

JUST CALL HER HYDRO- DYNAMIC

Keeping Up With Jody Smith
(or Trying to, at Least)

by Michael J. Stott >>> Photos by David Balch

Jody Smith, the irrepressible facilities manager at Stanford University's Avery Aquatics Center in Palo Alto, Calif., became an instant ambassador for Masters swimming last summer. Responsible for day-to-day operations at the XI FINA World Masters Championships, Smith calls herself a "water-based person." It's an apt description given her aquatic successes.

Mike Stott, a contributing writer for *SWIMMER*, is a member of Virginia Masters.

These days Smith is on deck most of the time. At Avery, she manages three full-time and 30 part-time staff, an employee corps that burgeoned considerably during some 18-hour days at Worlds. "Normally I staff 60 to 70 hours a week of guards. We had about 700 hours of guards in the first nine days at Worlds. Through it all, from maintaining the facility to handling minutiae, Smith kept a game day face that earned praise from 1,300 volunteers and 7,300 athletes from more

Jody Smith at a Glance

- **Age:** 37
- **Born:** Freeman, S.D.
- **Formative years:** Marion, S.D., until age 8 1/2; then Portland, Ore., until college
- **High school coach:** Her mother, at Sunset High School
- **Favorite food:** "Ice cream, any flavor. I swim so I can eat."
- **Last two books read:** *The World is Flat*, Thomas Friedman, ("This makes me sound a little more highbrow than I am"); *Lifeguard*, James Patterson, ("The perfect travel book—read on the beach at Maui").
- **Embarrassing moment:** As team captain, during her senior year at Stanford, Smith had never missed an event. When the 400 free relay started, "I was cheering 'Go Stanford.' I saw the third person finish and the fourth person didn't go, so I am part of the people wondering, 'what happened, why didn't the person go?' Then I had a dawning realization I was that person."
- **Philosophy:** "If I can make one person's day, it's nice to be able to do that."





JODY SMITH was a six-time All-American as a Stanford undergrad and continues to be competitive in the backstroke and breaststroke. She works out with her Masters group (above) four or five times per week.

hang out, run, eat, go out and travel with Masters swimmers.”

The pursuit of open water swimming has taken Smith happily on the road. She’s done the Tahoe and Maui relay swims four and six times, respectively. “I enjoy the experience on the boat just as much as the time in the water,” she says. “It is much more enjoyable than slogging it alone.”

Says friend Wendy Lowengrub, “Jody is a great travel companion and can make friends with almost anyone, including the local pool shark, which can provide an evening of entertainment in a strange town, or the local surf instructor who offered us free surf lessons.”

And when she’s working out with her home team, that effervescent personality really bubbles. Seeing Smith at practice conjures up reruns of “Laugh-In,” the Rowan and Martin 1960s TV comedy. “I can be the first one on deck and the last one in the water,” she admits. “It’s partly because of the interaction on deck, but even when I’m not in a Masters workout, I can be there cheering, or trading barbs.”

In the water, Smith is quite a presence. “I used to live to train, but now any training has to involve some sort of social aspect,” she says. Still, she never wants to lose that competitive edge. “If I’m going to get in the water, I want to win

(she keeps a daily log book). “I don’t mind getting my ass kicked and I don’t mind the challenge,” she says, “but right now it’s just as important to enjoy it and have fun along the way.”

Smith hits a Stanford Masters workout four or five times per week, going 3,500 to 4,500 LC meters per session. She rises shortly after 5 a.m. for morning workouts that last 90 minutes, and are populated by serious former swimmers many of them Cardinal. As a six-time All-American, Smith fits right in. At Stanford, she excelled at the 200 back and the 200 and 500 free. She also qualified for Olympic Trials in 1984 and 1988.

At last summer’s Worlds, Smith took her best shot at managing Avery and also competing. She finished second in the 200 back (bested by world record holder Sheri Hart in the 35-39 age group), third in the 100 back and second, third and ninth in three relays. “I was happy with the 200 back and surprised and happy with the relay swims,” she notes.

