

SWIMMER PROFILE: BARBARA INGOLD

By, Elaine Krugman

Every time I see Barbara “Barb” Ingold at a swim meet, I have a (happy!) flashback of the 2019 National Senior Games in Albuquerque, New Mexico. We had never met before that, but Randy Russel had recruited her to swim on our Georgia mixed 200 relays. We were thrilled to win a bronze medal in the medley relay where she swam backstroke and I swam breaststroke, but it was the freestyle relay I will never forget. It was a come-from-behind win to edge out our competition for the bronze medal by .08. We were ecstatic!



It took awhile, but I finally got Barb to agree to a swimmer profile interview, and I’m sure glad I did. Her story is an inspiration, especially for other coaches like her who are passionate about coaching Masters swimmers.

Like me and my previous profile subject, Carlton Eaton, Barb’s only competitive swimming experience was on her high school swim team before joining United States Masters Swimming (USMS) in 2015. At the time, she lived in Joliet, Illinois, and swam with the Joliet Blue Tides. When she relocated to Augusta, Georgia, in 2017, Barb was anxious to get started with a new team. “The first thing I did was hunt for a Masters team just to start building a support system and meeting people here in Augusta,” she recalled.

The Masters team in Augusta was part of an age group organization, but there was nominal support. In August of 2018, Barb and her teammates received an e-mail informing them their last Masters practice would be the following morning. Evidently, the parents of the age group

swimmers weren't interested in supporting other adults. Barb reached out to her former Masters coach in Joliet to ask for advice. She was advised to start her own team, so Barb quickly signed up for an upcoming coach certification course in Florida and got certified Level 1 and Level 2. As she explained, "Bill Brenner, from USMS, helped me work with the Augusta Recreation & Park District—in particular, the director of our aquatic center—to start this program." Once the Masters team became one of the aquatic center programs, they were able to get the swim lanes and support they needed. The Blue Tides, which are the only Masters team within a 60-mile radius started with just 3 swimmers in early 2019 and ended the year with 50 members. In March 2020, the pool shut down for COVID and didn't reopen until December, but the team has grown every year since and ended 2023 with 98 members.

Until 2022, Barb, 65, was the sole coach until a volunteer assistant, Sasha, stepped up to help run workouts. The Blue Tides runs five weekday workouts per day at 6 a.m. (8 lanes and 24 swimmers), two workouts at 8 a.m. on Mondays and Wednesdays, and two additional workouts on Tuesdays and Thursdays at 5:30 p.m. Approximately 30% of the members are triathletes, 30% compete in pool meets, and 30% swim for fitness. The remaining 10% are new to swimming.

In the beginning, the retired middle school math teacher coached on deck for 5 practices a week, but with the addition of Sasha, now coaches twice a week and swims 3-4 times per week, including 6 a.m. practices that Sasha coaches. While Barb is in the water, she often helps other swimmers who need stroke coaching, and she always swims the workouts she writes. "If I am going to write the practices I swim the practices. It's the best way to find out if a practice is working and if you can use it again," she said, adding, "I look at practices by the week, by the month, and by 3 months. And, during that period, we will focus on all strokes, IMs, sprints, 100's, middle distance 200's, and long distances."

Although Barb became a coach as a necessity to keep her Augusta team together, it has turned into her passion and purpose. "It's interesting how I fell into [coaching]. I'm retired, so that opened up opportunities. I love volunteering, because now I can give back to my swim community. And, the team supports me just as much as I support them. The feedback I get is always positive and if I'm having a down time in my life, somebody will send me an e-mail or text me out of the blue about how wonderful it is that they found this team and the coaches, and that always raises me up again."

