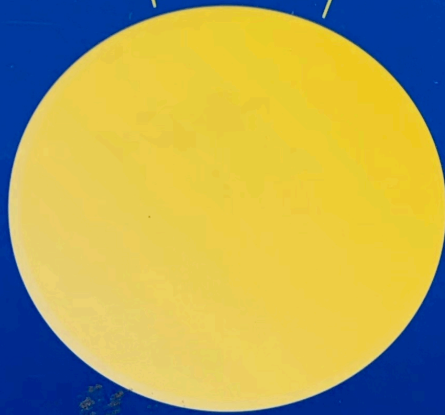


SWIMMING: CHARACTER AND EXCELLENCE



THERESA ANDREWS

MIKE BARROWMAN

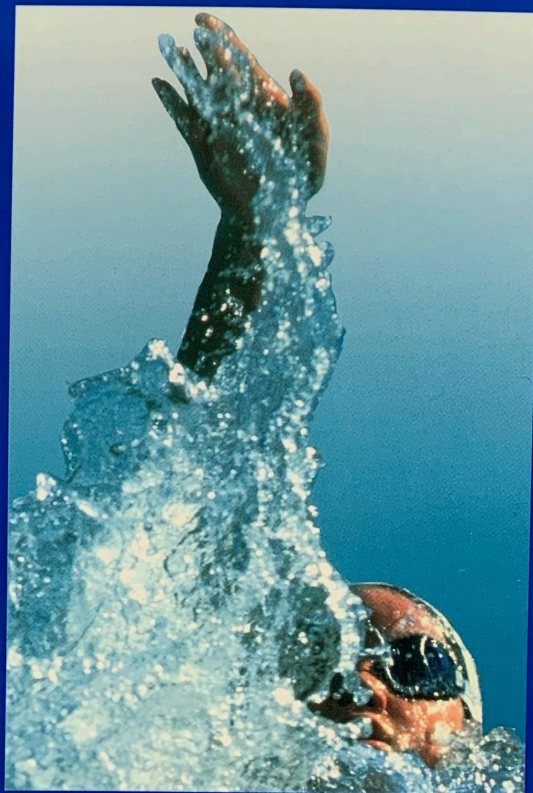
MATT BIONDI

TRACY CAULKINS

TOM DOLAN

ROWDY GAINES

TOM JAGER



BETSY MITCHELL

PABLO MORALES

RICH SCHROEDER

JILL STERKEL

AMY VAN DYKEN

DAN VEATCH

SIPPY WOODHEAD

BETSY MITCHELL

"The purpose of any athletic endeavor is to challenge human limits both on and off the playing field."

"... leadership involves consistency, whether in word or deed or both. People need to know what to expect from their leader. Leadership also takes a degree of courage. One has to stick to her conviction."

"Being a winner means being happy with yourself, confident in your abilities and proud of the work you do."

On the Fourth of July every year, the country club where my family had a membership held a big swimming competition for families. It brought all the families together by giving them a chance to swim some fun relays. When I was 5, my family reigned as club champs of those relays; we had so much fun, swimming and competing together. Around that time, my older brother, Peter, starting playing pee-wee football and T-ball. In 1971, in Marietta, Ohio, there were no little league sports opportunities for little girls, and I was jealous of my brother. My parents took me to the local YMCA to investigate the opportunity of swimming on the team during the winter. Swimming with my friends at the Y became all I wanted to do, and I enjoyed myself immediately. I started competing year-round at the age of 7. During those first years, I don't remember wanting to do anything different with my time outside of school. I was very content to spend two hours a day at the pool with my friends.

As a seventh-grader, I wanted to find a more challenging and competitive program. A group of us from the Marietta Y switched teams and began driving 20 miles each way to join the team at the Parkersburg, W. Va., Y in their daily training. I began to train two or three mornings a week on top of the five afternoon training sessions. Our daily schedule was hectic: 5:15 a.m. wake up, 5:30 a.m. leave for practice, 6:00-7:15 a.m. practice, school 7:55 a.m. to 2:30 p.m., home for an hour, 3:30 p.m. leave for practice, 4-6 p.m. practice, home by 7 p.m. for dinner and a couple hours of homework. I was usually in bed by 9:30 p.m.

I lost touch with my school friends as a result of the more rigorous schedule. I began to be closer to the older kids with whom I rode to practice and to the swimmers on the Parkersburg team. Immediately after the change in teams, I realized and accepted the fact that my school friends and I kept different schedules. Another positive result of my rigorous schedule



Left: On the award stand

Above: Acting as a Lap counter.

CHARACTER AND EXCELLENCE



and challenging training program was swimming faster. I began to see drastic drops in my times, both in practice and in meets. I remember that time in my life as a very happy-go-lucky one—a time filled with good friends, fun swim trips and team parties.

There was one occasion, early in my career, when I quit swimming because I was unhappy. In the fall of my ninth-grade year, I had a boyfriend, and I quickly learned that being an athlete and being a teenage girl did not always fit together perfectly. I felt different from the other girls at school because I always had wet hair and hairy legs. My boyfriend and I always arrived late to football games, dances and parties. One night, my confusion overwhelmed me, and I cried my eyes out thinking that other people would consider me abnormal for wanting to pursue swimming. I worried about what my friends and other people at school thought of me. I thought the answer to my distress was to quit swimming. So, the next day, I did. After two weeks of watching television after school every day, I was bored silly. Realizing that I didn't care what other people thought of me, I went back to practice and immediately knew that was where I belonged.