But after the 200 back, Smith bowed out of Worlds

than 75 countries. A dream job? “Yes, in theory about 90 percent of the time,” she says.

Smith makes no bones about the psychic income that she derives from her position. “Being in such an outstanding facility—the university and the partners we get to work with,” provides a terrific environ-

ment, she says. Working with swimmers at all levels provides job variety that Smith relishes.

Forgive her if she shows just a hint of partiality to the 400-member Stanford Masters swim team, of which Smith is a part. “Probably 70 percent of my social time has to do with Masters folks,” she says. “I



competition, scratching three events. “I was trying to manage the pool (at times in a Fastskin) and save my legs, and it was stressful trying to do both well.”

Even when she’s not peak conditioned, it’s the dorsal stroke that returns most easily. That, and kicking. “I can still swim backstroke pretty damn well, it’s the freestyle that can get out of shape,” she says. “But no matter what, I’m always a good kicker. I like hard kicking sets.”

Smith also likes “ladders, descends and that kind of stuff,” she notes. “I’m not a swim-to-the-interval swimmer. I’m a swim-to-get-the-most-rest swimmer. If we are doing 10x100 on 1:20, I would prefer to hold 1:12 and get the most rest, rather than hold 1:18 and swim through it,” she says. “Every once in a while, I love 5x800s.” (See sidebar for another favorite set.)

“If her shoulder is in shape, there is absolutely nothing that Jody doesn’t enjoy doing,” says Stanford Masters Coach Tim Edmonds. “Her rate and ability to work her legs, and the knowledge of her body and what she is able to do in the water is really, really strong,” he says. “Of course, that comes from decades of having great coaches and just being a phenomenal athlete.”

Age-group success propelled

Smith to Stanford. Although Palo Alto didn’t offer the big-wave surfing that intrigues her today, she got a monumental dose of big time coaching from George Haines (one year) and Richard Quick (three). The Stanford women won the 1989 NCAA title, and Smith teamed with Janel Jorgenson, Janet Evans and Karen Kraemer to win the 1990 NCAA 4x200 free relay.

“The thing I remember most about her as a swimmer,” says Quick, “is that she was a consummate team athlete. Her desire was to contribute to the team effort in any way she could. She was one of the reasons our teams were successful in those years. She was a winner because she was such a competitor and battler. She’d do anything to have Stanford be successful.”

That desire continues today. After some years in the dot-com and corporate world (including a marketing stint at Nike), it was time for a change, and five years ago Smith returned to Stanford. “It has been a joy to work with Jody

as a colleague at the administrative level,” says Quick. “She’s the kind of person who works her guts out. You knew she was going to bring pride to the job and develop it. She took a job that essentially didn’t exist and developed it into a very meaningful position,” he says.

Thanks to efforts of Organizing Committee Chairman Michael Moore and Executive Director Anne Cribbs, Stanford landed the XI FINA Championships in March 2004, launching a pressure-packed 29-month countdown. Smith’s preparation for Worlds began in

earnest at the end of 2005. She built on her experience as a host of previous FINA World (synchronized swimming), NCAA and national and international swimming and track and field championships.

“I knew from day one how big this was going to be,” says Smith. “This completely dwarfed most any meet you could host. I said good-bye to my free time for the next couple of years.

“When you do something like this, you have to have appropriate levels of excitement, energy and fear. There are things that are ultimately

inside your control, and those things that you know are going to be surprises. You prepare yourself mentally to find a way to deal with them," she says.

One of the biggest surprises of Worlds came several weeks out, with the need to lengthen Baker Pool (one of four used for the event) by less than an inch. Going into scramble mode, Smith drained the pool, marshaled contractors to attack the walls and refilled the 630,000-gallon tank just two weeks before opening ceremonies.

Says Cribbs, "Jody was responsible for everything that happened there from the physical setup to the staffing to the interface with the university and the budgetary stuff. She really had a big job to keep that all in order. She represents Stanford and the complex very well. Because she was a swimmer, Jody understood what the swimmers needed."

