



## *The Damon McCoy Story*

Damon McCoy has been called the best swimmer ever to come out of Louisiana by the coaches in the state. The Swimmer of the Meet Award given at our state championship is named "The Damon McCoy Award."

Damon showed up at Southside with his mother in the summer of 1975. Mary McCoy wanted to see if Damon could swim well enough to be on the swim team. It was immediately obvious that Damon had a special talent. But talent is only a portion of the tools it takes to become a great swimmer. The individual must have the desire and willingness to stick with it through the years. The swimmer must be kept hungry by never being given too much too early. Damon swam that summer in the summer league program. He steadily improved that first year. The next fall (1976) he began to really become a swimmer that had all the tools. By the season's end, he had set four national records and was nationally ranked in several other events in the 10-unders age group.

Damon was moved to the varsity team at age 10 which was very early, simply because he could no longer be challenged by the junior varsity practice schedule. In addition, Damon preferred the later practice so he could participate in other sports as well. Damon was a gifted athlete outside of swimming as evidenced by the fact that at age 12, he made the national semi-finals in the Punt, Pass, and Kick competition.

In 1982, Damon got a great deal of attention nationally by winning all four events at Jr. Nationals and setting one national record. That was no small feat, but it was even more astonishing in the fact that Damon was just age 15 swimming against 18 year olds.

The next year Damon moved up to Senior Nationals and scored in three of his four events, swimming against the best swimmers in the nation. He was chosen "Rookie of the Meet". That summer he was chosen to represent the USA in a special meet against the USSR. From this performance he achieved two world rankings and was chosen to be on the USA National Team that competed in Sweden and West Germany. Damon was still only 16.

Damon was the most heavily recruited athlete in the Shreveport-Bossier City area in any sport his senior year of high school. The University of Texas landed Damon, their only swimming recruit to receive a full scholarship that year. Texas is a perennial national power in swimming, finishing in the top three at NCAA's every year since 1980. The summer before his freshman year at Texas Damon qualified for and competed in the Olympic Trials, though he was considered very young for that level of competition.

Damon entered The University of Texas, and as a freshman broke the school record for the 500 yard freestyle. It was during that season, that Damon began to have knee problems. He experienced pain and favored his knee so much during the season that his leg atrophied noticeably by May of 1985. It was in May that he was diagnosed as having bone cancer. Chemotherapy was started immediately.

Damon's training was over, yet in August, he decided he just had to swim in the Louisiana State Championship with COSST. He was 20 pounds underweight, hairless and weak from chemotherapy. He had not trained since NCAA's in March. He was unable to swim his specialty events, having to stick to the sprint events because of his weakened condition. Yet he still won the 200 freestyle. But the most incredible swim came on the last event of the meet in the Senior Men's 400 Medley Relay. Damon swam the butterfly leg, which was the third leg of the relay. He swam his best time and moved the team from fourth to first. He had to be helped out of the water and all who witnessed it will never forget it. It was not the fastest 100 butterfly ever swum, but it certainly had to be one of the greatest ones. COSST hung on to win the relay. That was Damon's last time to ever compete in the sport that he had given so much to and loved so much.

After a gallant battle, involving numerous lung operations and experimental cancer treatments, Damon Heath McCoy died on July 7, 1987.

The City of Shreveport Swim Team will never forget him. The Shreveport Summer Invitational Swim Meet, Damon's favorite meet, will forever be named for him.