



KEN FITZPATRICK

Inducted as a Swimmer in 2013

Ken was born in Ottawa in 1963. Soon after, his family moved to London where he started his introduction to swimming at around the age of three at the local Berkshire Village community pool. His nursery school teacher, Miss Dorothy, was quoted as saying that he “was the only kid in the class who could be left alone in the deep end”. When he was six years old, Dad, Jim, threw Ken (who was not wearing a life jacket) into deep water off the dock at the summer cottage in Gatineau, thus giving him first exposure to open water swimming. It did not have the expected result, as Ken, to this day, is wary of unknown waters and even some pools. As a seven year old spectator at an Ontario Relay Meet at McMaster University, he was pulled out of the stands to make the fourth person on a LYAC (now LAC) relay team – registration/insurance/etc. apparently meant little in those days. After spending a few years in the Public Utilities Commission summer swim leagues, in the fall of 1970, Ken followed his older brother, Larry, and middle sister, Mary-Lynn, and joined the London Y Aquatic Club. A team photo shows him as the smallest and youngest member of the then 100-strong swim team.

During his early years, Ken was coached by Dr. Paul Hauch and Sonya Hodgins, swimming with older, role model teammates (Rick Madge, Chris Hodgins, Chuck Grace, Ian McPherson...many more) . He set his first provincial record in the 100 yd breaststroke at the age of ten, followed by several other provincial and national records in the 100 and 200 breast as well as an individual medley or two for 11&12- as well as 13&14-year-olds. Ken attended the 1976 Olympic Trials in Etobicoke (as a spectator) and was inspired by Robin Corsiglia’s Canadian Senior record swim (as she also was only 13 or 14 at the time) and saw many swimmers of that era go through their paces during the Trials (of memorable note, the powerhouse squad coached by Don Talbot from Thunder Bay) – a true inspiration for his own swimming career at the age of thirteen. The Montreal Olympics had the same effect on Ken while watching from the stands: world records by David Wilkie of Great Britain and Jim Montgomery of the USA (he was the first to go under 50 seconds in the 100m freestyle with a 49.99); and, of course, the tremendous showing by the Canadian men & women (Garapick, Gibson, the Smiths, Pickell, Robertson, to name a few) who had to compete against the less than honest East German women; and not to forget the ever so powerful Americans.

In his formative years under the direction of his coach Brian Cartlidge, Ken qualified for his first Nationals at the age of 14 and competed in Winnipeg in 1977. As a sixteen-year-old, Ken moved to Mississauga to swim under Coach Bill Barton (whom he had met at Camp Akomak/Chikopi which he remembers with great fondness) in preparation for the 1980 Olympic Trials. Although he was second in the 100 and third in the 200 breaststroke, at the age of 17, he missed the FINA standard by a few one-hundredths and thus the Moscow Olympics, the Boycott

Team. Unlike many of his fellow National team members, Ken was young enough to stay with the sport and move forward toward new goals and experiences. In 1981, he accepted a scholarship to USC (Southern Cal) after finishing in the final at USA Nationals (Harvard) and competing internationally with the National Team. Originally, he had been recruited by several other American universities (Indiana, Miami, Stanford, Texas A&M, and more). The Canadian history at USC - Garapick, Corsiglia, Nagy, Pickell, Kerr, legendary Coach Peter Daland, and the fact that the pending 1984 Games would be on the campus of USC, simplified his university choice. He qualified for his first NCAA meet in the 200 IM and enjoyed the team, university life, and world class competition of the PAC-10 throughout his four years in Los Angeles.

The highlights of Ken's swimming career came at the 1984 Olympic Trials after a "hugely disappointing" performance in the 100 breast. Four days later, he came back and touched out Veilleux and Bauman "by a blink" with a best time in the 200 breaststroke and a berth on the Olympic Team. At the Games, his highlights continued as he won his heat in a personal best time and finished 5th over-all with another best time in finals. He admits that it took him a very long time to accept the fact that, while there was no medal, 5th place at the most prestigious meet in the world, wasn't exactly shabby (and a 1st/5th finish alongside Canadian teammate and legend, Victor Davis, is something he will always hold dear in his heart!). He remembers fondly his family being in attendance in Los Angeles, including his Aunt Dix (the energizer athlete in the family) and Uncle Doug (head of the 1984 Canadian Olympic Volleyball delegation).

Ken was elected as the men's captain of the Canadian Olympic team by his peers. At USC, he became team captain two times; was two-time All-American; as well as two-time Academic Scholar Athlete. His original plan was to swim until 1986 and earn an individual medal at the Commonwealth Games or Worlds; however, in 1985, while fighting mononucleosis, he received an enticing job offer that he could not turn down and Ken retired from swimming. He remained in the Southern California area for ten more years in the business and alumni community of USC, eventually turning to volunteer coaching and new life paths.

As with all world class athletes, there was a tremendous support team in place that made sure Ken stayed on track. Mom, Deanne, was the leader of the breakfast brigade for teammates in London who came to the family's home after morning practices to take part in a feast before heading to school. She was an operating room nurse for about 25 years, working with Dr. Peter Fowler in the early development of arthroscopic surgery. Dad, Jim, was very involved with LYAC as president and was instrumental in the hiring of professional coaches such as Harry Gallagher from Australia and Brian Cartlidge. He worked tirelessly on the meet management team and helped with many other board related activities. He was a career London Life Insurance marketing man, joining the firm at age 18, who worked in various departments. Mom and Dad retired in 1996 and are enjoying the finer things in life such as grandchildren, travelling, golfing, volunteering, etc., etc.

Ken's siblings, Larry and Mary-Lynn were also part of the support team. Both swam with LYAC (Larry at the OUA level at Western) and were great fans throughout the years. Mary-Lynn meticulously kept the family scrap book and always had an inspiration for Ken when he was down. Ken's significant other, Jennifer, is a former world championship boxer and has served on the London police force for 22 years. She is also a triathlete, preparing for her first Ironman race. Ken is the Associate Swim Coach at Western University and also heads up the London Silver Dolphins (Masters Team). They live in London and enjoy an active lifestyle.

The Ontario Aquatic Hall of Fame is proud to induct Ken Fitzpatrick as an athlete.