After discovering that my heart belonged in the pool training and competing, swimming became an even bigger part of my life. I started to improve and become one of the best all-around swimmers in our region. There were two girls in my age group who were the two best swimmers in our area, Amy Polcari and Julie Netzel. These two always won the high-point award at the big invitational meets in our area. Even though I had traveled to YMCA Nationals in Fort Lauderdale, Fla., and participated in that nationwide prelims and finals meet, I still wanted to be good enough to win a high-point trophy for being the best all-around swimmer at our regional meets. The high-point award became a motivating challenge for me when we would go to meets. I didn't think in terms of goals at this point in my career. I remember simply being aware of the fact that I would have to get better in lots of different events if I were going to win that trophy. In 1979, I earned one of my most prized possessions: the high-point trophy for 13-14-year-old girls, from the Charleston, W.Va., Winter Invitational.

I learned about goals from Tom Phillips, who was my coach at the Parkersburg Y. Tom talked about training paces as they related to

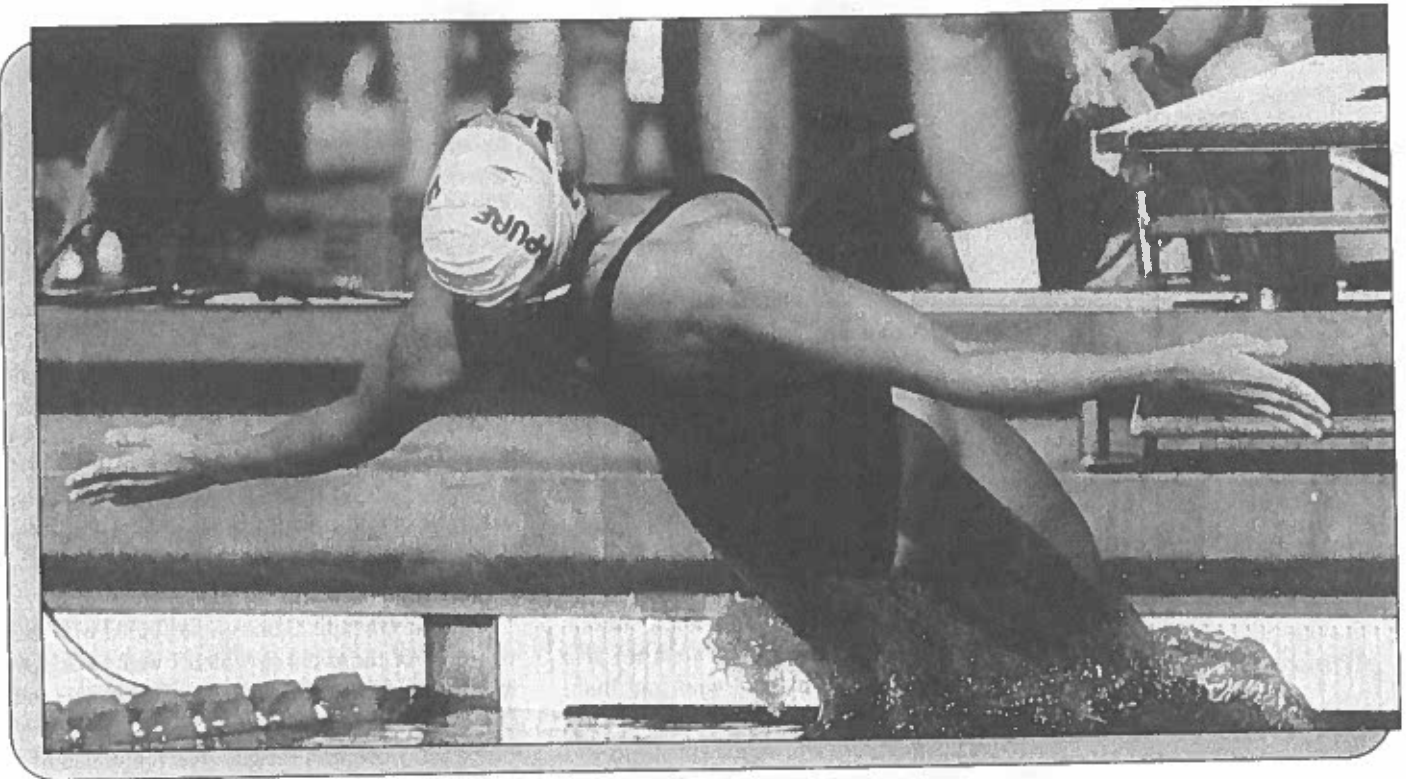
specific race times that I was aiming to achieve. He would have me repeat certain times for 25 and 50 yard swims so that I would have the confidence to swim faster than that in a race. As a 13-year-old, I was introduced to goal-setting as a way of relating daily practicing to competing in meets. My experience with swimming changed when I actually thought about the meets and races before going to them. As I became aware of the relationship between training and competing, I came to understand that if I had confidence in my training, I would have more confidence in competition. Understanding that relationship served me well throughout my career.

A DESIRE TO BE THE BEST

Swimming backstroke became my focus when I won the 200 meter back at my first junior nationals in the summer of 1981. I qualified for junior nationals the summer before my junior year in high school. This occurred after my decision to go away to school at The Mercersburg Academy for my last two years of high school. In late July, my team swam in the Mike Peppe Invitational in Delaware, Ohio. I knew I had to swim seven individual events in order to win the high-point award. So I added the 100 and 200 backstroke to my normal freestyle and butterfly events. On the way to winning that high-point, I qualified for junior nationals in both the backstroke events. My coach was extremely excited, and after he explained what the meet was, my mother and I decided that I should go to California to participate and that she would travel with me. Off we went to Mission Viejo without my coach, and I won the 200 and placed second in the 100 backstroke. After the race, people wanted to know who my mom and I were, where we came from, and they generally made a big fuss over us. At that point, all I wanted to do was eat and go to sleep. From that point on, people around me thought of me as a backstroker. I tried not to qualify myself as a backstroker or freestyler or anything in particular; labeling myself has never been something I like to do.

