

Why I Swim

By Bill Davis

I am frequently asked by my non-swimming friends, “Why do you swim?” This question is often posed with an overtly sarcastic tone. I suspect they are just trying to semi-cleverly mask the following questions:



1. Who in their right mind gets up at 5:00 am ON A SATURDAY to jump in cold water?
2. How can you take a kid's sport so seriously as a grown man?
3. What would possess a person to swim in a lake/ocean?
4. Why would any adult parade around in front of anyone in a Speedo?

After a decade of Masters swimming I have come to the conclusion that no matter how weirdly worded, these are actually pretty good questions. The answers speak to the many benefits I receive as a Masters swimmer at SwimMac Carolina in Charlotte, training under Coach Patty Waldron. The answers to the above questions can be summed up in three words – physical, social, and competition.

It is probably impossible to overstate the physical benefits of swimming. According to the CDC, swimming, among other health benefits, decreases the risk of chronic illness, improves the health of people with diabetes and heart disease, and reduces the risk of death by half over inactive people. All these stats are fine for the nerdy crowd, but, to me, swimming makes me feel better, improves sleep, and can, in many cases, improve one's physical appearance. At your next workout session or meet ask yourself where you will see that many fit looking adults in one place.

My first few years of Masters swimming, I trained mostly on my own. It wasn't until I joined a team that I realized the social value of training with a group of people. I'm here to tell you that swimmers make great friends. First of all, we love to eat and drink. Because we work-out so hard we can eat and drink a whole lot. Many teams have frequent social gatherings, holiday parties, family get togethers, etc. Our team's Saturday post-workout breakfast is one of the highlights of my week. Secondly, we are experts at having conversations in 10-15 second intervals. While the average person has to tell stories that last forever, we cut right to the chase and get the facts in between repeats. Ironically, my wife does not find my 10 second stories of much value. Little does she know!

We all train for our own reasons. I train for the competition of swim meets and open water events. Although most Masters swimmers do not attend meets, we all compete in our own ways at the pool, even in practice. Maybe you are trying to do a tough interval or keep up with a faster teammate. Or, maybe you are trying to get a USMS Top Ten at the annual National meet. Competition tests your training and gives you confidence. There is nothing like the achievement of doing something you've never done before.

As to why we wear Speedos, well that's just what we wear and our non-swimmer friends probably won't ever really understand that. Then again, I am completely unclear as to why runners wear knee high compression hosiery or golfers wear magical titanium wrist bands. I guess every sport has its mysteries.