Asked what she enjoys most about coaching, Barb quickly replied, "I love seeing how much the swimmers improve their stroke techniques and stroke efficiency. Nothing is more satisfying than being told things like – "I feel like I am gliding through the water," "I took x seconds off of my time," and "My shoulder doesn't hurt anymore." Barb also stated, "I love listening. I know all my team. I know what wonderful things are happening in their lives, what some of the bumps in the road are for them, and I just listen and try to relate to them. Sometimes that's all they want is someone to listen; so, I enjoy that aspect as well."

“As a coach, you can have a very positive impact on your swimmers, and sometimes you don’t realize the positive impact that you have until they share it with you. You never know what they are walking in their lives until you hear from them.” There was one 49-year-old swimmer that approached Barb about the USMS “Try Masters” program. Barb told her that if she could swim the length of the pool, she could participate. The new swimmer floated on her back and sculled all the way down to the other end of the pool and never put her face in the water. Six months later, after joining the Blue Tides, she swam the USMS 1-Mile Challenge and succeeded, swimming it in 1 hour. As Barb recalled, “She was so thrilled, and it was awesome. I think that was my best coaching moment because of her excitement. Her face was in the water, she was swimming; she was really swimming, and she did such a nice job. When she texted me, she said she felt like when she was in the water that God had his arms wrapped around her. She loves the water. She joined me in 2019, and she’s still with us... It was cool because she was so excited she could do a mile without stopping.”

It has been gratifying for Barb to see her swimmers succeed, and I was curious what advice she has given that has worked the best. Barb replied, “I tell all my swimmers we work on one tweak at a time... It works well for them. I tell my swimmers ‘practice perfect’ and I mean that. So, if you get tired and feel your stroke coming apart, then refocus on your stroke technique and quit worrying about speed or whatever, because you will never develop the muscle memory you need if you are breaking down and not swimming that technique. I tell them they are all masters of their swim—not the coach, not their lane mates—*they* are masters of their swim. They know what they can do, what they can’t do, and what their issues are, and what they need to work on or want to work on.”

As a non-coached solo swimmer, I wanted to know what advice Barb had for me and other swimmers who don’t train with a team. Barb suggested, “Take advantage of a coach. If you are at a [swim] meet, and you know a coach, take advantage of them. When you are in the warm-up or cool-down pool, try to get them to look at something and give suggestions on what you can work on... A good coach will help anybody.”

Getting back to Barb as a Masters swimmer, I asked about her goals when she first returned to swimming and joining Masters. “When I first started back swimming in Illinois, I was already swimming at the pool where the Masters team was located just for fitness. I had knee issues and swimming was the best opportunity I had to keep in shape. One of my friends was on the Masters team and talked me into joining and trying it. I said, ‘Fine, but I’m not competing. The next thing I know I was competing in a meet!’”

Unfortunately, the knee issues Barb had led to having knee surgery in early 2020. Following the surgery, she developed a blood clot that broke up and moved to her lungs causing a pulmonary embolism that almost killed her. As a result, Barb developed asthma that has caused her to struggle at times when she competes. “I do have some issues, but I’m still competing, and I

don't want to give it up. I have found that if the coach swims in a meet, your team members follow you. If I don't show up or swim in a meet, they don't swim either."

Swimming has helped Barb strengthen her lungs and improve her asthma, so it has been very beneficial for her health. "[Swimming] is one of the few things you can do that you can do up until the day you die. My goal is to keep swimming, keep coaching, and keep exercising my brain as well as my body. I send an e-mail out every week to my team, and I attach the practices for the week to it. I also continuously research swim techniques, stroke drills, and other swim tips that are the "Thought For The Week" in the e-mail. I also use the e-mails to announce events, pool closings, and to keep the team connected. I want to keep doing those kinds of things as well."

What does Barb enjoy most about Masters Swimming? "I love the water. I get in the water and I'm at one with it. It's peaceful; it just takes my stress away. It keeps me from worrying about other things, because all you're thinking about is not drowning," she laughed. "Seriously though, there is no one aspect. I do love the water, but I also love swimming with my teammates (who teach me as well), and the community of our Augusta Blue Tides."