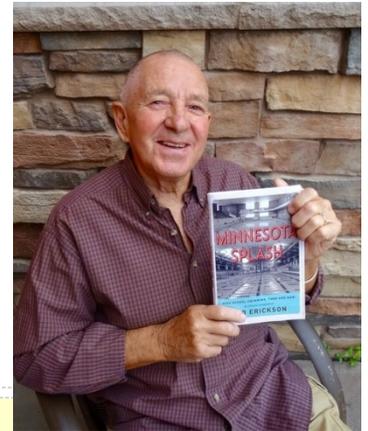


It's been nearly a year since Bob Erickson's book, *Minnesota Splash: High School Swimming, Then and Now* was published and released. We thought we'd take a look at his book with a fresh set of eyes, to see what it says, if anything, about club swimming.

Featured: Shaping the Sport of Swimming

By Bella



Bob Erickson's book highlights important moments and the people that helped shape the aquatic sport that is enjoyed by many to this day; it also provides background to how strokes and rules have evolved over the years. While Erickson wishes he would've been able to make the book about both club and high school swimming, it proved impossible to come up with any information on club.

His book was created to be a single source for people to have access to a multitude of topics, so it would be easier for anyone to learn about swimming.

The history of swimming in Minnesota is important for current athletes to know — especially the girls. Swimming was at the forefront of the movement for gender equality; it was one of the first sports that allowed girls to compete in a high school sport.

In the early 1900's girls were seen as inferior to their male counterparts, and therefore girls were not given much opportunity when it came to high school sports. And, the initial surge of girls' high school swimming lasted on until 1942, when girls' swimming as well as almost all other women's sports in the U.S. was terminated as the U.S. focused on the second world war. It wasn't until 1974 that Title IX (which gave equal opportunities for women) allowed girls to resume competitive high school swimming.

During the early period of swimming (in the 1920's), girls' swim and dive had the only official state championship meets. Shining the spotlight on Annette Kellerman highlights how remarkable swimming was and why it prevails today. Kellerman overcame being handicapped as a child to break a world record at only age 16. She also broke a big social barrier by wearing a suit instead of covering up most of her skin, as swimwear used to be very restrictive for women. Although she was arrested for 'indecent,' the judge ended up dismissing the charges. Kellerman was one of the very first female athletes who prompted the movement to allow women to compete just like the men did.

Putting universal themes of gender equality aside, Erickson's book revolves around Minnesota's influence in the beginning years of competitive swimming. Minnesota was the second state to ever hold a state meet for swimming, right after Florida. The first two presidents of the National Interscholastic Swimming Coaches Association (NISCA), were Minnesotans Harry Boardman and Paul Lukens. Both men have been nationally recognized as dedicated pioneers in the development of swimming. Because of the development of pools to attract miners and their families to the Iron Range, Minnesota also boasted the largest number of pools during those first years of competitive swimming.

In his storytelling, Erickson talks about the origin of the four strokes used today. The oldest stroke is the breaststroke and the newest stroke is the butterfly. There have been a surprising number of changes and refinements that have been done to the strokes. When asked what to expect for the future, Erickson believes that "there will be no introduction of any new strokes, only refinements to the current ones, as well as to the rules that apply to them." Every year the governing bodies of swimming (FINA and USA Swimming) meet to assess and refine the rulebook and to discuss whether certain rules should be kept or tossed, but the last major change happened in 1956 when the butterfly stroke was introduced.

With all the information and data Erickson has managed to pack under one cover, he still believes there is room for a sequel—once people have become acquainted with the current history provided. By that time, however, new records will have been broken, calling for the need for a second book.

It is important to keep record of the impact Minnesota has had on this sport nationally, and it is just as essential for athletes to educate themselves on the background so they can gain more respect for those who have made their mark.

Minnesota Splash: High School Swimming, Then and Now is available at Elsmore Aquatics.