

Sava Turcanu, Graduate from the Hickory Foundation YMCA (NC) and Harvard University



For this morning's devotion I would like to give some historical perspective on how YMCA Swimming Nationals was founded as a nation-wide swimming competition. The Young Men's Christian Association was founded in London, England, in 1844, by George Williams and some of his coworkers. During the mid-1800s in London the Industrial Revolution was in full swing which meant that their working shifts were long with few breaks and most of the workers did not live in London so they wanted a place of refuge from the unhealthy conditions of the streets of London. So George Williams created the YMCA, as a safe haven for men to go into between shifts to rest, have fellowship and to have bible study.

As the Industrial Revolution spread across the globe so followed the YMCA. Nine years after the first YMCA in London, there were 397 YMCAs in seven different countries including Canada and the United States. As working conditions improved, the YMCA became less of a place of relaxation and escape and more of an area for active exercise. In 1869, YMCA started including gymnasiums and in 1881, Robert J. Roberts at the Boston YMCA started teaching fitness classes and coined the term "body-building".

In 1891, a doctor, chaplain, and sports coach named James Naismith at the YMCA International Training School in Springfield, Massachusetts saw how bored his students were during the cold northeastern winter when they had to be inside. So he takes two peach baskets and nails them to each side of the gymnasium and gives the boys a soccer ball and tells them to put the ball in the basket. Creating basketball.

Four years later at Holyoke Massachusetts YMCA, William Morgan thought that basketball was too physically demanding for the older members of the YMCA. So he created a game with less running, still two teams but with a net in-between them and with the simple rules of not letting the ball touch the floor on your side. Inventing Volleyball.

In 1906, George Corsan at the Detroit YMCA started teaching swimming lessons. He once said his goal was "to teach every man and boy in North America". He taught thousands of people how to swim. He would teach his students to swim on land before getting in the water. His efforts lead to an increased popularity in swimming around the nation. George Corsan's reach was far and wide in terms of aquatic safety and helped make swimming a physical activity. By 1932, there were 1 million swimmers a year at YMCAs. By 1984, YMCAs were the largest providers of swimming pools in the entire world.

This meet, Y Nationals has been held since 1923--95 years ago. At the 1924 meet, there was an event called the Long Plunge where you dove in and you couldn't propel yourself forward in any way and once you stopped they measured the distance. Russell Smith from Detroit Michigan won that event going 75 feet in 55 seconds. Pretty impressive given that their baggy swimsuits in the 1920s acted more like a parachute than a fastskin. But unlike the exciting long jump in track and field, the long plunge in swimming must not have brought as much excitement with it so they never did that event again.

On this final day of swimming, I wanted to give some perspective. What started as an refuge for religious fellowship created this event we are having today. In this sport we often have our heads underwater and our minds extremely focused on going forward. But I hope you all take a second today to appreciate the past efforts of those that helped make this meet possible. From George Williams in London, England, to the meet administrators and

officials. From legendary swim instructor George Corsan to your coaches that taught you how to swim. And of course your parents who support you in any way imaginable. Once you do that, you will start to understand how many people want you to succeed and will support you no matter the outcome. Please join me in prayer. God please keep the athletes safe today and have everyone race the good race. Amen.