

North Carolina: the State of Swimming

By Jon Blank



Summer of 2014 has been a banner season for North Carolina Swimming! Two NC cities have earned recognition as "Top 50 Swimming Cities in the USA" per Swimming World magazine. Raleigh-Durham peaked at #3, while the Charlotte-Gastonia-Concord area also achieved a Top 25 ranking. The report ranked Raleigh-Durham area for its strong municipal facilities and commitment to high-quality competitors. From the press release, Raleigh-Durham "offers access to a large number of pool facilities for robust summer league participation, plus boasts a high percentage of top-performing athletes in USA Swimming competitions". Charlotte, North Carolina's largest city, and its environs were also ranked in the top 25. Charlotte-Gastonia-Concord is the home of the Mecklenburg Aquatic Club, which under the tutelage of David Marsh, continues to attract top-flight USA swimming athletes such as Ryan Lochte, Cullen Jones, and Micha Lawrence.

Per the article, "the ranking index was developed through a comparison of each city's swim-related attributes relative to the overall U.S. population. Key elements included the number of current USA swimming members, number of U.S. Masters (adult) swimmers and number of USA Swimming Clubs. The study also looked at the number of qualifying swimmers for high level competitions like the Speedo Champions Series, Speedo Junior Nationals, Phillips 66 National Swimming Championships, Olympic Trials and the Olympic Games, as well as Sports & Fitness Industry Association (SFIA) participation data, including the numbers of competitive and fitness swimmers, and the number of swim facilities open to the public in each city". The North Carolina LMSC deserves kudos for strong Masters enrollment and participation in our sport at all levels!

North Carolina Masters Swimming is also a very competitive regional club. At the recent USMS Long Course Nationals held in at College Park Maryland, North Carolina Masters won the combined regional team title as well as taking the men's team title. The men's 240-279 team (Jon Klein, Neal Vestal, Don Gilchrist, and Paul Trevisan), set a new World Record of 2:01.60 in the 200 LCM Medley Relay, bettering the old world record by over a second. Other NC national champions include Beverly Amick in the 100 LCM butterfly (W60-64), Filippo Porco in the 400 LCM IM (M35-39), Klein (triple victor in M55-59 LCM 50 freestyle and 50/100 backstroke), and Steve Barnett (double winner in M80-84 50/100 breaststroke). In addition, the mixed 200-239 200 LCM medley relay of Celia Wolff, Mary Dore, Klein and Vestal scored a win.

Just as impressive were the efforts of a smaller contingent of North Carolina Masters at the FINA World Championships in Montreal Quebec. In addition to winning for individual events in the women's 40-44 division, Erika Braun paced championship winning relay teams, highlighted by victory in the women's 120-159 freestyle relay (Kerry Lindahl, Alicia Uhl, Erika Braun and Celia Wolff). Despite less-than-ideal venues, such as no warm-up pools, suboptimal transportation planning, and spectator/competitor access at the temporary pool site, one competitor cheerfully reported, "12 minute walk before races was a challenge, but we made the best of it and still had fun".

In summary, North Carolina is indeed the State of Swimming! May the future hold as much promise and success for all of us who enjoy our sport!