Credentialing/access and cleanliness were just two huge issues that Smith navigated with aplomb. "One day we had 4,000 swimmers," recalls Moore. "You'd go into the bathrooms at night after 2,000 men had been there and they looked good. Jody was great and extremely thorough. When we had any problems or concerns with Stanford, she was the point person. I can't say enough good things about her," he says.

"I never lost energy throughout the event, which is easy to do when you are doing those kinds of days," says Smith. When I walked by, everybody [on our staff] still had that smile. 'What can I do?' 'Sure, I'll take care of that.' I was so proud of our staff. It was a combination of preparing well and just the people themselves who made it easy for the staff. It says a lot about Masters swimmers," she says.

There are days when it's hard for Masters swimmer Smith to divorce herself from the role of facilities manager. Being so visible occasionally challenges her sunny disposition.

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"There are two things that absolutely drive her nuts," says Stanford coach Edmonds. "One is having to be interrupted in the middle of Masters practice to do pool management stuff. She tries to carve out a little Jody-time in the middle of the day and, sure enough, here comes the plumbing contractor. To me, it's very funny to see the woman who runs one of the premier facilities in the country running around the pool deck dripping wet in her swimsuit dealing with subcontractors," he says.

"The thing that drives her most crazy are people who complain about the water temperature, as if she could somehow warm up 1.3 million gallons (Belardi Pool) of water instantaneously. This is one of those things, especially in the middle of workout, she doesn't want to hear—and that's one of those things we goad her with now and then."

The culprits know who they are. Two are former Stanford swimmers and Smith's close friends, Jane and Sam Worden. "When she first started managing the pool, I was very vocal about the pool temperature. She would say, 'Jane, just forget about it. You are such a wimp.' She is very sensitive about any cajoling. She'll take it to heart, but also give you grief back," says Jane.

"I'm a bit of a jokester," concedes Smith.

"Yes," agrees Sam Worden. "She's always there to help you rib somebody, to stir it up and make things entertaining."

Smith thrives on the banter. "I've spent all of my life working around training, and I've

always believed you could train harder when smiling. I love long rest sets. On aerobic days, you are going to have interaction with your teammates."

For Smith that means talking—fast. "Obviously, I talk quickly. I always have. I believe you only have so much time on the wall to tell that story. That is one reason I speak so quickly because I always want to get that story in," she says.

One tale she is reluctant to tell, but others aren't, concerns a fellow Masters swimmer she was dating. "Officially the relationship was Tahoe to Maui," says Smith, referencing the six-week period between the open water swims. Out for a biking date shortly thereafter, Smith tumbled, only to have her partner ride over her skull.

Confides a lane mate, "When someone runs over your head, it's all over." And shortly thereafter, for a variety of reasons, it was.

Jody the jokester is also close to the Wordens' children. "Jody has always been able to

just come in and take charge of the kids. She is not going to let them be shy. She plays with them on their level. She is very physical and our kids (ages 8, 6 and 2) like that. She invests herself," says Jane, likening Jody to Maria in *The Sound of Music*. Actually, says, Sam: "Put Maria on fast forward with a triple espresso in her. That's Jody."

If nothing else, Jody Smith is clearly a woman on the go. "There were times when I wanted to run from the building because I knew what was coming down the pike for FINA Worlds," she says, "but it was one of the best event experiences I've ever had."

Smith may reprise the experience next year at the XII FINA World Championships in Perth, Australia. Without the responsibility of pool management, her goals are to have even faster swims as well as engage the world Masters community.

Sounds like a job for an ambassador. <<<

get moving

Check out this favorite set (LC meters) from Jody Smith, who says: "This is my kind of set."

main set

- 20x100
- 10x100 on 1:25 (Best average on the last 10)
- 4x100 on 1:20
- 3x100 on 1:15
- 2x100 on 1:10
- 1x100 on 1:05

'mean' kick set

- 1x100 kick; your stroke on medium rest (1:40, 1:50)
- 2x50 fast on :45 or :50 (little to no rest)
- 4 or 5 rounds