

LORI RIEGLER

Since her arrival in 2015, Lori Riegler has propelled Somerset Hills YMCA swimmers to a national team championship; junior, senior and Olympic Trials qualification; and USA Swimming recognition as a Silver Medal club.

BY MICHAEL J. STOTT

Q & A



>> Coach Lori Riegler with swimmer [and daughter] Meredith Riegler

Coach Lori Riegler

Director of Competitive Swimming/Head Coach
Somerset Hills YMCA
Basking Ridge, New Jersey

- University of Toledo, B.S., exercise science, 1998; M.S., public health, 2000
- Graduate assistant, University of Toledo, 1997-98
- Head coach, Somerset Hills YMCA, 2015-present
- Head coach, director of competitive swimming, Chapel Hill-Carrboro YMCA, 2006-15
- Head coach, Princeton High School (Cincinnati, Ohio), 2005-08
- Head coach, St. Ursula Academy (Toledo, Ohio), 1998-2001
- 2019 ASCA Coach of the Year nominee
- ASCA Level 5

Lori Riegler's current team members hold 12 individual and relay New Jersey state records. Her Somerset Hills YMCA boys' team won the 2019 YMCA Short Course National Championships and placed third at the long course Y-Nats.

Q. SWIMMING WORLD: What was it about swimming that drew you to the sport?

A. COACH LORI RIEGLER: I started summer league at age 7 and began swimming year-round two years later with the Powel Crosley, Jr. YMCA in Cincinnati. We were a small, fun team that did a lot of social activities. My love for swimming came from Coach Mike Leonard. He created an environment where everyone was made to feel important no matter their ability.

SW: And then to coach?

LR: My first taste of coaching came as the graduate assistant at the University of Toledo. Then for three years I coached St. Ursula Academy in Toledo before moving out of state. Since finishing grad school, I have continued to coach. I can't imagine doing anything else.

SW: Any major influences along the way?

LR: Mike Leonard was enthusiastic, caring and firm with each of us. I wanted to be like that. He wasn't a dictator, but he engaged with us and got us to perform. A lot of how I interact with my athletes I learned from him. I have also learned from a lot of other great coaches.

Actually, most of my best memories are of my coaches and the support and encouragement they provided. They helped mold me into the person and coach I am today.

SW: You have coached high school, club and YMCA swimming. Why still the Y?

LR: I started and developed my love for the sport at the Y. My passion for coaching began with high school swimming before I migrated to club swimming. Each stop helped me grow as a coach. The Y's have allowed me to create a team of which I am proud. I have been fortunate to work with talented coaches who share my vision and passion to help athletes become the best they can be.

SW: How did you grow the Chapel Hill-Carrboro YMCA by more than 80% in just seven years?

LR: There wasn't one specific thing. The staff I assembled had a lot to do with it. I promoted a long-time assistant coach to head age group coach, which quickly helped. He had a real passion for working with young age-group athletes. He was very approachable, parents liked him, and he was well known in the summer league community. We spent a lot of the time advertising at the summer pools and running clinics. We also recruited some very strong assistant coaches and worked hard developing our age group program into one of the best in the state. We also

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JACK ALEXY

Collegeswimming.com ranks Cal commit Jack Alexy second in New Jersey and 19th nationally for males in the Class of 2021...and with good reason: he's an Olympic Trials qualifier in both the 50 (22.93) and 100 meter freestyle. His 49.67 is the third fastest ever for a 16-year-old. Alexy is world-ranked in the 50 free (23rd), 100 free (18th) and the 100 back (88th). Representing Team USA at the 2019 World Junior Championships in Budapest, he earned a gold medal as a member of the men's 400 meter freestyle relay.

Last December, he garnered first in the 100 yard free (42.87) and fourth in the 200 free (1:35.52) at Speedo Winter Junior Championships-East. Earlier at the 2019 YMCA Short Course National Championships, he won the 100 free (43.07), was runner-up in the 200 (1:36.81), placed third in the 500 (4:26.25) and finished fourth in the 50 (20.07).

As a sophomore at Delbarton High, he finished second in 100 yard free (44.64) and third in the 200 free (1:39.19) at the New Jersey High School Meet of Champions. As a junior, he won both the 50 and 100, posting anchor splits of 19.70 (prelims) in the 200 and 45.26 in the 400 free relays. He has since been a TYR Pro Swim Series qualifier and attended USA Swimming's National Select Camp.

If that weren't enough, Alexy is a multi-time YMCA national champion and record holder in the 400 yard free relay (3:00.37, April 2018) with Lukas Scheidl, Victor Vollbrechthausen and Jonathan Hua. Alexy holds 31 Somerset Y SCY and 17 LC records, and still stands 10th in the NAG 13-14 standings with a 20.59 for the 50 free.

His Somerset Hills Y coach Lori Riegler notes that "Jack is a very humble, talented and driven competitor who has improved tremendously in the last four years. He is a goal setter and works hard

to reach them every day. Jack is supportive of his teammates, and the younger athletes on the team really look up to him."