During my time at Mercersburg, I mostly swam the 100 free and 100 fly. The first time I qualified for senior nationals was in the backstroke, but I chose, instead, to return to junior nationals, where I won the 100 and 200 backstroke, 100 free and 100 fly. Winning at juniors was the experience that opened my eyes to how important swimming was in my life and to what

BETSY MITCHELL



opportunities might lie ahead. That summer I trained with the Pepsi Marlins in Cincinnati. Some of the Marlins went to the World Championship Trials in 1982, and I swam fast enough to go with them. Before my participation in that meet, I didn't understand what those Trials represented; but I got fourth, and at the age of 16, I almost went to the World Championships! At the time, I didn't think I was that good or that I was doing anything extraordinary. My performance at Trials earned me a spot at the 1982 Sports Festival, and later that summer, I placed second at senior nationals.

By the beginning of my senior year in high school, people were expecting big things from my swimming and considered me a force to be reckoned with. I still only wanted to have fun and enjoy swimming with super people. The University of North Carolina recruited me as its second backstroker behind the American record holder, Sue Walsh. For the first time, I had a distaste for being slower than someone. I hadn't been second to anyone on the same team, and for the first time, being second motivated me to work harder in training. As I prepared for the U.S. Open in Austin, Texas, in January of 1984, the desire to be the best American backstroker drove me in practice every day. I was 18 and I learned that swimming was important to me and that anything other than my best effort was

unacceptable.

During the summer after my freshman year, I participated on the U.S. national team for the first time. I remember being on the team with some of the best swimmers in history—Tracy Caulkins, Mary T. Meagher, Rowdy Gaines and Steve Lundquist. Being on the team with them was exciting but not overwhelming. Some people have idols, but I never did; I respected the good swimmers that I met but never idolized them in the sense that they were unbeatable. I enjoyed carving my own road to the top rather than following another athlete's path to success.

1984: SUCCESS AT TRIALS AND A BUMPY RIDE TO THE OLYMPIC GAMES

At the 1984 Olympic Trials, the night of the 100 meter backstroke final brought a wide range of emotions that I had to handle correctly in order to succeed. I qualified first for the final in what would be a heat filled with women who all had been previous national champions. I was definitely nervous. I wanted to swim as fast as I knew I had trained to swim. When my hands started to shake and the butterflies bounced against my stomach, I battled back with positive self-talk. I reminded myself of the hard work

*Left: At the Duke
Kahanamoku Pool,
University of
Hawaii, 1988
Above: Backstroke
start*

CHARACTER AND EXCELLENCE

and specific training times I had achieved. After reviewing my practice habits and sacrifices, I had the confidence to know that I could swim the second half of the race faster than anyone in the country. I turned my Walkman up loud to drown out any thoughts and continued to stretch in order to use up the nervousness. As we walked out to the pool past my wildly cheering team, I got a shot of adrenaline that gave me the ultimate confidence. I do not remember too much of that race. I tried to blank my mind and let the hours and hours of practice take over. Touching the wall first and seeing that I had won was an indescribable feeling. Pride and satisfaction are two words that mean the most to me. My coach, team and parents had supported me all the way, but I had won, by myself, when everything was on the line.

At the Olympic training camp, I felt discommodated and uncomfortable. The team was composed of many swimmers who had been swimming for a long time and waiting for their chance at the gold for eight years. Our team had a strong sense of unity and pride in ourselves and our country; the desire to dominate the competition took precedence over most other concerns. The older, internationally experienced athletes understood what was required to do well at the elite level, whereas, initially, I did not. I was simply satisfied with being on the team. As a newcomer, I had trouble making the transition from winning the Trials to preparing to win at the Olympics. There was a great deal of traveling, and living in a hotel for four weeks got old quickly. On top of that, there were photo sessions, autograph-seekers and many other distractions. Instead of working hard and concerning myself with how I had earned the right to represent my country, I allowed the newfound attention to confuse my work ethic and self-confidence. Before Trials, I had been comfortable at my own pool with my own coach; I motivated myself with the underdog label. At the training camp, I was one of many talented, hardworking and goal-oriented athletes, and initially the new experience threw my confidence.

The lesson I learned from that unsettling time was how to be focused on a goal. My goal in 1984 was to simply make the Olympic team. I succeeded. After 1984, as I began to make international teams, I focused on winning medals and setting records. Maintaining a personal focus on my goals and learning not to be distracted by external praise was very important to swimming

fast.

The Olympic training camp also taught me to focus on my own personal training habits. I became very discouraged when I compared myself to other women who were on the team. Comparing what I perceived to be a difficult training set with what they perceived to be a difficult training set was mind-boggling. I trained significantly less and with slower repeat times than the majority of that team. At the time, I became discouraged, and as a result, my practice habits changed. Watching those women and men tear up a tough practice made me realize the value of mental and physical toughness on a daily basis. I remembered the Olympic teams' toughness in practice at future training camps and in daily mid-year practice. Ultimately, that aided me in becoming a better practice swimmer.

