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Q&A WITH
NBAC's
TOM HIMES



SWIM BENCH
TRAINING
PART 2



BEFORE THE
BEEP WITH
MARGO GEER

THE
PROFESSIONAL

AFTER TWO YEARS OF COLLEGE, KATIE LEDECKY, THE WORLD'S GREATEST WOMEN'S SWIMMER, IS TRANSITIONING INTO LIFE AS A PROFESSIONAL

PRESENTED BY THE INTERNATIONAL SWIMMING HALL OF FAME

Q & A



Coach Tom Himes

Director of Aquatic Programs
—Head Coach
North Baltimore Aquatic Club
Baltimore, Maryland

- University of Baltimore, B.A., business administration, '80
- ASCA Level 5 coach
- Coached three Olympians as age group swimmers (Beth Botsford, Casey Barrett, Michael Phelps)
- Head coach, North Baltimore Aquatic Club, 2016-present; former NBAC head age group coach, 1985-2002 and 2010-16
- Worked at Howard County YMCA (1979-85); Retriever Aquatic Club (2002-06), Green Terror Aquatic Club (2006-07); Loyola Blakefield Aquatics (2007-09)
- Multi-time winner of the Maryland Age Group Coach /Age Group Staff of the Year
- Maryland Age Group Coach of the Year award named after him
- ASCA Age Group Coach of the Year (2015)
- Won 11 consecutive ASCA age group national team championships
- Guided swimmers to 81 No. 1 rankings, 37 national age group records and more than 500 Maryland state records
- Inducted into Maryland Swimming Hall of Fame in 2005

Coach Himes has been a member of the Maryland Swimming board of directors for more than 30 years, serving in virtually every capacity from general chairman on down. Currently, he is a member of USA Swimming's National Age Group Development Committee.

TOM HIMES

BY MICHAEL J. STOTT

PHOTOS PROVIDED BY NORTH BALTIMORE AQUATIC CLUB

Current North Baltimore Aquatic Club head coach Tom Himes still coaches swimmers ages 11-14, using time-tested methods that have led his NBAC athletes to more than 500 national Top 25/Top16/Top10 rankings under his watch.

Q. SWIMMING WORLD: Thirty-eight years in the profession. At what point did you decide to coach for a living?

A. COACH TOM HIMES: After coaching summer league from 1975 to 1979, I really fell in love with the profession. Athletically, I was basically a dedicated summer league swimmer with only two years of year-round experience. Wanting to advance in coaching, I became a year-round coach in 1979 with a local Y team.

SW: What did you learn from coaches Murray Stephens, Bob Bowman and Paul Yetter?

TH: At NBAC, I have worked with, observed and been part of a team with a rich coaching tradition that also includes people such as Michael Brooks and Erik Posegay. I have tempered what I learned with my own observations—give 100 percent, believe in what you do and don't quit trying to achieve what you believe you can do.

My motto is "Never be Satisfied." I continue to learn and observe with my goal to be better than yesterday.

SW: Any other influences?

TH: The athletes I have coached have always been—and continue to have—the most influence on what I do and how I do it. This sport is about athletes—not parents and coaches—and their needs are at the top of my list.

SW: How is it that the NBAC culture breeds excellence?

TH: In the beginning, Tim Pierce, Murray

Stephens and Carter Warfield set a high bar regarding standards and conduct for NBAC. That culture of "Attitude-Action-Achievement" carries into our 50th year. NBAC swimmers know that the will and preparation to be the best leads to outstanding achievements.

SW: As a stellar age group coach, how is coaching senior groups different?

TH: Even as the head coach, I am still coaching 11-14-year-olds. I hired a head senior coach to take the program's top two senior groups. When the previous head coach abruptly left, it was in the club's best interest for me to remain the developmental coach of our top 11-14-year-olds and not disrupt that part of the program.

The main difference is in dealing with swimmers. Seniors are generally older, more experienced and mature. The understanding of what it takes to be the best is generally elevated at the senior level. That understanding creates more coach/swimmer conversations relevant to training and competition. Essentially, the senior swimmer takes much more control of his destiny.

SW: At what age do you like to see swimmers take control?

