

Bill Kansas - Hall of Fame Story – Class of 2018

Minnesota Masters Swimming has been blessed with many swimmers who share National-Class swimming excellence with World-Class enthusiasm and generosity, but none finer than Bill Kansas. Bill's swimming record is Hall of Fame worthy in its own right: Over a 43-year span, Bill has 38 individual and 19 relay USMS national Top-10 swims, 12 individual and 12 relay Minnesota "State" Records, 3 All-American Relay swims, and 4 FINA Top 10 Relay swims.

This remarkable career began at age 6, in a backstroke race at the St. Paul YMCA. Progressing through high school, where he captained the St. Paul Central team. After college and a decade and a half of work, Bill returned to swimming in his late 30s, after seeing a note in the newspaper. "I bought a suit, finished last in every race, but was still first in my age group!" Soon after, he joined the Northern Shores Aquatic Club in Shoreview, where he trained and competed with Hall of Famers Roger Bosveld, Jim Pelissier, Ray Hakomaki, and Mamie Brown. It was then, in December of 1975, that he set his first State Record, in the 200 Breast. The next year, at the Nationals in St. Louis, Bill launched his National-Class career with third in the 50 Breast and was National Runner-up in the 100 and 200 Breast. Similar success followed him to the 1977 Nationals in Spokane, where his multiple Top-3 finishes helped lift the Northern Shores team to 5th place overall. During this time, Bill recalls fierce competition in the breaststroke events with teammate Harry Brown, Mamie Brown's son, "Harry would win the 50, I'd win the 200, and the 100 was really competitive!"

Bill then gracefully entered his self-described "tennis, skiing, and ballroom dancing phase," but returned to swimming—and national success—at the 1993 Nationals at the U of M Aquatic Center, where he recorded four top-5 finishes. Bill's most recent return to swimming was in 2013, and he has graced our meets and record books since then.

But even more special than his National-class swimming résumé is the genuine optimism and generosity Bill brings to every meet, be it in a relay swim, a cheer, a special good luck wish, or simple displays of sportsmanship. He never leaves the water before all competitors in the event have finished, and officials hold a special place in his heart and are the recipient of his thanks at every meet. Bill has the willingness to swim anything, anywhere, for the good of the team. Bill loved the relays, because "it gave me the chance to meet more people."

You will rarely see Bill without his infectious smile, even after a 200 Breast, 400 Medley Relay, and a 400 IM back-to-back to back—with an enthusiasm that pegs the "Positive Energy Meter". Yet, he makes that level of fun fit perfectly with his good friend and fellow Hall of Famer Pete Magee's description of Bill as "one of the toughest swimmers I have ever known."