



TECH SUITS
ADD **FLAVOR,**
BUT SWIMMERS
BRING THE **JUICE**

BY LAURA HAMEL | PHOTOS BY ALLISON TOLPA



Georgia Tech in downtown Atlanta, home of the Yellow Jackets, buzzed with ferocity May 20-23, as U.S. Masters Swimming hosted its 40th Short Course National Championships. In addition to a 40th anniversary celebration, there were a few other reasons why the meet was special.

During the meet, USMS announced this year's Capt. Ransom Arthur M.D. Award recipient. Eight prior award recipients were on hand to welcome Lynn Hazlewood into their ranks: Nancy Ridout, Sandi Rousseau, Kathy Casey, Barry Fasbender, Jim Miller, Mel Goldstein, Betsy Durrant and Paul Hutinger. (See Inside USMS on page 44 for a profile of Hazlewood.)

More than a dozen Olympic swimmers from several different eras swam, including Rowdy Gaines, Cullen Jones, Mark Gangloff, Roque Santos, David Sims, Sue Walsh, Chris Stevenson, Jeff Farrell, Dave Wharton, Ryan Papa, Bumpy Jones, and David Gillanders. Also attending were *Swimming World's* 2009 World Masters Swimmers of the Year Rich Burns, Laura Val, Michael Mann, and Mike Ross.

But much of the buzz surrounding the meet was a last chance to swim in a full-body "rubber suit" in a Masters pool competition. After the 2009 USMS decision to follow FINA rules regarding swimsuits in USMS pool competition beginning June 1, many swimmers saw Spring Nation-

als as one last time to break a record, swim a personal best, or just look and feel slim and fast, zipped into a form-fitting supersuit.

Many predicted a large number of record-breaking performances in Atlanta and the athletes did not disappoint. The 103 individual record-breaking swims kept the crowd on its feet and the noise level high in the Georgia Tech Campus Recreation Center. The noise ratcheted up another notch during relays, which many swimmers consider to be the ultimate good time at a Masters meet. There were 19 relay records broken and the high-octane fun was evident on the faces of nearly all the relay competitors, regardless of speed.

Pure speed was on display when Olympic gold medalist Cullen Jones and American record holder Nick Brunelli, both swimming for North Carolina Masters, awed the crowd as they contested the 50 and 100 freestyle distances. Brunelli, 28, bested Jones in the 100 on Saturday with a time of 42.62. Jones, 26, returned the favor on Sunday with a 19.14 in the 50.

NEVER TOO OLD

Some of the most amazing swims at the meet were not turned in by Olympians, but by people like Rich Abrahams, 65, of Colorado Masters. Wiping out seven records in the 65-69 age group, his 22.10 in the 50 free and 49.42 in the 100 free not only shattered the



records of 23.66 and 52.76 – but also the notion that decline at age 60 or 65 is inevitable. Abrahams says his performance was not by chance. He

spent 17 months preparing for the meet, targeting his success by swimming race pace sets in every workout during that year and a half.

“I kept track, I met my goal. This gave me a lot of confidence because I knew I could handle the discomfort from high lactate levels because I was used to it,” Abrahams says.

Defining age-related decline at this event would have been difficult anyway. Anne Dunivin with Georgia Masters, at 93, swam the 1000 free in a time of 49:33.56, nowhere near the record of 21:20.93, but Dunivin is, nevertheless, an inspiration.

As is Marianna Berkley of Virginia Masters, 87, who swam five events, including the 200 breaststroke and 200 IM.

And 90-year-old Doris Russell with Maryland Masters, who utilized the mechanical lift to get in and out of the water for each of her six events, including the 500 free and 200 fly, but swam each one with a smile and accepted the smiles and applause of onlookers clearly impressed with her athleticism.

FULL CIRCLE

A common thread in many of the Atlanta swimmers’ stories is their return to the sport after years of inactivity, illness or injury. Scott Townsend, 56, with Las Vegas Masters, was nearly paralyzed after breaking his neck in a body surfing accident several years ago, but managed to eke out a first place finish in the 1000 free with a time of 10:54.02. Not bad for a guy who might never have walked again.