SAMPLE SETS

- 24 x 50 free @ 1:00 (2 fast/1 easy) holds :22/:23
- 10 x 100 free @ 1:20 (best average) holds :53
- 18 x 50 backstroke @ 1:00 (2 fast/1 easy) holds :26/:27

MEREDITH RIEGLER

Now a sophomore at Lindenwood University, Meredith Riegler (see photo, page 40) finished her freshman year as a GEICO Academic All-Great Lakes Valley Conference performer. At the conference meet, she finished seventh in the 400 yard IM (4:26.37) and eighth in the 100 back (57.33).

In high school, she was a member of four-time state champion Raritan Bridgewater. As a senior at the state championships, she teamed with Jackie Ruhnke, Grace Zhou and Sarah Pacelli to win the 200 yard medley relay (1:45.56) and earn NISCA All-America honors. Just months later, she placed seventh in the 200 meter IM (2:26.08) at the YMCA Long Course Nationals.

"I did not start coaching Meredith directly until she was 14," says her mother, Lori. "But I am extremely grateful for the technical skills her earlier coaches gave her. They instilled a tremendous drive and ambition in her to work hard, challenge herself (swimming with the fastest boys) and raise the bar for her teammates.

"Being mom and coach to your own child has its own challenges. We found it best not to bring swimming home. When we did, we turned it into fun and productive conversations. Meredith was treated like every other athlete. The tough stuff was always saved for the pool. We implemented new strategies as she got older and came to understand the dynamics and reasoning of her training. Admittedly, there were tears along the way until we finally found the right taper for her."

SAMPLE SETS

- 18 x 50 backstroke @ 1:00 (2 fast/1 easy) holds :31
- 10 x 100 free @ 1:20 (best average) holds 1:00
- 5 x 200 IM @ 3:00 (best average) holds 2:25 ❖

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spent a lot of time educating our families on athlete development through high school and beyond.

When I took over, a majority of the senior-level athletes had switched to another team. It took a couple of years to change the perception that the Y was not the place for serious senior swimmers with college swimming aspirations. We also changed the culture by building trust with the athletes and their families.

SW: How do you handle the wide range of talent that exists within a YMCA program?

LR: We provide a unique environment where

everyone is welcome. Our staff has a shared vision, and we have developed flexible practice schedules that allow athletes and families to be involved in other activities. We have access to three pools, and the coaching staff works with athletes individually to help them reach their goals, regardless of ability.

SW: With which group are you particularly effective and why?

LR: I am involved with every age group and have made it my mission to get to know all the athletes on my team. I have a natural affinity for coaching senior-level athletes. They are at the age and place in

their swimming careers where they need to be taught accountability. I help them understand that there are consequences for their decisions, and that poor ones can have a negative impact on achieving goals. I also enjoy helping them through the overwhelming college recruiting process.

SW: What do you do to get younger swimmers to love the sport?

LR: I make it fun. Our emphasis is on teaching proper skill development. Our coaches are great at developing creative ways to make practices fun and engaging.

SW: Coaching style. Are you a guidance counselor or a taskmaster?

LR: I am multi-faceted, and I take the time to get to know my athletes and find the best way to work with them. I believe in open communication and accountability, and I put a lot of onus on the athlete. I allow some latitude when getting in the water at the beginning of practice, realizing swimmers need to get some of the social interactions with their teammates out of the way. Once in the water, it's time to work. We have fun at practice, and music is a must. My athletes

respond better to my collaborative coaching style rather than dictating to them.

SW: How do you handle weights and dryland?

LR: We incorporate dryland work into every practice group in some capacity. We have access to properly trained instructors who conduct our dryland and strength training sessions. The coaches and instructors work together to make sure the training is appropriate.

For our 12-and-unders, the focus is on hand-eye coordination, body awareness and flexibility. For our 13-and-overs, we

incorporate some light strength training. We do not lift heavy weights. Bodies are still growing, so we are careful about what we have them do. We concentrate on injury prevention, especially the shoulders. All of our strength training programs complement our in-water work.

SW: What's a typical mid-season practice schedule for your senior swimmers?

LR: The senior practice schedule is consistent throughout the season. We offer six days of practice a week with Tuesdays off. Practices are two hours with a 40-minute dryland session before practice on three days.

Over winter break, we move to twice-a-day practices with a morning workout on Christmas Eve, New Year's Eve and New Year's Day. We take Christmas Day off. Many of our college athletes return during this time, which provides for some fun training/racing in practice.

SW: How do you approach training for your really talented swimmers?

LR: I use the results from the previous season as a starting point for planning workouts and looking for new ways to challenge the athletes. I have three different training groups. The workout will be the same, but the intervals differ. One day a week, I tailor workouts for national-level athletes to their specific strengths.

SW: Competition between New Jersey Y's is pretty keen.

LR: The Y's are very competitive and also very supportive of one another. Somerset Valley Y is definitely one of our strongest competitors. Many of our athletes go to school together and love to race against each other. That helps both of our programs get better.

SW: In 2019 and 2020, Somerset Hills Y was named a USA Swimming Silver Medal club. What's the benefit to that honor?

LR: With the 2019 money we received from a USA Swimming grant, we purchased an underwater camera and a TV to help with stroke correction. We will be using the 2020 funds to purchase new training equipment. This honor gives credibility to our team vision and mission, and it also helps us grow and attract new athletes. ❖

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