

## Discovery of the Open Water

**By Steve Shotts**

"Everything is better when I am swimming! I eat better. I sleep better. I feel better. Life is just better!" While I can't count the number of times I've proclaimed such, I am certain that I was right every time I did so. Why then (I've often asked myself) do I stay out of the water for years at a time? I won't even pretend that I have an answer to that question (beyond a list of hackneyed excuses). I will, however, say that I think I have found something that will help me break my pattern.

For me, one of the most difficult parts of Masters swimming has been facing the comparisons I make between my current times and those I remember from years ago. I'm sure many other Masters swimmers face the same problem, but for me it has been a real barrier; making it difficult for me to sustain a training program for more than a season at a time. I recently joked to one of my teammates that, "I have never competed in a USMS event in two consecutive years!"



Then, as I watched the 2012 Olympic 10K Open Water event, I was intrigued. Although I had been a distance freestyle swimmer and USMS 1500m National Champion, I had limited open water experience. Unlike the pool events I would have no comparisons! Moreover, simply completing a 10K swim is an accomplishment – time wouldn't matter. When I found out the 2013 USMS 10K National Championship event was to be held in Las Vegas, I started swimming *again* the next day.

I hadn't ever swum more than a mile in open water, and had 40 weeks to train for the 10K. I swam a few open water events in late 2012, and was starting to develop a training plan when I joined Sailfish Masters (SAIL) in Concord, NC. Beyond the usual benefit of training with other swimmers, the whole team seemed to embrace my goal of swimming 10K. With Coach Cathy's help, I developed a training plan. I swam with the masters group three times per week, tried to get in some extra swims per week, maintained a dry-land training program with JP Fit, and registered for some meets and open water events. I would

compete in USMS 5K Open Water Nationals three weeks prior to the 10K to gain some experience.

Unfortunately, almost all of my training was done in a short course yards pool. That said, I was able to work in some long training sessions. My favorite:

2 x 1000 Free @ 15:00  
4 x 500 Free @ 7:30  
5 x 400 Free @ 6:00  
10 x 200 Free @ 3:00  
20 x 100 Free @ 1:30

My training volume increased over the weeks, wasn't as consistent as it should have been, but peaked out at about 30,000 yards per week. I cut out dry land training about six weeks before the 10K to get more time in the pool, and tapered a week before the 5K.

With the help of some fellow swimmers along the way who gave me training tips, and in spite of a collision in the 10K, I accomplished my goal of completing a 10K swim! I even completed the 10 Mile Kingdom Swim two months later. I am proud of both, but more importantly, I am proud to say that open water swimming and the people I met this year have returned my love of swimming, and soon enough, I won't be able to say, "I have never competed in a USMS event in two consecutive years."