

LESSONS WITH THE LEGENDS

SWIMMING WORLD CONTINUES A SERIES IN WHICH TOP COACHES SHARE SOME OF THE SECRETS OF THEIR SUCCESS.

BY MICHAEL J. STOTT

SPONSORED BY



JOHN COLLINS

A lawyer by education and well-versed in modern aquatic training methods, John Collins is well into his fourth decade as a decorated swim coach. As such, he has been a mentor to more than a dozen Olympians, world and national champions such as Rick Carey, Lea Loveless, Tobie Smith, Cristina Teuscher, Jenny Thompson and Cody Miller. He also directed NCAA D-III Manhattanville College aquatics for 22 years.

Coached by his father and schooled by Doc Counsilman at Indiana, Collins became an NCAA butterfly All-American and USA national team member before earning a J.D. from Fordham University. Law degree aside, Collins followed his father into the swim coaching business. For years, he ran workouts from a six-lane pool in Larchmont, N.Y., home base for the team established by his mother and father in 1945.

Under the elder Collins, many Olympians—including Ford Konno, Mike Troy, Lynn Burke, Carl Robie and Kevin Berry—trained and broke American records while swimming out of Badger Swim Club. Fabled coaches Red Silvia, Counsilman, Forbes and Ursula Carlile, Sam Herford and Frank Guthrie were also frequent visitors.

Quest for excellence via middle-distance training remains a Badger staple. At a 1996 ASCA World Clinic, he told an audience that his program was “very aerobic, middle of the road distance-wise, emphasizing versatility and pulling. I do less kicking, strength training and anaerobic speed work than most programs,” he said. “It has a no-pansies atmosphere, and it provides a challenge in every workout.”

In 2018, he still advocates eight to 12 workouts per week. The addition of Lehman College’s 50-meter indoor pool, coupled with Badger’s “blue jewel” 50-yard outdoor facility guarantees long course training year-round.

Collins was a U.S. national team coach from 1984-2007 and head coach for the 1995 Pan American Games, 1997 Pan Pacific Championships and the 2001 and 2007 World Championships. He was also named 1983 ASCA Coach of the Year and has been inducted into the Metropolitan Swimming, Westchester County Sports and ASCA halls of fame.

A LEGENDARY PERSPECTIVE

Q. SWIMMING WORLD: *To what extent has your coaching*

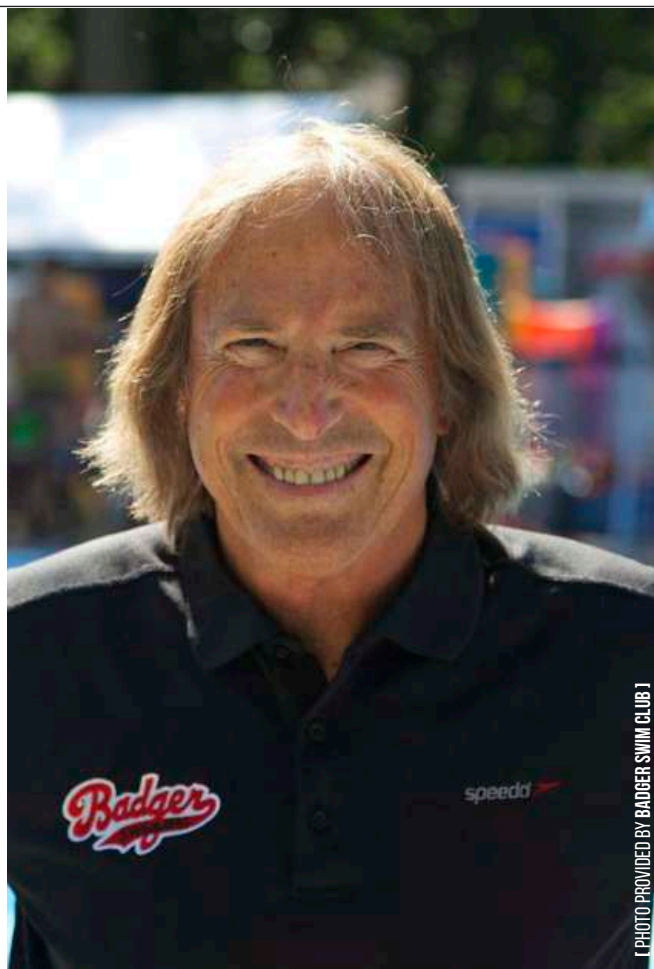


PHOTO PROVIDED BY BADGER SWIM CLUB

changed over the years?

