

SWIMMER PROFILE: CARLTON EATON

By, Elaine Krugman



When I saw Carlton Eaton at the Southeast Zone Championships, in Auburn, it dawned on me that I had seen him at swim meets for more than ten years, but I had never introduced myself and knew nothing about him. I was pleased Carlton agreed to a profile interview, so we all could get to know him better.

The 57-year-old, originally from Illinois, moved with his wife to Atlanta, in 2011, from Birmingham, Alabama. Carlton is a self-employed recruiter, specializing in matching qualified candidates to corporate finance and accounting

jobs. “I have always thought it was kind of a win-win situation when I am able to find a candidate who needs a job and a company that needs a great candidate. It’s just awesome. It’s a bonus that I get paid for doing that,” Carlton said about his business.

A former high school competitive swimmer, Carlton later went on to compete in triathlons. He also swam the relay leg of the Panama City Ironman—something he probably won’t repeat, since it was a very difficult swim in extremely rough water.

When this triathlete moved to Georgia, he decided to leave running and biking behind. As he explained, “I always excelled at swimming more than running, so I decided to focus just on swimming [and] that’s why I joined Masters (in 2011)... I was trying to get back to a regular workout and one that I could do for the rest of my life. I wanted to be able to compete throughout the year and test myself and measure my efforts against my peers. Masters was able to provide both those things; a regular workout, a coached workout; and, I was pleased to find out how many meets there are around the Atlanta area.”

Having a coach has been quite beneficial for Carlton, and he recommends other swimmers training with a coach make the most of that resource so they can improve. His advice? “First, they should talk to their coach. Sometimes, a coach

doesn't know that you want critique, or you want to get better, so you've got to talk to the coach. Talk to other people in your lane or around you, especially if they are strong and fast and look like they have a smooth stroke. Ask them what they are doing or ask them to watch your stroke and give feedback."

For swimmers training on their own without a coach, Carlton suggests, "There's a lot you can learn from watching a good swimmer. Even if you don't have a club that you swim with, you probably have a friend or somebody in your family that could video your swimming. When you watch video of somebody else who is swimming and you compare it to yourself, then you can [make] the corrections. You think you are doing what Michael Phelps (for example) is doing, but then you look at your own stroke and realize that you are not. So those are the two things that can really help: Watching video of somebody who is doing it right, and then watching yourself, and breaking down the stroke into small components." Carlton added there are videos of swimming drills on the internet that can help a swimmer build up strength and technique, [such as the [USMS YouTube Channel](#).]

Carlton isn't the fastest swimmer in his age group, but he had once hoped he could advance up the rankings. "I kept thinking, if I just hang with it long enough and don't die, I should finally be the fastest swimmer in my age group. But no; swimming is one of those sports that keeps people young, so people who are faster than me now will continue to be faster than me when we are all in our 80's," he laughed.

A few years ago, an injury kept Carlton out of the pool—and on the couch—for a while. As he explained, "I have cervical spine degeneration, so that means that my discs are narrow. [My neck injury was] triggered when I was doing dryland training. It got really bad where I was going to see the doctor a lot and I was basically on the couch in a fetal position; because, just walking around, I was in pain. So, I didn't get in the water for a long time. But, after a lot of doctor visits and lots and lots of physical therapy—and finding the right physical therapist—I finally got healed... I am just very lucky and happy that physical therapy worked, and I could get back in the pool."

Carlton realized he needed to change his dryland routine to avoid further injury. Rather than getting muscle fatigue from doing too many repeats of the same explosive types of exercises the young swimmers were doing, Carlton now does

gentle body weight exercises and calisthenics. Three to five times a week in the pool at Westminster, he swims a 3,000-yard coached workout after his warm-up.

For swim meets, Carlton is strategic when selecting his race events. Although his favorite events are 100 freestyle and butterfly as well as 200 freestyle and individual medley, he doesn't necessarily race them all in the same meet. "I really would like to see how long I can keep pushing myself to do these favorites, but I tend to do more 50's because it's not as exhausting. And, it's something that I can go to a meet, and I can do the sprints and feel good about it, and not feel exhausted and totally spent. If I'm doing what my favorite events are, I am going to feel totally spent at the end of the day," Carlton explained.

The annual Masters swim meet Carlton looks forward to the most is at Auburn University, in February. "Auburn is my big meet. I usually call it 'my Nationals,' because I love the pool, I love the way they run the meet there; they are so on time, but I don't feel rushed... It's just a beautiful pool, and I always feel like I get good times there."

Looking back over his thirteen years as a member of U.S. Masters Swimming, there was one swim meet that stands out for Carlton. "Back when I swam with Swim Atlanta in Roswell, we all made a trip to [2016 Short Course] Nationals in Greensboro together. We rented a house, we had a great time, and we socialized back at the house; it was fantastic. I had a really good time."

Other favorite memories include meeting Olympian swimmers. As Carlton recalled, "For a number of years I swam Eric Shanteau's Swim for Your Life at Lake Lanier, and I got to meet Rowdy Gaines, Rebecca Soni, and Aaron Piersol. And, for a while, Eric's brother Ryan swam at the Roswell club when I swam at Swim Atlanta Roswell. One year, Eric Shanteau came to swim with us for one practice, so that was really cool. Just that kind of stuff all stands out to me."

Since joining Masters, the entire swimming experience has been positive for Carlton. "I love that I can get into a routine. I don't love waking up at 5 in the morning, but I do love having people to train with. I love the coach on deck, following a workout—I love that this is something I can do for the rest of my life. And, the meets are fantastic... I tried swimming on my own for a while before Masters and it's just tough. Getting up at 5 in the morning and being there, and

having other sleepy people there helps motivate me to get there the next time, too.”

Once he gets in the pool and into the groove of his warm-up, what is it about swimming Carlton enjoys most? “I love the peace of it, being in the water, the quiet, but also the strenuous activity. It’s something that you can really get your heartbeat going, it’s an activity that is almost a whole-body workout... but I don’t feel there is the repetitive stress you can get from running; there’s no pounding. You’re in the water, it’s fluid; it just feels like your floating... It makes you feel light; it makes you feel strong, it makes you feel a master of something that is fun but hard.”

Carlton’s swimming goals for the future? “I hope that primarily, my goal would be to not stop, to not get injured, because I am being careful and because I am staying strong and flexible and that I am able to do this for the rest of my life. That’s really my goal; to be able to do this and maintain some health and strength and to grow old and enjoy life.”