



In Pacific Swimming, many successful coaches started their journey through the sport with their own swim career. From club to college swimming or attending the Olympics, these coaches have each had a unique experience that shapes the way they coach their swimmers today.



Zone 1 North: Dana Kirk

Dana Kirk has currently been head coach of a site at Palo Alto Stanford Aquatics (PASA) for 8 years. She swam for Stanford Aquatics, and attended the 2004 Olympics in Athens, Greece, for the 200m butterfly.

Grace Tramack: *Where and why did you begin swimming?*

Dana Kirk: I started swimming at the Bremerton YMCA because my dad was a swimmer. Not a super hard core swimmer, but he swam, and we lived on Oyster Bay in Washington. He wanted us to be able to swim and he wanted us to be able to enjoy the Bay and to not have to worry about us. He put us in swim lessons right away.

GT: *Who or what was inspirational to you during your swim career?*

DK: I think each different coach that I had was inspirational in a different way. It was kind of like going through the stages of what was important [for me] at that time. I joined the swim team because my dad challenged me to a race, and I wanted to beat him. I was 5, and I didn't beat him, but he said he had to really work for it to not let me beat him. He put me on the swim team and I had this coach named Bonnie who owned a ranch in Washington, and she was really fun. When I was young she would do these really fun challenges where if you were swimmer of the week you got to wear a special cap and if you were swimmer of the month you got to take home a bear, so the different short-term challenges were really good at that time.

As I got older, the challenges got better, and the coaching got better. When I was in high school I had a coach who was all about [the 5 D's: Direction, Desire, Dedication, Determination, Discipline], and he

basically said learn to work; learn to enjoy the suffer, and really celebrate the hard work that you do. At that point, it was something that really inspired me to keep going and to get better. Success was helpful too. Being able to make a national team when I was 16 and being able to go was a really great way to keep everything worth it.

Then there was Richard Quick in college. I think when you swim for somebody like [him], he instills something in you like "you have to do it for Richard." He was just that kind of person.

GT: *How would you describe your coaching philosophy?*

DK: I think my coaching philosophy has changed a lot from when I first started. A lot of it comes down to being a little more individual for the kids that are in the pool. Sometimes I hear of coaches that write their workouts out months or weeks in advance. I try to know what the general theme of the day is going to be, but I match it to the kids that show up. Rather than matching it to what the group needs, I try to match it to the kids that not only show up in the water but show up to the practice. I think there's a really big difference between showing up to practice and showing up to get work done. [There have been] some practices that change drastically half-way through, where we think we're aiming towards one goal and then half-way through the practice it just changes. A lot of that will be that this practice was written for a specific person in mind, or this practice was going with a specific group of people in mind, and they just didn't care that day, so it'll shift to the others. I believe in quality over quantity, I believe in race pace and I believe that training heart rate is more important than [heavy] yardage. I don't believe in training for a long period of time without a specific goal. There are specific goals in each set that I want the kids to achieve.



GT: *How have your past coaches or experiences shaped the way you coach your swimmers?*

DK: Watching other coaches [was also influential]. I swam for a coach who was very unpredictable. At swim meets we would assign a kid to follow him around to make sure he didn't get in fights with other coaches, and that he wouldn't get kicked off deck. That's something I would never want to put my kids through. I hope that I am fairly predictable [to my kids], where [they] you can tell, "oh, okay, we're getting into the danger zone, she's going to get really mad at us for this." In general, the likelihood of a surprise outburst is very low.

I think that the expectations that I was held to when I was younger is something that I really valued. I hold these same expectations for the kids that I coach. Not everyone should be held to the same standard. I think that's something that a lot of people don't really understand, but it's true. You're going to have to hold different kids to different standards based on their abilities. So some kids get mad because I'm allowing [one swimmer] to breathe every two strokes but I'm not allowing them to do it. And the difference is that's pretty much one kid's ability, and that's not [theirs]. That was something that I grew up with, so the coaches' expectations of me were different than others and I think that made me better. On this team we're getting a little bit more towards age-dominant distribution of kids, but in general, I don't believe in that and I never will. I don't believe in the marketing that 10-year olds should stay with other 10-year olds and 11-year olds should stay with 11-year olds. I think that you should go to the group that you will have the most success with. That being said, I don't think 11-12's should be doing morning practices, so we'll never put an 11-12 in a group that has a required morning practice. But we will put a 14-year old in a group with an 18- or 19-year old and say "get it done; we're not going to put you here if we don't think you'll be successful." At the same time, we're not going to put a 16- or 17-year old in the most advanced group because that's how old they are, because that's not going to be successful either. It's a bit more allowing people to blossom at whatever speed they're going to blossom at.