Mike Ross, 42, with Maine Masters, who swam in college, returned to swimming after an injury. When he discovered that he was capable of breaking records, as he did in the 100 back with 51.85, he became highly motivated to keep training and found the road to recovery was paved with records.

Keith Switzer, 47, with Team Blu Frog, also a former collegiate swimmer, returned when his doctor told him he had to get his blood pressure in check. His

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record breaking 1000 free swim of 9:43.93 may not have been exactly what his doctor had in mind, but he credits his return to the sport for his better health and lower blood pressure.

FAMILY TIES

Husbands, sisters, dads, aunts, grandchildren and grandmothers. Georgia Tech was teeming with family groups swimming and cheering each other on. Suzanne Dills with Pacific Northwest Aquatics, who broke four records in the 65-69 age group, was accompanied by her sister Toni LeClerc, 62, who returned to swimming with Dills's encouragement a few years ago. Dills's daughter and grandchildren were in the stands to cheer them both on.

Olympic gold medalist Mark Gangloff, who swam a 23.87 in the 50 breaststroke, also crushing records in the 100 breast and 200 IM, was happy to be swimming in the same

meet with his wife Ashley, a former collegiate diver, who swims for fun and fitness. Both Auburn alumni, they swim for Auburn Masters. The Gangloffs brought their 8-month-old daughter Annabelle, who got just as much attention as her famous father.

USMS's immediate past President, Rob Copeland, 53, was joined by his mother Parkie, 80, his son Noah, 23 and daughter Megan, 20. The Copelands participated in several family relays in the 18+ category, in order to accommodate the age range. "We came in last place, but hey, it was great fun," shares Rob, who loved having the chance to swim on a three-generation relay.

TEAM BONDING

Families not defined by blood or marriage (aka teams) also supplied much of the free-flowing positive energy that filled the aquatic center. The



Catch Us on YouTube

USMS Executive Director Rob Butcher and three-time Olympic gold medalist and swimming commentator Rowdy Gaines recapped the meet each day in a short video that was uploaded to the usms.org front page every evening. Each segment is packed with swimmer interviews and footage from that day's events, including a special slow-motion clip of Cullen Jones and Nick Brunelli contesting the 50 free on Sunday. If you missed these video recaps during the event, go to the USMS YouTube channel, youtube.com/USMastersSwimming, or the Atlanta nationals landing page at usms.org/comp/scnats10/.



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Clemson Aquatic Team showed up with 15 Clemson fans, wearing “Save Clemson Swimming and Diving” shirts to protest their alma mater’s decision to cut its swimming program. Solid top 10 finishes by CAT swimmers netted them fifth place in the local clubs division.

Mike Taber with Adirondack Masters, who is visually impaired, relies on his teammates to help him navigate his turns and finishes. Two teammates, one on each end of the pool, carry long poles with tennis balls on the ends, which they use to tap Taber when he is getting close to the wall, signaling him to start his turn or finish.

Charlotte Davis, 60, with Pacific Northwest Aquatics, broke five national records at the meet. But that seemed secondary when she spoke, with tears in her eyes, of the special bond she has with her teammates and how they sup-

ported her through the death of her husband last fall.

“Swimmers are a unique group of people; they have a lot of compassion for one another,” Davis says.

Overwhelmingly, the Masters swimmers spoke of their love of the sport and their teammates. For many, USMS Nationals is the culmination of all the hard work they put in during the year. They set goals, train hard, and then plan a travel trip with their teammates or family around the meet. The volunteers and staff at Georgia Tech welcomed swimmers and spectators with Southern hospitality. Many participants gave kudos to Meet Director Ed Saltzman and the USMS Championship Committee and staff for another great year.

And, although they will not be wearing supersuits in 2011, many are looking forward to next year’s Spring Nationals in Mesa, Ariz. <<<

>>> **Laura Hamel is the editor of SWIMMER.**

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