

James Kochendorfer Hall of Fame Story – Class of 2016

James's first experience with swimming was certainly not an indication of his amazing success in the sport. When James was 9 years old his mother enrolled him in swimming lessons out of fear of her child being uncomfortable around water in a state so abundant with lakes. To pass his first swimming lesson he just needed to swim width of the pool. He made it but in the longest path possible by taking a turn and ending up on the other end of the pool. The distance was greater than a single width of the pool and was considered sufficient for passing the class. Even at a young age he was motivated to succeed. Little did he know at the time what impact that event would have on his life as it was his introduction to swimming.

James started competitive swimming with the South East Metro Sharks in Cottage Grove founded by Jerry and Sharon Simpson and coached by Jerry Simpson and Duane Sorenson. He still has fond memories of training in the outdoor pool in Cottage Grove.

James went to high school in South St. Paul and swam for their team. Swimming talent runs in the family as his sister was one of the first swimmers to ever swim for the high school team. The high school didn't have a pool so for 3 years the team was bussed to the St. Paul YWCA pool and was later bussed to the W. St. Paul YMCA pool. His entire high school swimming experience was being bussed to pools in order to compete.

College swimming for James started at Macalester after turning down an opportunity to swim for Bemidji. At this point in his swimming career he focused on the 400 IM and distance freestyle events. He still has memories of the long 15,000 yard workouts he endured during his stint at Macalester. The next three years of his college career found him at Bemidji the college he initially turned down. This is when his focus switched to Breaststroke and found his true calling. Reducing the yardage nearly in half at workouts at Bemidji helped him make the decision to switch to breaststroke. At this time his focus was on the 200 breaststroke and 400 medley relay swimming the breastwork leg. He has a bad memory of his senior nationals meet swimming in the 200 breaststroke. He felt physically prepared being in great shape but just didn't have his head in the game and didn't perform well. Even with a disappointing event it certainly did not stop him from continuing his success in breaststroke events as a Minnesota Masters swimmer.

Slightly after college James continued to swim but switched his focus to Triathlons and Marathons. His early Masters training was at the Southdale YMCA. One of his first great Masters successes was at a pool that had a faulty clock display. At age 27 he swam a 59.98 in the 100 Breaststroke witnessed by several of his Bemidji Alumni friends. Unfortunately the time was not recorded as an official Masters time but he proudly hung on to the paper printout of his time for 15 years.

Moving to his home and raising kids for the next 7 – 8 years prevented him from competing in Masters swimming and forced him to take a bit of a break from training and competing. Swimming was always in his blood and I am sure looking at that 59.98 printout kept him motivated even with the break.

James heard about a group swimming with Bob Dykoski at the Wayzata West middle school. He started swimming with the group and realized with a great group, some good swim training 3 times a week and training with weights you can quickly get back to the conditioning and mental state required to compete at a high level again. He still trains with this group nearly 20 years later and is clearly grateful for the camaraderie and training he has experienced with this group after all this time.

James has had amazing success since his return to swimming with Minnesota Masters. He has accomplished 61 individual USMS top ten times since 1990 and 5 top ten relay times. In addition to his USMS top ten times, James was recently added to the FINA All-Time Top Ten list in his current age group for the 50 Breaststroke in long course meters, a very rare and prestigious accomplishment.

Clearly James is not slowing down and still has an incredible passion for training and competing. Swimming is a very important part of his life and always will be. The physical and mental health benefits, friendships and personal pride he gains from swimming will keep him in the game for a long time. James mother said to him as a young kid "you are addicted to swimming" and his response to that was "you are absolutely right and there is nothing wrong with that." I think that sums up his passion for the sport and the drive that keeps him competing and continuing to be so successful.