Zone 2:
Richard Thornton

With more than 20 years of coaching experience, Coach Rich Thornton has been head coach of San Ramon Valley Aquatics (SRVA) since 1984. He swam competitively during his youth, continuing his swim career in college at UC Berkeley. In 1980, he qualified for the US Olympic Team in the 200 free with a time of 1:51.05.

Q: *How would you describe your coaching philosophy?*

Richard Thornton: For developing young adults, we are looking for optimum development as a person and as an athlete. From a coaching perspective, we are a speed though endurance program and we stick strictly to an 80/20 breakdown in our training intensities.

Q: *What/who were some influential experiences/coaches/teammates when you swam growing up?*

RT: This is hard to answer because the list is so long. The list starts with great PacSwim coaches from the 70s and continues with all the coaches I swam for throughout my career. Then the list ends with all the great coaches that I have been around during my first 30 years of coaching.

Every coach has something that can help you. Even coaches that you do not totally agree with will have some little thing that can make you faster or make you a better coach.

Every swimmer I trained with or competed against at the highest levels, gave me something to learn.

Q: *What is some advice you would like to share based on your experience as a coach and a swimmer?*

RT: The best advice I can give is to go for it and don't get scared when you become fast. Be smart, be tough and always enjoy being successful.



Zone 1 South: Mark Taliaferro

Caitlyn Koo: *When and where did your swimming career begin?*

Mark Taliaferro: My swimming career began in July of 1976 at the Palo Alto Swim Club.

CK: *What motivated you to start swimming?*

MT: The '76 Summer Olympics.

CK: *Is there anything specific about that Olympics that motivated you to start swimming?*

MT: I watched the swimming. I would stay up... you don't know this obviously, you weren't born but the Olympics were on at 11:00 at night and my parents would catch me every night watching the Olympics and tell me to go to bed but I would tell them, "after the swimming."

CK: *What motivated you to become a swim coach?*

MT: That was a complete accident actually. I went to San José Aquatics to congratulate my former age group coach on getting the head coaching job and he asked me if I wanted to help with a three-week program: the program called Introduction to Competitive Swimming. And so I'd just been out of school and I said, "Sure, great. I'll help you for three weeks" and I never really stopped coaching after that.

CK: *How would you describe your coaching philosophy?*

MT: That's a loaded question. How would I describe my coaching philosophy? Well, it's changed over the years but right now it would be about focusing on teaching the fundamentals and making sure that kids understand that swimming is just a game and it's for fun and we only go [swim] to learn how to be great people and not just great swimmers.

CK: *Who influenced your coaching philosophy? Are there any coaches (or other people in general) that you look up to?*

MT: Yeah absolutely. My coach at San José Aquatics named Jonty Skinner and he just cares so much about swimming and he gave us so much knowledge that it was like you were just armed. You just knew more than anybody else so it was kind of easy to swim, you knew

what you were doing the whole time and you really felt in control. And then a guy named Bill Thompson who was the guy who gave me my first coaching job that I went to congratulate but he was also my coach at Santa Clara Swim Club when I was eleven or twelve. [He was] one of the better technicians as far as age group coaching goes that the sport of swimming ever had.

CK: *What would you like all of your swimmers to take away from your coaching?*

MT: Well, I would like them to take away that I was a fun coach but a guy that always wanted them to reach their potential



Zone 4: Brian Holm

By Allison Kulikowski

The Local Swimming Community has changed

drastically in the past forty years, as seen by many coaches that began as swimmers competing. Head coach of Reno Aquatic Club, Brian Holm, has been a part of many teams as both athlete as well as coach within the LSC and has used each experience as a learning opportunity.

Brian started as a Summer League swimmer for Dewing Park, but was recruited to Walnut Creek Aquabears in 1989 to train for and compete in the two-hundred free relay with teammates Jim Verellas, John Jay Verhuel, and Kent Anderson. The boys set the National Age Group Record for the 17-18 age group at the Pacific Senior Championships in December. Following that, Brian quit until Junior Nationals in March 1990, and finished his high school swimming career with De La Salle. In total, Brian trained and competed in USA Swimming for four months during high school. "The experience was amazing," he claims, continuing on to say that that relay record was one of his favorite memories, especially the video they shot "before, during, and after." Head coach of the Aquabears at the time was Mike Troy who was "a gold medalist 1960 Olympics, a world record holder, first swimmer on the cover of Sports



Illustrated, three-tour Navy Seal in Vietnam, and 100% Irish!” He soon became Brian’s biggest influence and is the reason why he is coaching in Pacific

Swimming now. “He was crazy, but an incredible motivator; he was intense,” Brian commented.