At the Olympic Games, I struggled with the enormity of the event in which I was participating. After qualifying first for the final heat, I felt the same rush of adrenaline as at Trials, only this time, I couldn't relax. I was too consumed with the fact that this was *the* Olympic Games. I was in a state of disbelief. I remember waving my hands as the announcer said my name. Then I don't remember anything else. I didn't do any positive self-talk, nor had I prepared myself in the final days with the same sense of confidence that had earned me a spot on the team. I came in second and earned the silver medal. I was disappointed with my performance because I didn't rise to the occasion; but I gave my best effort on that day. I remember my first Olympics with a smile; it was definitely fun, and I was more prepared for my next major international competition because of the disappointments felt in Los Angeles.

After the 1984 Olympic Games, two-thirds of the Olympic team retired and all we read about was how difficult it would be to replace *them*. I always thought that swimming was something for the future and that the whole point was for people to swim faster. I wrote a letter to *Swimming World* arguing, "The swimmers from the past were great swimmers and great athletes. In their day, they were the best. But there is a whole new generation of swimmers who are representing the U.S. and need your support to get better and to swim faster." Today, I still look at the succession from past to future in the same way. I was the best at one time; but it is somebody else's day now. I believe our sport should praise, motivate and support the

BETSY MITCHELL

future generations of stars.

TEAMWORK AND TEXAS

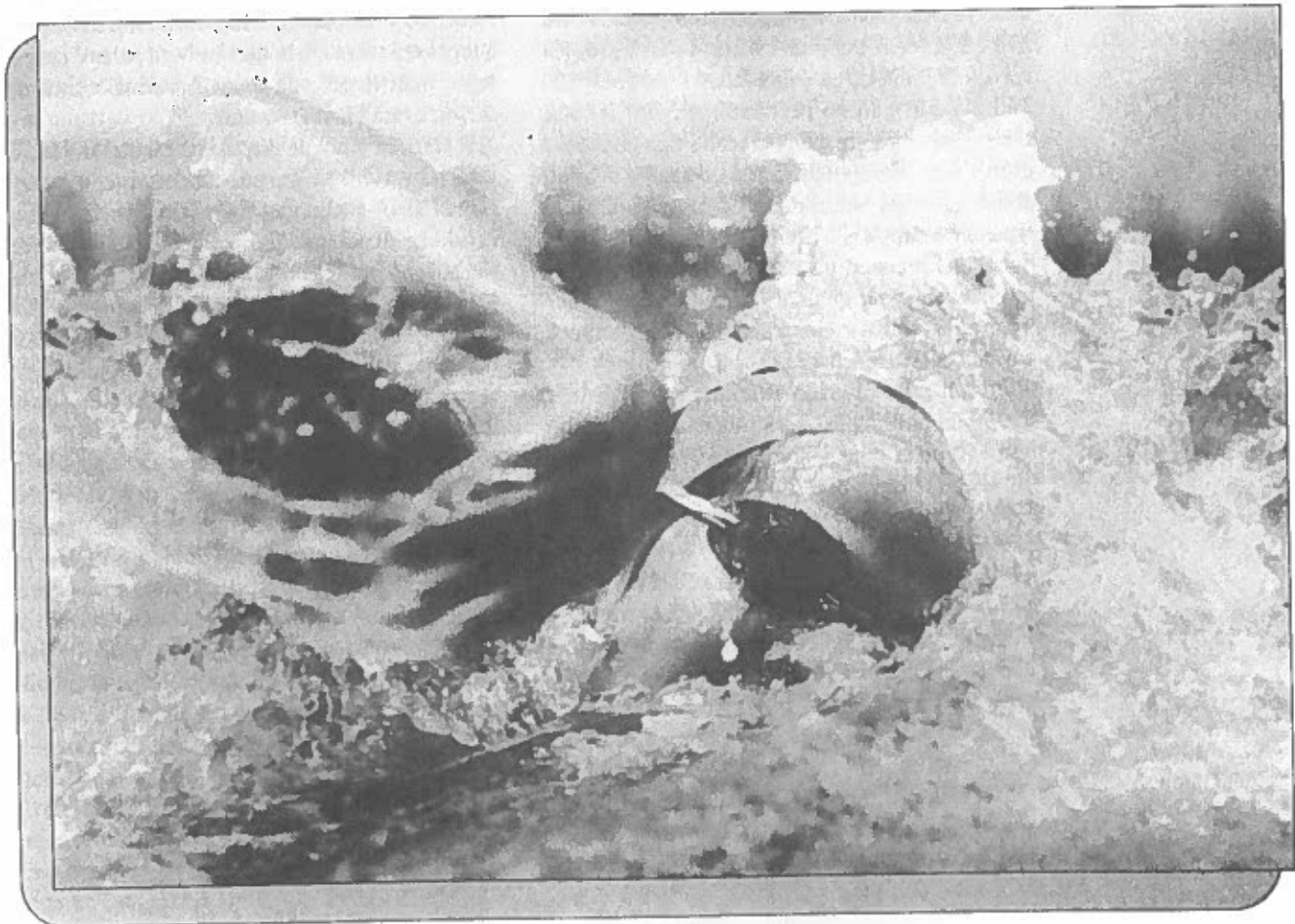
In 1984, the University of Texas won its first NCAA title under Richard Quick. Watching them from across the pool (I swam for North Carolina at the time), I thought about how fun it would be to be a part of a team so obviously special. They were constantly doing cheers together, laughing and talking with one another. You never saw just one of them alone; they were always in groups supporting each other. I could see that they cared for one another and had the ability to pull together whether they won or not. That ability directly contributed to their ability to swim fast. Since one of my goals was to have fun while swimming, I felt transferring to Texas was a good move, although scary at the time.

