

Out of the Blue : Sharing insights and positive perspectives about the sport of swimming from those that have lived the experience. By Cynthia Owens



For some reason, one of the best kept secrets at SCSC is that we have a two time Olympian and a gold medalist swimming here on a daily basis!

Chris Cavanaugh grew up swimming just down the road at De Anza Swim Club. As a teenager he decided to dedicate himself to swimming. By the time he graduated from high school in 1980, he had set a CCS record that would stand for 29 years; the oldest record on the CCS books! In fact, even with the aid of the new 'technical suits' the record was not broken until this year. Chris qualified for two Olympic Games; first in 1980 (which were boycotted by the United States), and then again in 1984, where he earned a

gold medal and set a world record in the Men's 4 x 100 Freestyle Relay.

Among his many swim accolades, Chris broke the [world record twice in the 50 m freestyle](#) in 1980. During his 7-year stint with the U.S. National Swim Team, Chris was a finalist at the [1982 World Championships](#), the [1983 Pan American Games](#), and numerous USS National Competitions. He was also a 22-time [All-American](#) at the [University of Southern California](#), where he graduated in 1986 with a degree in industrial and systems engineering.

Today, Chris is an avid Masters swimmer with SCSC. He is a seasoned coach with more than 20 years experience; and he has a passion for developing young swimmers in a positive, inspiring environment. I recently had the opportunity to catch up with Chris and talk about his perspective on swimming.

1) What has swimming meant to you?

[CC] Swimming has been a life-long event. Not that I have lived my entire life based on swimming, but that swimming has created much of who I am, what I've become, and how I drive to be more. First, who I am – as a product of swimming and coaching parents, one may think I was pushed and driven to be a swimmer. Nothing could be further from the truth. I was allowed to compete in many sports, and to find my own passion. I enjoyed all sports, but wasn't allowed to play football due to the injuries that last a lifetime. Swimming created a drive, and pushed me physically and mentally. Finding the strength to press through hard workouts and take on everyone in the pool created pride and satisfaction. I also found an inner strength to overcome the pain and push myself in other ways, both in and out of the pool. Second, what I've become - pushing myself in the pool also provided a "can't lose" attitude out of the pool. I worked hard in school when time was limited due to hours in the pool. I found time-management, goal setting, determination, and other positive traits of success were enhanced. One of those positive things was the great group of [humble](#) and quality individuals that make up the swimming family. I learned to be humble, recognize other's worth, offer encouragement, and create lasting friendships. Third, the drive to be more – from this I have found a desire to reach for more. I achieve meaningful goals regularly, and have many more desires which I will one day achieve. The essence of my swimming *past* focuses me on keeping the drive and challenging myself constantly for the *future*.

2) When you think of your personal experience swimming, what comes to mind?

[CC] I swam for De Anza Swim Club, not the same DACA of today. DASC was a great organization which was enhanced by having SCSC just up the road. My Mom knew George Haines growing up. He was and still is an inspiration to me. Thankfully, I was lucky enough to swim for him for 8 years at Stanford when home from college, and one year at DASC. The amazing thing was, SCSC was one of the preeminent swimming programs in the world, and like Michael Phelps brought North Baltimore to recognition, Don Schollander,

Out of the Blue (continued)

Mark Spitz, Donna DeVarona, Buster Crabbe, John Hencken, and others were the heroes of my youth.

3) Did you always dream of making the Olympic Team? Why or why not is that important?

[CC] The Olympic Team is a dream for all of us to have. Short term goals along the way are reached each day though, and if you fail to have them for those moments, the Olympic Dream is never going to be in your grasp. I can tell of days when I was just stoked by intense pain created during a tough workout; the pain itself motivated me, made me know I was improving. Although this sounds like a line; it's true: working hard at school, finding things you're good at, building confidence by undertaking many tasks and activities, are the foundation for building a legacy, and creating true champions.

Goals come in all forms. Goals in athletics have several elements – 1. they are real, tangible, and achievable; 2. they have clarity (goal times, specific events/meets/distances); 3. we know what we have to do to achieve them. Unfortunately, goals are not as clear in the regular world (school, relationships, family, home, friendships, business, and so on), so it's important to uncover them, set them, and go for it. Self-worth, self-esteem, and confidence in as many areas of life as possible are the building blocks to living and knowing a wonderful life. I was lucky to reach the Olympic Team twice, but still feel I left things on the table, and know I don't want to do that in my day to day life.

4) What advice do you have for swimmers just beginning their journey?

[CC] The *journey* is about having fun. If you don't find a way to enjoy the friends and the challenges swimming brings, it's a long road. If you realize the incredible diversity and don't let the bad moments (like taking second, third, fourth; or silly petty situations) distract you from your goals and desires, you will come out on the other end with some of the greatest people as friends and associates. My parents were awesome about so many things; but especially this: don't take it too seriously.

Build yourself up to become a champion by knowing it's not about how *good* you were, but how good you *can become*. Hold that last line forever. It never stops you from reaching for more. Find the champion in you, and you will become a champion. Interestingly, the mind is the real power in success.

All the best to you future champions!

Out of the Blue is a regular monthly feature in our club newsletter to showcase stories of inspiration, motivation and humor from those who have strong ties to our great sport