From high school, Brian attended Chico State with the original intention of being on the ski team. It was Mike Troy that convinced him to be on the swim team, though, only for it to be cut after his freshman year. Though “relieved... to ski full time,” he soon realized he missed swimming and “felt [he] could do more in the sport,” so he transferred to Diablo Valley College. With all his colleagues that he raced against in Summer League, high school, and club on one team for the first time, it soon became “the greatest experience [Brian] ever had.” He claims, “That is where I learned how to train,” and experienced his fastest times ever under “greatest coaches I ever swam for,” Bruce Wallace and Leonard. After his sophomore semester at DVC, he rejoined the Aquabears as to train while finishing an AA degree. He explained, “I did not take it serious enough and missed out on a great opportunity.” He then went to the University of Hawaii on a full ride scholarship, but only swam the one year due to coaching challenges. “I never got to finish my last year of college swimming eligibility. I never got to stay in one place for more than one year or be a returning teammate or team member for any program for four years. So I went to Colorado and skied it off,” he remorsefully stated.

In 1995, Brian moved back to Walnut Creek to train full time for Olympic Trials. Sadly, he missed the cut in the fifty freestyle and retired. From 1991-2003, he coached full time for the Aquabears, Rudgear Meadows Swim Team, Dewing Park, and Las Lomas High School. In these years, Brian matured and experienced a “changed demeanor,” which he attributes to the rising success of his swimmers. “By 2001 I had won all the league meets with Dewing Park and high school sections with Las Lomas which lead to my hiring at Roseburg, Oregon 2003-2006.” His swimmers there qualified for Trials

and reached finals at Nationals to become world ranked. A pull home encouraged Brian to move back to the Bay Area and take the head coaching position at Blackhawk Swim Team. Since this was not a year-round USA Swimming team, he decided to take a job offer at the Pleasanton Seahawks under very successful head coach Steve Morsilli in 2011. Brian coached the elite 11-13 year olds and the varsity group. He exclaimed, “I loved my two groups and had a lot of success: National Age Group records, Pacific Records, and USA Top 10 as well as number one rankings were in my groups.” His swimmers even inspired him to start swimming again for the Tri Valley Masters where he experienced near as much success as his times in college. Brian has been coaching for Reno Aquatic Club since 2013, and has taken on more administrative duties while fostering a “more competitive atmosphere.”

Brian has been involved in Pacific Swimming for many years, and seen many beneficial changes come about, including the many resources to swimmers. “I was just a tall, skinny kid who was fast in the fifty free” and “considered more of a wild athlete,” he explained. The thing is that there were only two swimmers at the time who trained professionally. After attending meets such as US Open and Senior Nationals, he was forced to stop because there was “no extended team for swimmers after college,” forcing graduated seniors to hang up their goggles. There are also many tiers now for meet standards than there were when Brian was swimming, such as C/B/A, Senior meets, Junior Olympics, Sectionals, Futures, and Grand Prix. These stepping goals have helped swimmer stay engaged to train all year, and encourages swimming in one of thousands of college programs. “If USS swimmers can help themselves, they need to do everything they can to research their potential college program and make sure it is secure,” he warns.

Through his extensive experience, he truly believes, “USS swimming is so important for young athletes’ development, responsibility, accountability and experience” and adds, “I just wish I took swimming more seriously.”



Julietta Camahort: *What is your general approach to coaching and what effect do you hope it has on your swimmers?*

Chris Rogers: My general approach to coaching consists of two parts – technique and endurance. First on a technique approach, I am constantly asking myself “What are the things that a particular swimmer is doing to help propel them through the water?” And how are the sets we do in practice, allowing a swimming to strengthen and develop that efficient stroke?

I believe that there are many ways to swim and do not look to force a singular mold onto all swimmers. However, I do believe there are things that a swimmer can do that will create inefficiencies that may slow them down. This is a very broad outlook, as there are physical, mental and social factors that all contribute to this. But I believe that as a coach, my goal is to identify and address as many of these factors as possible.

From there, the goal I have with each swimmer is to increase their personal efficiencies and strengths through varied sets, this is the endurance that I mentioned above. Every set we do offers the swimmers an opportunity to work on a specific aspect of their races. How those sets interact with each other, be it short rest, repeat efforts, drilling, high intensity kicking, focused long swims, all test a swimmer's endurance in one way or another but also allow a swimmer to work on their strengths. As a coach this means I may be looking for different swimmers to be emphasizing different things during their sets. I might be less concerned with an underwater specialists' overall time or pacing in a 400 freestyle so long as they are doing good turns and long underwaters.