During my red-shirt year, which was the 1984-1985 school year, I went through another metamorphosis of swimming faster. I also got a significant amount of international experience. I traveled on four different national team trips that

year. At one point in 1985, I decided that I didn't just want to win races; I wanted to be the fastest backstroker in the country. I wanted to be the best, but not in terms of place. I wanted to be the best in terms of time. My emphasis switched from swimming to win races to swimming to beat the clock. At the U.S. Open in 1985, I set American records in the 100 and 200 meter backstroke.

From the time I enrolled at Texas, I deliberately set limits on the way I spent my social time. Before this point, I had been more laid-back about the important factors away from the pool that contribute to swimming faster. I became more disciplined about going to bed early the night before morning workout. I accepted the fact that I had less time for late nights or hanging out with friends because swimming and school were my priorities. That is not to say I didn't have friends or go out socially, but I regulated everything in my life—from food to sleep, from study time to leisure activities—according to what I needed to do for school and swimming. For instance, in my fresh-

*Below: Winning the
200 meter freestyle,
World Trials, 1986*



CHARACTER AND EXCELLENCE



man year at UNC, I weighed 168 pounds and had 23 percent body fat. When I set my world record in 1986 three years later, I weighed 150 pounds and had 15 percent body fat. It took three years of daily effort to make that change. I didn't deprive myself, but I educated myself about nutrition and monitored the amount and type of food intake. Through prioritizing parts of my life, I learned how to function effectively toward achieving goals. I learned change takes time and that the value of personal perseverance pays off in all aspects of life.

I felt a lot of pride swimming for Texas. I felt proud and happy just to have a spot on the team. At meet time, I knew I had a job and that my teammates counted on me to do my best. The extraordinary thing about our team at Texas was that my teammates never made me feel that winning or losing meets rested solely on my shoulders. I trained with two of the best backstrokers in the country, Debbie Risen and Tori Trees. When we were swimming for Texas, I can honestly say the order of finish did not matter to me—just that we scored the most possible points for the team. It was very freeing to concentrate on the good of some other entity, such as a team, and not just on myself. I think that college swimming gives the United States something that other countries will never expe-

rience or understand. People who have been on successful teams, whether in high school or college, want to give up their individual concerns for an overall achievement.

Certainly my desire to contribute to a team effort, as I did at Texas, can be traced to my high school swimming experience at The Mercersburg Academy. Teamwork and unity were the sort of attitudes that our coach, John Trembley, sought to foster. He stressed to us the idea of being a part of a team and doing our best for the team each and every day. The typical and very disjointed experience many people have is to compete for a high school team on Wednesdays and Saturdays and to train daily with a USS club team. Club swimming is not geared toward forming people into a team; it is geared toward individuals. It is not about winning meets; it is about individual achievement. When I was starting to blossom as a swimmer, my focus was on team achievement and my teammates. I swam specific events not only for myself, but for the team. The basic difference between my high school swimming experience and many of the athletes in club swimming lay in the motivation at meets. I learned to swim for others instead of just for myself.

1986: WORLD TRIALS,

BETSY MITCHELL

WORLD RECORD

During the 1986 season, I wanted to be a member of the World Championship team. Prior to the Trials meet, I honestly never thought about setting a world record. My confidence was growing because I had trained so much backstroke, and based on my performance in practice, I knew I was ready. Based on our backstroke training sets such as 5x800 meters, 20x100 on 1:30, fast 50s repeating 31 seconds, I was not intimidated to lay everything on the line. The lesson I learned as a 13-year-old still rang true. Setting and meeting goals in practice was the key to doing my best in meets.

Looking back, the week of Trials was one of the best of my career. On the first day of Trials, I placed third in the 100 meter free, earning a spot in a relay event. The second day brought a surprise victory in the 200 meter free. On the third day, I swam my personal best time in the 100 meter back, setting an American record. Coming off successes early in the week, the hardest part of waiting to swim the 200 back on the last day of the meet was not thinking too much. Swimming "off" events such as both freestyles kept me from getting too nervous. Two days before I swam the 200 back, I did a warmup set of 5x200 meter back, descending. The final repeat I swam in 2:14! My coach, Richard Quick, and I just looked at each other and realized that I could swim extremely fast by the end of the week.

I have the same memories about my world record swim as I do about the Olympic Trials in 1984. I remember walking from the ready room to the blocks with the other finalists. Walking past my Texas teammates gave me the same shot of confidence. The announcer called us to the blocks. Then it was very quiet. My next memories are very vivid memories of my thoughts during the race. I remember the race itself from two distinct perspectives. First, I remember feeling like a camera on the ceiling looking down on myself; I could see the increasing distance from the other competitors, and that inspired me to go faster. The other perspective was that of a bug riding on my forehead, looking back as I swim toward my goal. The difference between this race and others before it was in the control my mind exerted over my actions during the race. My mind commanded my legs and hands to quicken the tempo of the stroke and exert more pressure against the



*Far left: Burning up
the water*

*Left: Accepting
congratulations for a
win, Charlotte Ultra
Swim*

water. The response was faster swimming, which resulted in a new world record. I vividly remember looking at the scoreboard and being satisfied that I had finally swum fast enough. My coach was there immediately, and his hug dragged me out of the pool. I waved at my team and my parents, then jumped back into the pool to cool down. If ever I swam a race that came together perfectly in preparation and execution, it was that one.

