

Meet NC Swimmer John Kortheuer

by Jerry Clark

John Kortheuer (Kah-toy-yah) has been a Masters swimmer since January of 1978. Since then, his total count of USMS and World records, including relays, is an astounding number – 54. He is primarily a breaststroker, but has held numerous freestyle and butterfly records in addition to his breast records. Broken down, the FINA world records are 11 long course meters individual records and 3 short course meters individual records plus 4 long course meters relay records and 4 short course meters relay records. Of course, all these would also be USMS national and NCMS state records. Additionally, his USMS national and NCMS state records are 9 short course yards individual records, 3 short course meters individual records and 2 relay records



John, who with his wife Lillian now lives in High Point, turned 80 this year and immediately set out to attack the 80-84 records. During the short course yards season (Jan 1 – May 31), he established a new 50 breast record of :39.78. Thus far in the Long Course Meters season (Jun 1-Sept 30), he's fallen short of the record but is planning an onslaught on the Short Course Meters (Oct 1-Dec 31) world record at the Autumn SCM meet in Charlotte Oct 29-30.

Among his training partners, John has for years been well known as an expert in finding ways to avoid portions of a workout. First he seems to take his time getting into his suit. He will walk out on the deck just about when the warm up set is ending. Then he'll get in the water and do part of the first set as his warm up. As the workout progressed, we'd sometimes notice him reducing the distance in a set; he'd hang on a wall once in a while and let the others in his lane go down and back, then he'd hook back up behind the last swimmer in the last 50. Some wondered how John seems to always go so fast at big meets. Having been on some medley relays with him, I can attest that when the bell rings, John will be there and will beat the breaststrokers on the other relay teams. He just loves hunting for records!

How's this story for proof: John once entered a short course meters meet in Charlotte but had a conflict develop in the form of being asked to be a pallbearer in his high school friend's funeral. He rushed back to the Aquatic Center after helping carry the heavy box from the hearse up some stairs, into the church, got into his suit and ran out to the pool just as the announcer called his heat. Several swimmers and Bill Appelbaum yelled at the starter to wait a few seconds for John to put on his goggles and cap. No time for a warm-up -- but he set a world record in that 50 breast! John says he couldn't help but wonder if he should forget warm-ups before a meet from then on!

John is a great guy who loves to tell and hear jokes. He also tends to be nervous well before his event at a meet – he finds a private place and sort of goes into a personal séance, then up to the starting block and BOOM, he's headed for the other end. This séance habit often caused anxiety to his relay teammates. We'd have three of us ready to go as our heat neared, but we couldn't find John anywhere; someone would check the restroom or underneath the stands to find him zoning out for the upcoming race. His relay partners have teased him about this over the years.

Good luck John in your quest for 80-84 records.