It is my hope that my swimmers become self-aware, and are quick to communicate. First, be critical of yourself – during practices you should always be aware of what you do well, are you a strong kicker, great at sculling, do you come out ahead from a turn, etc., and be proud of your strengths and play to them as best you can.

Likewise, be critical of your weaknesses and identify areas you can improve on as a swimmer – do you breathe off your walls, leave early on sets, pull on the lane line that sort of thing and challenge yourself to improve on those weak areas. However for this method to be truly successful, communication is vital between the swimmer and coach. A coach has to understand what the swimmer is doing, and the swimmer has to understand when a coach is redirecting them down another successful path.

JC: *How has your coaching philosophy evolved over the course of your coaching career?*

CR: When I started coaching out of college, I emphasized developing an efficient stroke above all else. I held back on building endurance and racing in practice, as I believed that it would be counterproductive to risk reinforcing bad habits in practice. However, in time, many of the kids I coached, and even I, myself grew frustrated with the differing rates of stroke change within the practice groups and felt held back in many ways. Since then, I have found a balance between pushing the intensity in practice, while reinforcing a swimmer's good habits (personal strengths), and still nudging the swimmer to make small improvements over time. I have found that this approach keeps my swimmers more interested in practice and keeps the sport fresh and fun. Again, because of this philosophy change, I have found that stroke progression is not necessarily a linear path to be followed but something that happens in leaps and bounds.

JC: *How has your background in swimming shaped your coaching style?*

CR: As a young coach I draw heavily on my experiences as a swimmer. Looking back at my own development I try to teach the same valuable lessons that I once learned and pushed me to excel as a swimmer.

I had the opportunity to swim for Cal (CAL-PC), Bluefish (ABF-NE), and Gators (BGSC-NE). While with each team, I was fortunate to experience success as an individual and teammate at the national and international level. Yet, each program was vastly different in the way they were organized, coaching style and team culture. Bluefish under Chuck Batchelor, had a much more “traditional” coaching

THE OLYMPIC CLUB



style – high volume paired with high intensity. As swimmers we took pride in working harder than the competition, and Chuck’s approach of getting in our face only fired me up more to work even harder. While at Bluefish I learned that hard work and swimming “through the pain”, can produce incredible sensations of pride and satisfaction. The swimmers I trained with will to this day, meet and reminisce about those days, those 25k yard Thanksgiving days and will always carry with us that pride in what we did together.

While swimming at Gator, I learned the importance of mental preparation and strength. We regularly met as a team and discussed the importance of never letting self-doubt into your mind. Daily mentality can have a sharp impact on your training and racing, either in a positive or negative way and as rational people, we all have the ability choose which “voice” to listen to - the voice that makes us stronger and pushes us further, or the voice that wants to find the easier way out and quit.

And finally at Cal, where I finished my career as a swimmer, I learned the importance of organization and opportunity cost. A cluttered mind and home is never as efficient nor productive as one would like. Dave Durden is truly exceptional in his attention to detail while keeping the big picture in perspective. Over his desk hangs a massive four year Olympic cycle calendar. Every practice, month, season and year has a goal and purpose building toward the end of the cycle. Dave would have the team, unpack and “move into” the hotel each travel trip. Build our daily routine in preparation to swim fast in a similar setting to how we lived and trained. Having the opportunity to see and understand how every detail can impact a swimmer, Greg taught me the value of moral support. He was the backbone of the team, where if there was an issue, you knew you could talk to him. As an athlete, his presence on the deck was calming and supportive.

JC: *How would you say coaching has changed since you were a swimmer?*

CR: When I was a swimmer growing up in New England, information was still less accessible than it is today. What a team was doing across the country

could have gone completely unnoticed in my area. Now with the advent of the internet and how readily available information is, swimmers and coaches have a better understanding of what is going on at various other programs. Even if they may not fully understand how certain stroke techniques are implemented, people are more aware that there are different ways to swim a stroke effectively.

I also believe that coaching has shifted over the years to become less focused on times on a page and more on an overall approach. By that I mean kids these days seem to need to experience success frequently. They need a “smarter” approach, one that is more focused on technique and short goals so they never truly fail. No matter if there was little to no effort in the swim, swimmers expect a coach to offer a “silver bullet” answer. In my opinion this has necessitated a softer approach in coaching.

Contributing Athlete Representatives



Grace Tramack
Zone 1N

Brandon Shi
Zone 2



Caitlyn Koo
Zone 1S

Allison Kulikowski
Zone 4



Julietta Camahort
Zone 3