TH: It is a very individual thing, and it happens at different ages. It is very related to parenting. Swimmers whose parents give up controlling every move tend to take control earlier than those of parents who do not. I would like to see this process begin as early as 10 years old. You will get much more out of swimmers as soon as they understand how much control they really

HOW THEY TRAIN

BETH BOTSFORD

BY MICHAEL J. STOTT



PROGRESSION OF TIMES

SCY	Sept '91	Oct '91	Apr '92	Apr '93	Apr '94
50 Back	36.63	31.83	28.79	26.62	26.50
100 Back	1:24.10	1:10.86	1:01.71	57.87	56.23
100 Fly	1:24.68	1:17.84	1:05.73	59.64	56.40
200 IM	—	2:38.99	2:23.64	2:11.74	2:08.58
LC	Jan '92	Aug '92	Aug '93	Aug '94	
50 Back	33.50	32.08	30.88	30.43	—
100 Back	1:14.49	1:09.39	1:05.33	1:02.92	—
200 Back	—	—	2:23.85	2:16.51	—
200 IM	2:51.71	2:35.22	2:28.02	2:24.57	—

In a five-year period in the early 1990s, North Baltimore Aquatic Club phenomenon Beth Botsford held every national age group backstroke record (SCY/LC) for ages 9-10, 11-12 and 13-14. At 15, she went on to win two Olympic gold medals (100 backstroke, 4 x 100 medley relay) at the 1996 Olympic Games in Atlanta.

In her career, she was a 16-time NCAA All-American, won six national USA Swimming titles and broke the American and U.S. Open records in the 200 meter backstroke. She also competed and won medals at the World Championships as well as the Pan American, Pan Pacific and World University Games.

These days, she is an assistant coach at her alma mater, the University of Arizona, where she is a member of the Wildcat Hall of Fame.

As her first NBAC coach, Tom Himes had a bird's-eye view of the promise to come. "Beth came to us in September of 1991 after turning 10 in May. I had seen her swim in a couple of summer league meets, and she was extremely sloppy, but seemed to sit on top of the water and demonstrated a good feel," he recalls.

"Beth's first two weeks were a bit stressful. She had never done much in practice, and when she had, it was mostly 25s. Initially, she cried every day, but always returned ready to go. After overcoming her fears, she developed quickly. She was essentially just a backstroker. Her free was sloppy, breast very weak and her fly was a mess.

"Yet from the start, it was evident that she was truly focused. She listened and applied what you told her. She was very coachable and took to challenges. We focused on improving all of her strokes. She became a great backstroker and developed an outstanding fly and a solid IM," says Himes.

"In the beginning, she swam for 75 to 90 minutes, four to five days per week, and her improvement was nothing short of remarkable. She went from crying every day at practice in early September 1991 (1:24 SCY 100 back) to breaking the 10-and-under NAG records in the 50 and 100 back in March/early April 1992—28.79 / 1:01.71."

In short order, Botsford added a fifth day and then a sixth as an 11-year-old. At 12, she swam seven days a week for an hour-and-a-half and occasionally for two hours. "Beth moved into the senior group when she was 13, and did not start doing doubles until she was nearly 14 years old," says Himes.

"From very early on, Beth set lofty goals. In May 1992, she did a class presentation on swimming, and professed that at age 15, she hoped to be at the 1996 Olympic Games. Her yearly goals included the Olympic dream. With her, it was believable to her coaches that it was an accomplishable goal," he says.

SAMPLE AGE GROUP SETS

(Short Course Yards)

12x:

- 25 back drill @ :40
- 50 back kick @ :50
- 50 free @ 1:00
- 75 back FAST @ 1:10

2x:

- 6 x 100 back @ 1:35
- 200 back kick @ 4:00
- 4 x 100 back @ 1:25
- 200 back kick @ 4:00
- 2 x 100 back @ 1:15
- 200 back kick @ 4:00

3x:

- 6 x 50 reverse fly kick (on back) w/ fins @ :50
- 1 x 200 fly drill @ 3:30
- 6 x 50 fly @ :50

6x:

- 50 free kick @ 1:00
- 50 side kick @ 1:00
- 50 reverse fly kick (on back) @ 1:00
- 50 side kick @ 1:00
- 5 x 100 back @ 1:30
- 4 x 200 back @ 2:50
- 3 x 300 back @ 4:10
- 2 x 400 back @ 5:30
- 1 x 500 back @ 6:30 ❖

have regarding their own success.

