

## **East Carolina Masters**

by Casey Charles

note, East Carolina Masters team is now called Greenville Swim Club Masters

I was approached in the summer of 2010 with the idea of having a Master's program in Greenville by Jenna Leggett, a former college swimmer from Canada, who was looking for a place to train while attending graduate school at East Carolina University. Jenna and I set up an initial meeting which was attended by 10-12 recent college graduates. I told them the obstacles of running the team through Minges Natatorium, namely the lack of pool time anytime during the day or night. Audible groans resonated through the small classroom in the Health and Human Performance classroom as I told them practices would almost exclusively be held in the early morning hours, chiefly 5 AM - 6 AM.



To start, we would hold a few afternoon practices to gauge interest. Well, interest was not there - three swimmers showed up to the first practice. The masters team was scrapped after two weeks, but the idea remained and resonated among parents of my club swim team - the Greenville Swim Club (GSC).

I was approached about a week after the disbanding of the small group by Mike Stroud who said he was interested and that he thought he could spread the message to other people around Greenville. Mike delivered on his promise. One month after my first meeting regarding Masters, I was again in a classroom speaking about the idea of running a masters team in Greenville. It was different this time - forty people showed up, no one blinked an eye when I told them we would be practicing in the early hours of the morning. A week later I was standing on deck at 4:50 AM watching swimmers fill the natatorium - 10, then 20, then finally the 34th and last swimmer showed up and we were ready to begin.

As I tell my swimmers, I was always skeptical about how long the Masters team would last in those first few months. I thought swimmers would grow tired of waking up so early. But, it simply never happened. Sure we lost a few swimmers here and there, but the bulk of the team remained intact and swimmers were complimentary of the coaching staff and the practice structure.

In the spring of 2011, ECM competed in NC Masters State Championships placing 6th as a team. In that meet, with only 10 swimmers, we were able to take home over 10 state titles, pick up 8 national cuts, and break one state record. At that point, the staying power of the group was apparent. We were a team and no one was going anywhere.

As doctors, salesmen, attorneys, nurses, teachers, and private business owners, we have come together over the past year to become a formidable training group within the state of North Carolina, and we hope to carry those triumphs into the 2012 USMS National Championships in Greensboro, NC in April.