixing 5,000-meter swims with cycling, running and weightlifting.

“I like to vary it to make sure the muscles don’t get too used to doing one thing all the time,” she says.

Recently she got in the pool with her husband Phillip Bowen and his Tri-Valley water polo team, just to try something new. She trains regularly with the Terrapins USA-S team, and swims competitively for Walnut Creek Masters.

And this August at Worlds, when Heim-Bowen is done with her open water competition and her 800-, 400- and 200-freestyle events, she’ll still be busy. In addition to cheering for her husband and his water polo team, Heim-Bowen will be rallying behind her mother, Beatrice Heim, who is competing in the 800- and 400-meter freestyles, making her first FINA World Championship appearance at age 80.

It’s Heim-Bowen’s fourth international meet, but she’s sure this will be her busiest one ever.

Diving back in. Lori Hillman had competed as a diver in every Masters diving national championship since 1988.

But in 2003, she missed the Hawaii meet because she encountered a difficulty that threatened not only her diving but also her life. Diagnosed with an aggressive malignant breast cancer that required extensive surgery and chemotherapy, Hillman—ever the competitor—began an arduous road back.



She competed in Nationals again in 2004, earning some top-six finishes in her diving specialties: the platform and the one- and three-meter springboard.

“It was emotional getting back out there for the first time,” says Hillman, who has long targeted this summer’s FINA Championship at Stanford as part of her big comeback in competitive diving. “By the time August rolls around, I’m hoping to have my top list of dives. I’m working on the basics right now—board work, trying to get my balance and the hurdle. Hopefully by

August, I’ll be at my peak.”

Hillman, who had a back muscle moved as part of her reconstructive surgery, is still trying to get all her strength back, especially in her arms.

“I have a few dives I was formerly doing that I’m not doing right now that I would like to have back by August,” she adds. “Realistically, I’d like to get my forward 2 1/2 on 3-meter ready, and a back somersault with 1 1/2 twist. I haven’t done any of those since before my treatment.”

Hillman’s treatment included eight months of chemotherapy and steroids that caused bloat-

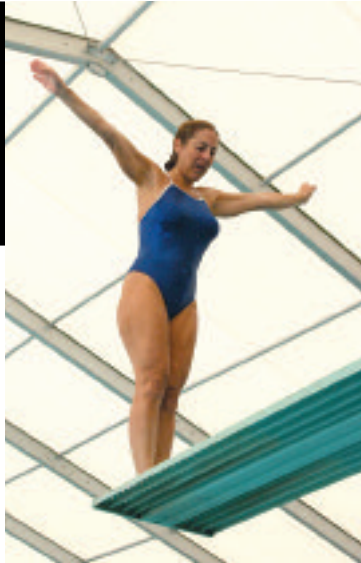
SUZANNE HEIM-BOWEN (right) will be competing in the open water competition and the 800-, 400- and 200-freestyle events. Her mother, **BEATRICE HEIM** (left), is competing in the 800- and 400-meter freestyles, making her first FINA World Championships appearance at age 80.

ing. But she has lost 40 pounds since last year, and the 46-year-old is right on pace to be at her best at Stanford.

She’s got an edge, too, in husband Bill Travis, a former Olympic diver and now a coach, who helps train Hillman at their home in The Woodlands, Texas. They met poolside in

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1988 at Hillman's first national competition when he asked her to join him in a synchronized diving competition.

They've been synchronized every since, adding two children—10-year-old Britton and 7-year-old Miles—to the Travis-Hillman team. Miles just won his first novice diving competition this past winter.

Hillman, a foot surgeon and podiatrist, has also put her best foot forward helping others in the sport. She was 2000 Olympian Laura Wilkinson's doctor, performing the successful surgery that allowed Wilkinson to win gold in the platform event during the Sydney Olympics. She has also treated Russian synchronized diving champion Vera Ilyina.

Hillman, of course, has had her own successes at national and international meets. But no matter what happens this summer at the FINA World Championships, she's already a winner.

Ready to reset breaststroke standards. Bob Strand is com-

ing back and he's coming home. Masters swimming breaststroke records in the 60-64 age group may never be the same. The 60-year-old Strand, who aged up in February, already holds 13 of the 18 national breaststroke records available to him since he became involved in Masters swimming in 1990.