SW: When an athlete does that, what does it tell you?

TH: That they are ready to achieve their highest level. That means taking control of their efforts in training, including their commitment to improving their mental and technical skills.

SW: Your three secrets to swimming are: come to practice, listen to your coach, be the best teammate you can be. What are three secrets to being the best coach?

TH: 1. 100 percent commitment to excellence—a whatever-it-takes mentality is a must. Always strive to be the best at what you do.

2. Continual learning—never believe you know everything there is to know. You can learn from almost any source: old coaches, new coaches, swimmers, clinics, articles, etc. Soak in as much advice as you can. An open mind will enhance your knowledge to continue to grow and excel. Thinking you know it all puts limits on your ability to excel.

3. Put the athletes' needs first. They trump those of the coaches or parents. Always remember, this sport is about the athletes!

SW: You coached Michael Phelps from ages 9 to 11. How did you show him swimming was fun?

TH: His older sisters were outstanding swimmers. Whitney was the top American 200 butterflyer in 1994, and Hilary was a junior-national-level swimmer. Michael became a swimmer because they were swimmers. He was a typical young male who was playing other sports and really did not react well to being pushed in the pool.

The key was to give him something that would entice him to do outstanding things in practice. He was very competitive, so making bets with him always worked. He could be amazing—for example, 500 free kick under six minutes at age 10.

Michael would shut down if he was not happy. Keeping him happy and challenging him was a way to coach him successfully in his early days.

SW: Former swimmer Meghan Sackett said, "The happiest I've been in the pool is when I've been swimming for him (Coach Himes)." Why was that?

TH: I am flattered and appreciate comments like that. My goal is to push the swimmers mentally and physically while keeping them smiling. I want them to buy into the hard-work-equals-maximum-performance concept. But it must be done creatively to keep them all positive and happy.

There is no substitute for the hard work and the thinking this sport requires. You must present it in a way that keeps the swimmers happy. Fake them into working harder than they ever have, and get them to believe it is going to be a lot of fun.

SW: What are you doing differently now as opposed to 10 years ago?

TH: Swimmers/children are much more fragile than they used to be. We have all spoiled our children and have protected them from

uncomfortable situations. Consequently, swimmers must be treated a little more gently than before. Coaches need to be much more flexible than previously. The "Blue Collar" approach is gone.

SW: Where are you on strength-and-conditioning programs for age groupers?

TH: Body weight exercise using no or very basic equipment... Weight training, etc. can wait until their bodies have developed and can take the additional training without worries of injury.

SW: In your 30-plus years of coaching, what changes have you observed?

TH: The sport itself is still the same. Hard work leads to great results. What has changed is all the hoops we, as coaches, must jump through to get the same results. Additionally, swimmers have become more sensitive, and parents have become much more manipulative and interfering.

SW: How have those changes impacted coaching and swimmer development?

TH: Personally, it has been more difficult to have swimmers "buy in" to the commitment required to be the best. It seems to take swimmers a little longer to get what it takes to reach their highest potential. Commitment has become a "four-letter word" to both swimmer and parent.

SW: You have served with distinction in countless administrative positions from the local to national level. Why so involved?

TH: Being involved with local, regional and national committees is a must if you want to stay connected to the sport and keep up with current issues. It is a learning experience as well as an opportunity to express your views on various topics affecting swimming at the local, regional and national levels. It is just a great way to gain information that will help enhance your coaching and administrative knowledge. At a minimum, I recommend that all coaches frequently attend local LSC meetings—and better yet, serve on a position within the local LSC.

SW: As a member of the National Age Group Development Committee, what's the biggest issue in the days ahead?

TH: In no particular order:

1. 12-and-under tech suits—yes or no?
2. Parent and coach education
3. Progression of swimmers, novice to national level—i.e., the continued work by the committee on the athlete progression model. ❖

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Michael J. Stott is an ASCA Level 5 coach whose Collegiate School (Richmond, Va.) teams won nine state high school championships. He was named a 2017 recipient of NISCA's Outstanding Service Award.