FOUR MEMORABLE POINTS IN A LONG CAREER

A central theme throughout my career involved exceeding expectations that other people set for me. I enjoyed shocking people when I swam. It was fun to do better than I was expected to do in the non-backstroke events. Relays were an important part of my high school and college experience; I enjoyed the pressure that went along with relay efforts. This was a double-edged sword when I didn't swim as fast as possible because I detested letting people down, especially myself. Throughout my career, I had an internal battle between keeping swimming fun and somewhat carefree, and balancing the pressures of maintaining world and American record performances with each swim. Four particular swims show the highs and lows of swim-

CHARACTER AND EXCELLENCE

BETSY MITCHELL

- Born: January 15, 1966
Hometown: Marietta, Ohio
Graduated in 1988 from the University of Texas with a degree in education; earned a master's degree in sports administration in 1991 from the same school
1984: Silver medal in the 100 meter backstroke and a gold medal in the medley relay in the Olympics
1986: Set a world record (2:08.60) in the 200 meter backstroke and became the first American woman to set a world record since 1981
1986: World Championships: swam on the American record-setting 400 meter medley and 800 meter freestyle relays
1986: USS Swimmer of the Year; *Swimming World's* American Swimmer of the Year
1988: Won U.S. Olympic Trials in the 100 meter backstroke
1990: Led off the U.S. team that won the medley relay at the Goodwill Games in Seattle, thus defeating the East German women for the first time in 12 years
Won nine national titles and was a 20-time All-American

ming at the elite level: 1986, world record; 1987, NCAA champion in the 200 IM; 1988, Olympic disappointment; and 1990, Goodwill Games victory.

My world record performance came as a wonderful shock. I had been training harder than ever, and my goals had been firmly set, but I never expected to earn the expectations that accompany being the fastest backstroke in the history of the world. The only reason that this swim is one of my favorite memories is because it was the culmination and execution of everything that I worked very hard to produce. I was less thrilled with how other people's assessment of me changed after that swim. This illustrates a fact of life: one must accept the good *and* the bad results from any endeavor.

The most exciting set of meets that I participated in were the NCAA championships. The meet was smaller than senior nationals and was held for women and men independently. It was an honor to be there and represent my university; and my team won the championship for five straight years. In 1987, I earned the high-point award for winning all three of my events—100 and 200 yard backstroke as well as the 200 IM. The thrill of that year was the novelty of competing in the 200 IM. After qualifying first for the final session, I realized that the rest of the field was filled with strong breaststrokers. My breast-

stroke was horrendous. So the strategy became simple. I had to go out fast. I had a four-second lead at the halfway point, after the butterfly and backstroke, but with two laps remaining, the field turned even. I remember gritting my teeth with determination to win and urging my legs to kick harder. I held my breath the whole last lap and touched first. The rush from an unexpected win was definitely different from the relief of a routine backstroke victory.

"Disappointing" is the word I use to describe my experience at the Seoul Olympics in 1988. After graduating from college in June of that year, I felt a lot of external pressure to continue in the role of U.S. team leader and dominant backstroke. Looking back, I realize I was trying to hang on to a special time in my life when I should have just retired after the NCAA Championships that year. I only swam the 100 meter back at Olympic Trials even though I was still the best in the world at 200 meters back. This gave people the impression that I did not care about the sport as much or about fielding the strongest U.S. team possible. In reality, I was simply tired of swimming. I was just trying to concentrate on doing my best in the one event in which I had a goal left to achieve. At the Games, I swam poorly and slowly in my individual event. I lost confidence in my ability to race because of that swim, and I even gave up my spot on the medley relay because I felt that my teammate would swim faster than I could. In the end, I felt I had let the team down. It was not the end to my career that I had hoped for. However, I felt that I had done my best on that day.

After working at my alma mater for a year, I felt that I wanted to give myself one more chance to set the world record in the 100 meter backstroke and have a more positive career-ending meet. I enrolled in graduate school at Texas and trained my guts out for another year. I qualified for and swam at the Goodwill Games in Seattle. I would use it as my swan song, to prove I could realize a goal. Although I tied my personal best in winning the gold medal at that meet, I did not set a world record. I did swim well and felt confident that I had given my all in pursuing my goal. Our medley relay was phenomenal. My roommate and Texas teammate, breaststroker, Tracey McFarlane, and I led off the relay, and Janel Jorgensen and Nicole Haislett anchored us to a victory and American record. The best part of the meet was beating the East German relay by just hundredths of a second. After 12 years,

BETSY MITCHELL

an American relay finally beat the Germans!! Swimming my best *and* leading our relay to a tremendous victory allowed me to feel that I completed my career in a suitable fashion.

PERSONAL REFLECTIONS

Swimming faster and winning races have always been the goals which were central to my participation in our sport. The sport is not about money or press attention or popularity. The purpose of any athletic endeavor is to challenge human limits both on and off the playing field. The challenge comes from doing your best at all times. I don't think I ever swam a perfect race; I came very close, but I could have done something better or tighter or faster. If one gives an honest effort every day in practice, then there can be no second thoughts or true disappointments after a competition. It is far easier to accept that another person beat you than that your own work habits and lack of self-confidence beat you. Winning is an attitude, not just a place.