"There's absolutely no question in my mind that he's going to take every breaststroke event, plus some other events, probably setting some new world records," says one of Strand's coaches, Scott Williams of the San Francisco Olympic Club, looking ahead to FINA. "Bob studies the sport. He's into it 100 percent. He's a great person



to have on your team because he leads by example and he has proven it over and over."

Strand still swims for The Olympic Club in San Francisco, though he and his family moved to Los Angeles four years ago and he now trains with the Rose Bowl Masters. The birth of daughter Ava three years ago was the impetus for Strand tapering his participation in the sport he loves. The USMS Short Course Nationals at Coral Springs, Fla., held this May, was his first national event in three years. Likewise, the World Championships

mark his return to the international stage.

"I love to compete," says Strand. "When you get to the Nationals and Worlds, you better be serious and you better be ready because the other guys are. There are so many great swimmers."

History indicates Strand has been more than ready in the past. Returning to the pool at a USMS meet in Mission Viejo, Calif., earlier this year, Strand set new records in the 100- and 200-yard breaststroke in his new age class, and sent ripples through the sport that the "Grand Strand" was back.

There was no doubting that fact at Short Course Nationals in May. Strand won five events and set new USMS records in the 50-, 100- and 200-yard breast as well as the 100 and 200 IM.

He's actually most proud of three USMS records he has

Sixty-year-old **BOB STRAND** has set 13 national breaststroke records (of the 18 available to him) since becoming involved in Masters swimming in 1990. Now that he's aged up, he's poised to break even more this summer at the FINA World Masters Championships.

held for more than 10 years: the short course 100-meter and 200-meter breaststroke and the 200-yard breaststroke, all set in 1996.

Strand has lost only one breaststroke competition in five World Championship appearances. He has also been crowned world champion twice in the 50 freestyle and once in the 200 IM, events he plans to enter this time around as well.

As August approaches, Strand is back to his old training regimen, five days a week of 15,000- to 17,000-meter swims. The toughest part, he says, is adjusting to physical and mental changes as he ages. That, and being a target in a whole new age group.

“When I first started swimming it may have been a little more fun than it is now, kind of being the ‘target’ guy,” says Strand. “I’m going to Worlds and I’m going to be the odds-on favorite and that’s pressure. But in adult swimming—I shouldn’t say this—you can get done with it and go out for a few beers.”

Strand laughs at that assessment. His competition likely won’t be so happy.

Water polo squad is really a cross-country team. They’re a long shot in the water polo competition at Worlds. Heck, they’re a long shot even to get together and practice.

They’re 13 women, age 40-55, from across the country who have come together to give water polo a go, and, no matter what happens in August, there’s little chance anyone else at Worlds will be having more fun.

“We’re like teenagers,” says Tracy Grilli, one of the team’s founding members. “We just feel like kids when we all get together.”

Grilli, who is the USMS national office administrator in Londonderry, N.H., swims with New England Masters. As a member of the aquatics task force that helped bring the World Championships to the U.S., she had the idea that putting together a water polo team

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might be a lot of fun.

So Grilli rounded up two of her Masters swimming buddies with water polo backgrounds: Laura Kessler of Brecksville, Ohio, and Debbie Cavanaugh of Fort Lauderdale, Fla. Then they started looking for more teammates.

The team began to take shape at USMS Long Course Nationals last August in California, adding champion swimmer Lisa Dahl of Seattle and Heather Hagadorn of Denver. More recruiting took place in September at the United States Aquatic Sports convention in Greensboro, N.C., bringing Kim Crouch of Boulder, Colo., Frances McEachran of Greensboro and

Carrie Slover of Pueblo, Colo., on board. With Cav Cavanaugh (Debbie’s husband) as coach, the fledgling team held its first practice in the tiny hotel pool, thanks to Kessler scrounging up a ball and then finding a place to get it inflated.

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“We had 12 of our people

show up in Las Vegas,” says Grilli. “We had a blast. Five of us won awards and the best part was working with people on the national water polo team. They were impressed with our enthusiasm.”

