



RICK SMITH/staff photographer

Jim Bennett practices his breast stroke during the master's swim program at the Farmington YMCA.

'Doggie paddlers' lap it up as masters

By Loraine McClish
staff writer

Jump in. Hit the water. Shoot to win. "Competition evokes the perfection. Competition makes for the motivation," said Greg Malloux, swimming coach for the Farmington Hydrofoils. "No matter what your level of ability, you have to set goals for yourself."

"People have to be challenged to excel, and that's what I'm here for," said Bill Hughes of his work with the U.S. Masters Swimming Club. "When I give the club members their time goals there is always a lot of moaning and groaning. I'm called an ogre."

"I hear a lot of talk about the coach with the cracking whip, but ribbons aren't the reward. It's going that one second faster than you did last time. It's the competition that gives you that reward."

Malloux and Hughes are both volunteer coaches. The two team up for the workouts every Sunday morning with Kris Rande, a paid staff member of the Farmington Hills YMCA, one of the few YMCAs in the state that provides free pool time — as well as a professional coach — to its members who want to swim in the master's program.

As a consequence the Hydrofoils attract members from about six neighboring communities. One of those members is Mary Fieber, a Livonia resident, unofficially dubbed "Queen of the Master's." She also is unofficial captain of the cheerleaders and official chairwoman for the Hydrofoils.

She rates the Royal Oak Soaks, the master's club that works out in South Oakland YMCA, and the South Oakland Seals, who work out in the pool on Oakland Community College's Orchard Ridge Campus, as the Hydrofoils' biggest competition in the metro area.

SHE CALLS the competition "swimmers who understand why you want to swim five, six, seven days a week."

"We all feel exactly the same," she said. "We're all staying off middle age spread and the heart attack. Swimming is the single best exercise there is."

According to Hughes, swimming is one physical sport where you don't have to worry about a physical injury.

"There is no strain on the cardiovascular system or the skeletal structure," Malloux said. "It tones the muscles. You become stronger. It's the ultimate aerobic exercise because you have to breath right and deeply."

"A few of our members have come to us after they've all but been destroyed by jogging. We have



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Master's swim coach Bill Hughes helps Phyllis Beard work out a leg cramp during lap swimming.

quite a few former Olympic swimmers in the Michigan Master's, those who stick with it just to maintain."

The largest segment of the members were collegiate swimmers who know the value of competition, he said.

Master swimmers compete against their own time record during the weekly workouts. As a club, the swimmers compete with other clubs, generally once a month, at a meet somewhere in the state, arranged by Michigan Master's.

All points earned, whether the swimmer is racing in an event individually or in a relay, tally up for the club total.

"You can compete in as many or as few events as you want and in as many or as few events as you want," Malloux said. "You can compete in the nationals or not. You don't even have to qualify for the nationals, just show up."

MASTER SWIMMERS must be at least 21 years of age. The swimmers compete against others in their own age group, which are in increments of five years each, and there is no age limit.

"There is always a record to beat," Malloux said. "The better the people that you swim with, the better your motivation for improvement — the more likely you are to hit the water gung-ho and see who comes out on top. Reach out; grab; stretch. The mental stimulation is equal to the physical."

Anyone who owns a pool and can gather up four people for a team can form a master's club.

"Newcomers to a club are always welcome and, if you think you can make a couple of lengths in the pool, you're more than welcome," Malloux said.

Master's clubs not hard to find

The man who heads up the U.S. Master's Swimming programs in Michigan is Tom Spears, who can answer any and all questions about such clubs in the state, meets or membership.

Spears heads up the South Oakland Seals team, which works out from 7-9 a.m. Saturdays and 9-11 a.m. Sundays in the pool on Oakland Community College's Orchard Ridge Campus in Farmington Hills.

"With six lanes and four swimmers to a lane, about 25 coming at one time is just about right," Spears said. "We take swimmers of all levels of ability, and there's always somebody there to give help to any one who asks for it."

The Seals' dues are whatever it takes to cover the cost of the pool rental, divided among the members. It runs about \$55 a school semester, and when the new semester rolls around, it will be Spears' job to jockey for a position on the college pool schedule, so the workout times may change.

It is not unusual for master members to work out on their own time, either individually or with a few other swimmers, because scheduled pool time near them isn't convenient.

"THERE'S A small group — but not a club — that reserves a couple of lanes at Schoolcraft College for that reason," he said.

The Farmington Hydrofoils work out from 10 a.m. to noon Sundays in the Farmington YMCA, 281000 Farmington Road.

The time schedule conflicts with church for some of its members, and coaches are in hopes of getting some evening hours scheduled for the workouts within the next month.

The Hydrofoils must be members of a YMCA to receive the free pool time.

For Hydrofoils membership information, call the Farmington Y at 553-4020, and leave a message for Mary Fieber (pronounced Fee-ber).

For inquiries about the Royal Oak Soaks, call the South Oakland YMCA, 547-0030, and leave a message for Kathy Conley.

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— Bill Hughes
Master's Swimming Club



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Master's swimmer Steve Hugg gives his wife, Kathy, some helpful advice on how to do the free-stroke.