

Roger Bosveld's Hall of Fame Story - 2014

Written October 2014

Born in 1940, Roger started swimming at about age four. His family moved to Red Oak, Iowa in 1945. There, all summer long for many years, the town's kids would show up at this 40 by 80 yard city pool. It was the summer's hang out. You were only allowed in the deep end, where all the fun was happening, when you could swim across the 40 yard width of the pool. He was able to do so by age six, mostly teaching himself. Imagine all day every day at the pool as a kid, getting in for a dime and getting lunch for another dime. That was Roger's early summer life.

When he arrived at elementary school and realized he couldn't run. Polio had swept through his town and he caught a mild case. It was basically ignored. He had to teach himself to run, but still had a hard time doing it. So he picked a sport that did not require much leg. He will tell you today, "Legs waste oxygen".

When his family moved to Mason City, Iowa in 1950, he discovered there was no swim team through the school system. No high school or middle school swimming. So he started his own team at the YMCA, at age 14. By age 15 he was quite competitive. In those days the longest race was 200 yards. But then there were the lakes. Roger's first lake race was at Clear Lake in Iowa in 1956. It was a 2 miles long race. He took 2nd place being beat by 2 minutes by none other than Earl Ellis, Iowa University's swim captain and best distance swimmer. Remember he was only 16 at the time.

Roger will tell you that there was very little parental support for his swimming. He had to hitchhike to the annual AAU Iowa state meets. As a senior in high school, after hitchhiking, he impressed some college coaches enough to receive two college scholarship offers. He selected and swam at Nebraska as distance freestyler, at least until his senior year. Nebraska had imported a couple of Olympic caliber distance guys from Japan, so Roger took up backstroke and IM. The Individual Medley had just become four strokes, but a lot of variations were still allowed in the fly. If you have been watching, you will have noticed there are back and fly state records and placements on national top ten lists sprinkled through his mostly freestyle rankings.

So why did Roger start in swimming Masters. It was Tom Hodgson's encouragement to come out and swam in Shoreview. This is where Masters Swimming in Minnesota really started. By 1979, Roger recorded his first pool National Top Ten Time. Twenty-seven years later he recorded his 25 National Top Ten time. That was in 2006. But, what Roger really loved was open water swimming. When asked the question, "What is your favorite event?" he answered "one where I do not see the starting line and the finish line at the same time." He loved the Lake Alexandria lake competitions.

How was Roger able to swim so long? He will tell you he took breaks – coaching break. He would stop swimming and coach for a while. Roger was a good swim coach. The best story was some advice he gave to one of his young swimmers at one of her first lake swims. It was a swim along the shore in a lake known for its weeds. He leans over and said "You are going to do really well today". "Why's that she asked?" "Because you are not afraid of weeds". Karen (Bosveld Zemlin) jumped in and did really well and has been doing really well ever since.

Roger like lake swimming so much that he invented the "family relay" event. And when there was not an event long enough, he invented that too. He swam across Lake Mille Lac, (with Karen). It took him 12 hours and 26 minutes to swim that 21 miles at age 67 - IRONMAN!!. Then he trained for the English Channel. Qualifying requires doing the "6-60". A six-hour swim in water 60 degrees or colder – no wetsuits allowed. In 2008, at the age of 68, he battled the 7 to 9 foot waves for hours in his channel attempt, but wisely climbed on the boat when he knew it was too far to go in those conditions.

Roger made his mark in distance swimming. For the pool swimmers that do not pay much attention to sponsored and sanctioned open water events, there are many through out Minnesota and the country. The fastest in an age group in an event is given the All-American designation. Roger has made All-American status five times in the Masters career ---- SO FAR. One secret, train a thousand miles in a year.

Roger calls his best race when he broke 20 minutes in the 1650. He also continues to show his competitive spirit as he recently bragged about tying Tom Hodgson in a lake race. When the officials handed Tom the trophy, Tom turned around and handed it to Roger. Roger also brags about beating Paul Windrath in a 10k race, (although only once and it was Paul's first lake race). Notice, Roger still has that competitive mind set.

Also in the 1970 and 80's, you should know that Roger ran Minnesota Masters when it was a one-person operation. The enrollment then was up to 225 participates, not over 1,000 as it is today. The work was enjoyable because his children, Karen, Brian and Mike, did a lot of the work. The Minnesota Masters newsletter, called the OLD STERNWHEELER, was published out of his home.

Roger took some time off this year (2014) with a bout of pneumonia. But he is back now, swimming a mile and a half per day. Soon we expect to see him racing in the lakes again. After all he is only 75. And is doing so, as he claims, without a fast twitch muscle in his entire body.