It certainly takes enthusiasm for members of this far-flung team to train on their own, anxiously awaiting the team’s rare practices, including one in

Members of the **WATER POLO SQUAD:** (Kneeling, left to right): Chris Blose, Kim Crouch, Debbie Cavanaugh and Cindra Mirales. (Standing, left to right) Coach Cav Cavanaugh, Janice Krauser, Laura Kessler, Frances McEachran, Lisa Dahl, Heather Hagadorn, Coach Mike Heather, Tracy Grilli.





THE MAC WOMEN'S SYNCHRO TEAM. The 70-79 team (seated on the front row) has won a national championship every year since 2000. They are (left to right): Betsy Austen, Marianne Perrin, Mary Hulme, Jeanne Newmark and Jeanne Steed. Not pictured is Marge Allen.

Coral Springs, Fla., in May, following the USMS Short Course Nationals.

"Up here in New Hampshire, I don't really have much I can do other than practice dribbling and throwing the ball against the wall," says Grilli. "Some of the others are training with teams when they can. Laura is playing with a men's college club team and Marilyn Heid of Columbus, Ohio, is playing with the Ohio State women's team. Everybody's doing what they can." Rounding out the team's roster are Chris Bloese and Janice Krauser of Fort Lauderdale, Fla.; Cindra Mirales, Prince Frederick, Md.; and Voni Oerman of Englewood, Colo. Picking up two sponsors, Adolph Keifer & Associates and TYR Sport Inc., was another confidence booster.

"We didn't even all know each other when we went to Las Vegas," says Grilli. "Most of us cramped into two rooms and rode around everywhere together in one van and one

car, so we became very close." And staying close is key for this long-distance, long-shot team.

Synchro team ready for big stage. The Multnomah Athletic Club's 70-79 women's synchronized swimming team will be making its first appearance at an international event when it travels to Stanford in August.

That doesn't mean that the Portland, Ore.-based team (MAC, for short) hasn't already made a name for itself in the sport. The private club's most senior team has won a national championship every year since 2000, but that's as much travel as the annual club budget would allow.

Sometimes when they competed, there weren't many teams in their age group and rarely any in their class. In fact, at one recent competition when there weren't any other teams in their age group, their scores still beat all five teams in the 60-69 group.

"For their age group, the skills they're doing are really advanced," explains Multnomah coach Julie Thaden. "Instead of

doing skills that are considered water ballet, which is what you'd expect from someone their age, they're doing modern synchronized swimming."

The team's elder stateswoman, 81-year-old Jeanne Steed, has been competing in the sport for 20 years now and she's succinct in her analysis of the team's rise in the ranks of synchro.

"We just did Esther Williams-type of things at first," she says. "Gradually we've learned a little bit more. We've got some swimmers who have been working at it for over 50 years."

With the World Championship in neighboring California, Steed and teammates Marge Allen, 77; Betsy Austen, 79; Mary

Hulme, 77; Jeanne Newmark, 76; and Marianne Perrin, 70; are anxious to strut their stuff in an international pool.

The MAC team already has a leg up—literally—on much of its competition.

"Our team does vertical, inverted positions," says Thaden. "They do positions with their legs up in the air and their heads pointed to the bottom of the pool."

For most teams in this age group such moves are rare. Even more rare are some of the advanced lifts the MAC team regularly performs.

Steed is lifted in the air at the start of the routine, and that's nearly unheard of in this age group (which is based on averaging all team members' ages). Steed, a former mountain climber who still actively snow skis, has no problem with the lifts. A retired high school math teacher, she only tried synchro because the tennis courts at Multnomah were closed one day and she ventured over to the pool to see what was going on.

Now, she's hooked.

"I enjoy the action to music, especially," she says. "And the competition makes you sharpen up. You're always learning something."

International competitors will learn something, too, when they see this team in action. <<<

Post-Coverage of Worlds

Due to the mid-August timing of the XI FINA World LCM Masters Championship/3.0K Masters Open Water Championship, readers are advised that delivery of the Sept./Oct. issue of *SWIMMER* will be delayed by approximately two weeks to include coverage of competition events. Additional coverage will be available online through the USMS web site: www.usms.org.