A. COACH JOHN COLLINS: Not much. I’m still learning and have picked up a lot by osmosis. The Badger program has always been, and still is, a developmental program aimed at producing national-caliber swimmers.

To be good, you need to train extremely diligently...and smartly. I do believe there’s “more than one way to skin a cat.” I still do some of the sets that we did in the ’70s—like the timed 3300, 10 x 400 backstroke or 50 x 100—but not as frequently. The hard work is always the underlying element.

One thing has changed, however. I used to dictate what I thought the swimmers needed to do to be great. Nowadays, they tell me. Coaching is a challenge, and to be successful, you have to be a thinker, a problem solver as well as an observer of the world around you.

You’ve had some pretty good post-grad swimmers.

Yes. I trained Rick Carey for three years after he graduated. We had a good group of post-grads leading up to Sydney—Richelle and David Fox, Fabiola Molina, Lea (Loveless) Maurer, Cristina Teuscher and Jenny Thompson during her comeback in 2002-04. All were great to work with.

I have always felt comfortable training the older swimmers, and they have been a positive influence on the younger ones. Having national champions and some of the world’s best swimmers in everyday workouts is one of the key elements that has made Badger Badger.

How have you addressed the needs of pro swimmers?

In 2014, we established a pro group by forming Badger into a

501(c)3 corporation. We marshaled our alumni and put together a small pro group led by longtime Badger Ryan Feeley, Cody Miller, Zane Grothe and a few others.

Badger's Road to Rio project provided funding, logistical and coaching support. For the most part, the athletes trained with their college programs. They swam in New York at our short and long course senior championships, and I took them to all the Grand Prix meets, as well as international competitions.

The pros interacted with my senior group at all those competitions, attended Badger fund-raising events and ran clinics for the Badger age groupers. They became part of the Badger family. It was a mutually beneficial relationship.

At the 2016 Olympic Trials, Badger had 17 swimmers, and less than half were post-grads. Cody and Zane both won their first national titles swimming for Badger. It was a hugely successful experiment and heightened my own experience as a coach.

Is it harder to make champions now?

Of course. The world of swimming has exploded. It's bigger, more competitive, professional, business-oriented and media-driven.

It is still possible to take high schoolers and make them champions before they get to college. I also realize that very few college swimmers return to their club roots once they start their college program. And there's the rub and urgency to get your swimmers to the national level by the time they're 17-18 because you probably won't see them again.

Add to that the hundreds of older post-grad/professionals who

can almost always beat high school-aged swimmers. That means you need to find that gold nugget to have any chance nowadays. I am certain our Olympic team in 2020 will be predominantly a professional team.

Haven't you trained in odd-size pool configurations?

Yes. Pools come in all sizes, and there have been success stories from every size imaginable—20, 33-1/3, 55 yards, etc. The key is adequate pool time, and where there's a will there's a way. I've always felt that training in a subpar facility was an advantage.

Your hardest trainer ever was...

I've coached a lot of hard workers. Most Badgers have a timed 3300, 50 x 100 on 1:10 and 10 x 400 IM as part of their DNA. However, my fastest trainer was Rick Carey, who could, almost weekly, come close to breaking an American record in practice.

Rick was a dominant performer for 10 years, both in practice and in competition. He understood the importance and the urgency of the clock in everyday training, besides being a mercurial performer who always wanted to win. ❖

.....
Michael J. Stott is an ASCA Level 5 coach whose Collegiate School (Richmond, Va.) teams won nine state high school championships. He was named a 2017 recipient of NISCA's Outstanding Service Award.



ver · sa · tile (adj). 1. Power Bags



www.swimmersbest.com