In the later stages of my career when I was elected team captain on national teams and was confronted with giving a palatable answer to more or less predictable questions from the media, I sometimes found it wasn't possible to give an accurate answer. The accurate answer either didn't match what was expected or it was too long or complicated. That is one reason the communication between the media and the people they interview so often lapses into cliches. When you lose a race, the assumption seems to be that you are unhappy because someone beat you. When I lost a race, of course I was unhappy, but not because I got beat. I was unhappy because I didn't swim the way I had prepared myself to swim. To elicit that answer and to respect it, it is necessary to dig deeper than normal expectations.

Since I was still in shape in 1990 at the Goodwill Games and I still showed potential to swim fast, I was often asked if I would try out for the 1992 Olympic team. I didn't want to continue swimming in the manner that our sport had gradually pushed my career. I wouldn't have been swimming for myself. I would have been swimming because other people expected me to want to swim. Also, since my first encounter with the Olympics as a young, naive 18-year-old, I have realized that, in reality, the Olympics are different from what they seem to the public. Ath-



*Left: Reflecting on
the upcoming race*

*Opposite: Ready to
compete*

letes swimming for prize money and taking performance-enhancing drugs are not my ideas of amateurism. I think swimming should happen in a clean arena, where the largest goal is to improve without help or outside motivation. Maybe I am old-fashioned, but I think money is changing our sport. Clearly, though, now that we have started down this road, we are never going to be able to go back.

I am a collegiate swim coach now, and I love my job. I can't imagine a job more important than working with young people every day. Helping others toward their goals, helping them through the tough practices and celebrating when they reap the rewards is incredibly rewarding. I am a coach who wants to help people swim faster than I did or ever dreamed I could. No one improves on talent alone; it takes hard work. The fun in coaching or in any athletic endeavor is in seeing hard work pay off in a

CHARACTER AND EXCELLENCE

peak performance. I enjoy watching young people achieve their goals, and that gives me a sense of fulfillment.

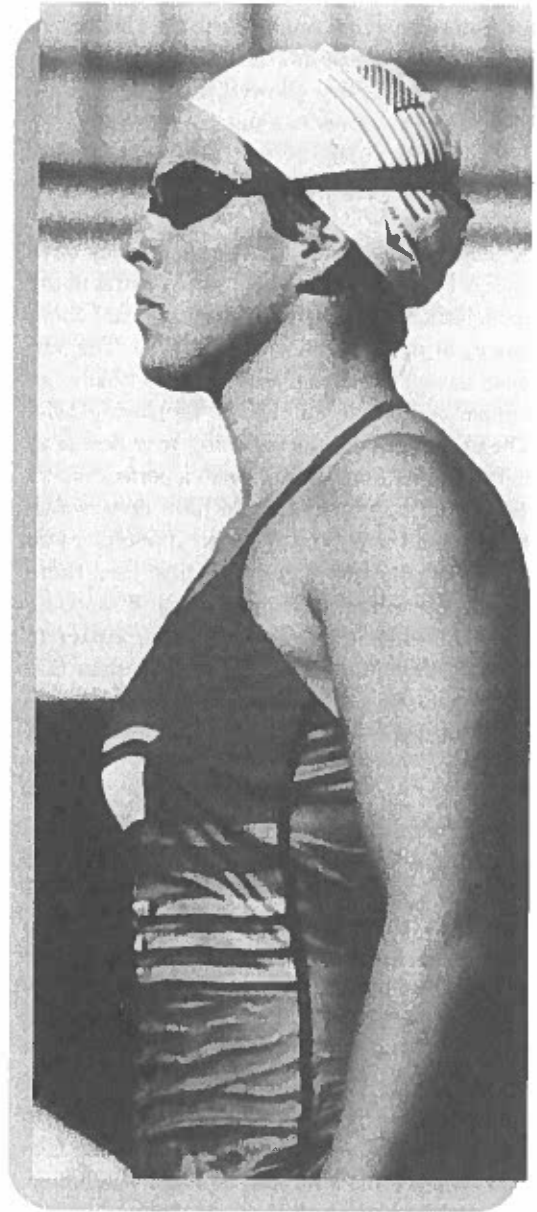
CONCEPTUAL KEYS TO SUCCESS

As swimmers, we share common experiences—tough practices, winning and losing, and a desire to do our best. Since so much of our life goes into our sport, we are forced to reflect on the meaning of what we are involved with. In my case, that reflection involves concepts like “leadership,” “competition,” “winning and losing” and “hard work.” These concepts provide an opportunity to offer some advice borne out of my 23 years of swimming.

First of all, leadership involves consistency, whether in word or deed or both. People need to know what to expect from their leader. Leadership also takes a degree of courage. One has to stick to her conviction. A leader knows what she believes and believes strongly enough to communicate it effectively to others. Some people tailor their message to suit the demands of different groups. I think a true leader will say the same things regardless of the group of people he or she is talking to. I think leadership is made of consistency, courage and conviction.

Being a winner means being happy with yourself, confident in your abilities and proud of the work you do. This is not only a swimming definition. Winning is an attitude as well as an accomplishment. How you view yourself and your goals and desire is an indication of your self-confidence. A high level of self-confidence is a byproduct of the struggle to train and compete. People often wonder how to learn to be self-confident. I believe it is a simple task—just do it! If you are happy, confident and proud of who you are and believe in yourself, my feeling is that you will be a winner.

