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A SPLASH DOWN MEMORY LANE

BY KARLYN PIPES-NEILSEN

In swimming, you still have to get from one end of the pool and back faster than your competition, but much has changed in our sport over the last 40 years.

Happy New Year! Just where does the time go? It seems like just yesterday I was watching the 1972 and '76 Olympics. For those of you who remember what it was to be a swimmer in the late 1960s and '70s, let's take a splash down memory lane:

SWIM PRACTICE

- No goggles, lane lines or backstroke flags = total chaos and plenty of collisions!
- 60-80 kids of all ages and abilities in a six-lane pool—all training at the same time.
- The entire team starting from a dive for a sprint.
- Short warm-ups, no drills, get-out swims!
- Toxic chlorine levels and no goggles, resulting in blurry and burned eyes that caused you to see halos around lights for hours after practice.
- Kicking a mile to give your eyes a break from the chlorine.
- Multiple suits, panty hose, T-shirts and garden gloves with rubber bands worn for extra drag.
- Inner tubes or thick, circular sponges for pulling.
- Ocean tombstone kickboards or kickboards cut in half.
- Towing Clorox bottles secured with strips of inner tube around the ankles.
- Exer-Genie or Doc Counsilman machines.
- Isometrics, calisthenics and push-ups!
- Weights made of cement-filled pineapple or coffee cans with galvanized pipe.
- Early goggles that looked like binoculars—big rubber rims, metal frames

and lenses made of Plexiglass.

- Not a single hydration product—not even water—was consumed at the pool.
- Sneaking out of practice and hiding for an hour-and-a-half in the showers.
- No pace clocks...just a loud coach yelling out times.
- Really long, boring workouts that seemed to last forever!

SWIMSUITS

- Women's suits were baggy with a modesty "skirt."
- Tanning through your swim suit that created a stripe, swirl or tie-die pattern on your butt.
- White, square-top, rubber swim caps or no cap at all.
- Using Vaseline for chaffing on your neck and shoulders from the nylon suit straps.
- Shoe laces or barrettes to keep shoulder straps from falling off.
- The shocking Belgrade "skin suit"—no skirt, Seafoam print, two shoulder snaps...and it cost 50 bucks, which was a fortune back then!
- Homemade "skin suits"—if you could not afford the Belgrade.
- Diamond-pattern Arena paper suits.

SWIMMER'S APPAREL

- Fuzzy cotton sweat suits with patches sewn on from strange meets.
- Puffy down jackets.

- "Moon" boots (pre-UGGS).
- Tennis shorts (summer).
- Levi cords or jeans worn indecently below the naval.
- Boys: shaggy or long hair parted down the middle.
- Girls: short pixie or long hair parted in the middle.
- Everyone: slimy, silver-green swimmer's hair

WHAT WE ATE

- Really big breakfasts that we sometimes saw again.
- Pixies Sticks, honey, Pop Rocks, beef jerky, Space Food Sticks and cubed sugar swiped from hospitality.
- Box Jell-O was "energy food," eaten with a wet finger.
- Lunch at McDonald's for under a buck.

RULES

- Touch turns in freestyle.
- Real backstroke turns where you stayed on your back and touched the wall.
- Head may not go under the water in breaststroke.
- DQ'ed for a "double underwater" breaststroke pull-out.
- Spin or "bucket" turns on backstroke.
- Allowed two false starts.
- Allowed to enter the water prior to swimming—for all events.

FINALLY, WHAT I REMEMBER THE MOST

- The joy of being around my swimming friends.
- Having fun in the water.
- Learning how to set goals.
- Feeling proud of my accomplishments.

Funny...those last few things that I remember the most haven't changed a bit in more than 35 years! ♦

Karlyn Pipes-Neilsen of Aquatic Edge would like to thank the many contributors to this article (you know who you are!). For more information about Karlyn, please visit www.aquaticedge.org.



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