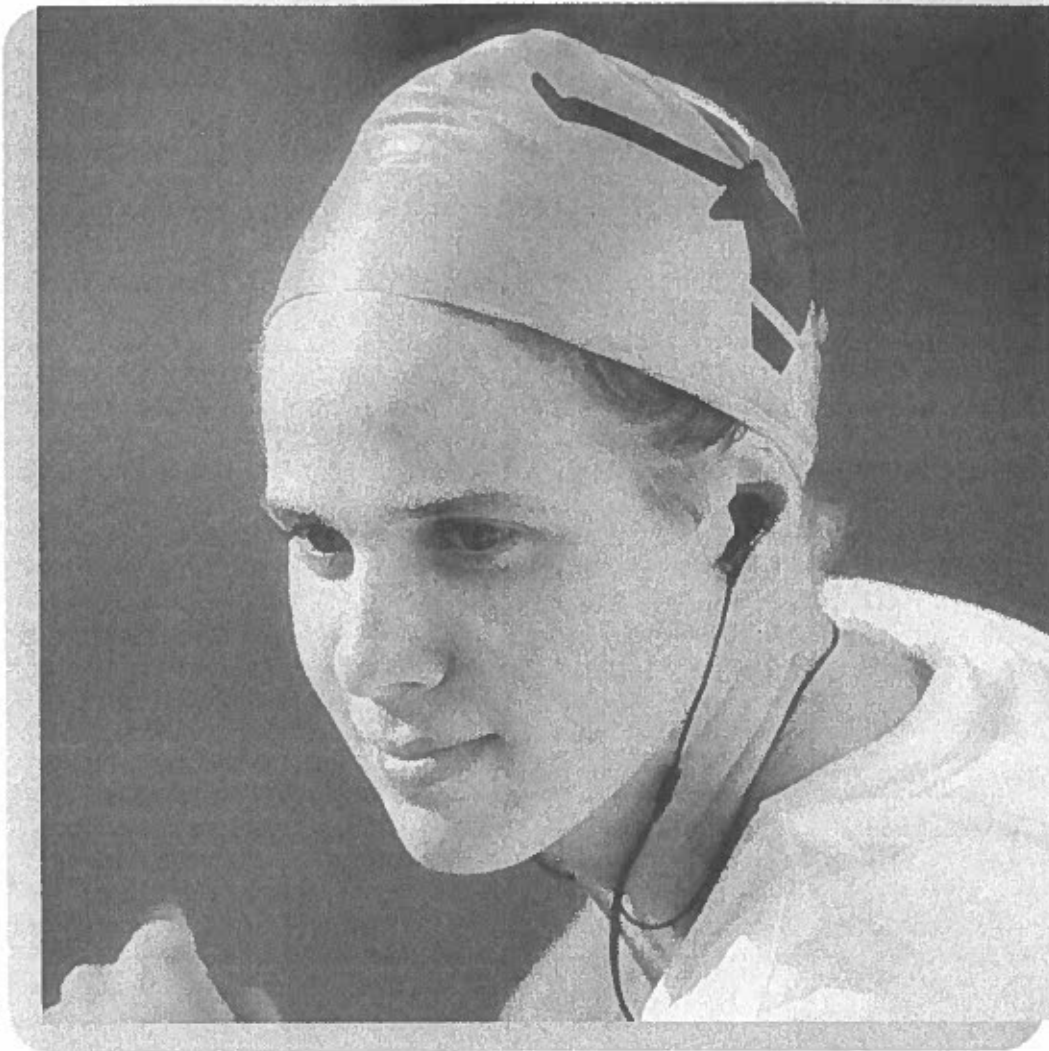
Not reaching a goal is disappointing. If disappointment means not achieving a goal and success means achieving a goal, then I had significantly more disappointments than successes. I fell short of my goals far more frequently than I achieved them. Perhaps I set my goals unrealistically high. To look at the issue of winning and losing another way: if each race has eight participants, if there is one winner by definition, then there are seven losers. This doesn't allow many of the people who compete to place first. But winning and losing is not solely a matter of



place; it is more a matter of attitude. I swam faster over the course of my career than I ever imagined I would when I first started swimming for fun. In the end, however, I failed to swim as fast as I truly believe I could have. There were disappointments along the way but no regrets; I wouldn't change anything.

I think competition is a time- and place-oriented thing. When I swam, I definitely had a competitive attitude about most things in my life. I had such a strong desire to do my best. I worked toward believing in my abilities and expressed it in everything I did. I would do my homework and be in bed by 9 p.m. so that I would be rested for morning practice. I tried to eat right to have the proper fuel for practice and

BETSY
MITCHELL



meets. I visualized my races away from the pool so they would become second nature. By constantly preparing myself for competition, I was consumed by being ready to compete. Now, I compete at specific things when I decide to see how well I can do something; competition does not permeate everything in my life.

I believe passionately that people get better as a result of having to earn something. I don't think the easier path is the better path. By working hard to achieve a goal, you learn a lot about yourself, about other people around you and about the true value of the goal you are pursuing. Swimming takes lots of hard work but offers a good return. The process of training your body requires learning about dedication, discipline, goal-setting and sacrifice. Every day that you achieve goals in workout, you are preparing to achieve goals in a meet. It is impor-

tant to reach short term goals before attempting long term ones. Striving for the long term gain develops commitment to your endeavor and fosters pride and self-confidence. There is no substitute for hard work.

Every minute of every day I learn who Betsy Mitchell is capable of being. I don't fully know who I am yet, but I know the qualities I hope I have—honest, caring, able. I think I am someone who perseveres. Swimming was the vehicle that allowed me to develop those traits. I was fortunate to swim with coaches who were interested in developing me as a person as well as a swimmer. It is my goal as a coach to help people learn about themselves as well as realize their potential in the pool. Competitive swimming is a great part of life, but it is really just the beginning for more important challenges to be faced throughout life.