

# Stroke-by-stroke success

*Aggie swimming coach Nash has reaped his rich rewards*

*Editor's note: This is the first of a two-part series on the swimming and coaching career of Texas A&M swimming coach Mel Nash. Still engaged in competition at 27, Nash discusses several aspects of his career. Nash will begin his fourth year with the Aggies during 1982-82.*

**by Frank L. Christlieb**  
 Sports Editor  
 When Mel Nash casts a glance at his high school and college swimming experiences, he realizes their potential for inspiring younger athletes attempting to improve.

Nash, the Texas A&M swimming coach, says that his years of competition among names like John Nabor and Jim Montgomery, along with four years of swimming under legendary coach James "Doc" Counsilman at the University of Indiana, have given him an excellent background to utilize in coaching.

During the past spring season Nash was named Coach of the Year in the Southwest Conference. Nash sees possible Top 20 squads for Texas A&M in the near future — possibly as soon as next year.

But before slipping a whistle around his neck and stepping into coaching shoes, the 6-2, 195-pound Nash endured a rewarding career that he said re-

sulted from a great deal of work and devotion, as well as a significant amount of self-discipline.

It hasn't all been easy. While Nash has managed to earn many awards and has been victorious many more times than he can recall, there've been times when the three-year Aggie coach thought his career had ended.

After missing the 1972 and 1980 U.S. Olympic teams by the narrowest of margins, Nash, still competing at 27, even now longs to reach a goal he considers within striking distance.

He wants to qualify for the 1984 Olympic team.

And Nash, who won two events and placed second in another at the United States Masters Swimming Championships held late in May in The Woodlands, doesn't think age will detract from his chances if he plays his strokes right.

"I know that I could make the top six or eight in nationals now if I trained for a whole year," he said. "If I can get my amateur status back by the summer of '83, I'll go for the '84 Olympic trials. There's no doubt in my mind."

But his current ambition comes after a total of 19 years of swimming and diving. In fact, Nash said, if it weren't for a plot manufactured by his father, Mel

Nash Sr., he might have become a renowned diver rather than a first-class swimmer.

"I started out as a diver when I was about eight years old in my first competition and dove until I was 14," he said. "When I was 12, at the club where I worked out, they started a team. So I went ahead and tried out for the team."

"I looked really good swimming, so the coach put me in a group with some of the semi-older kids. I got to the workout and he said, 'Warm up with 200,' and I thought to myself '200 lengths?'"

"I didn't know anything swimming, and I said 'What's that?' They said, 'Well, that's eight lengths — 200 yards.' So I swam and I got to the end of my 100 and I was blurry-eyed and I couldn't see anything, and the coach tapped me on the head and told me to work out with the younger swimmers instead."

And that first day nearly disillusioned Nash to the point that he considered rushing back to diving to escape the grueling pace of swimming. But a sufficient dose of success changed his mind.

"I cried all the way through the workout and went home and said, 'I hate this. I want to be a diver,'" Nash said. "And that was

my dad's ulterior motive in putting me on the team. He always wanted me to swim and be on the team, and he knew that I'd be good, but I was also a good diver and that was his sport."

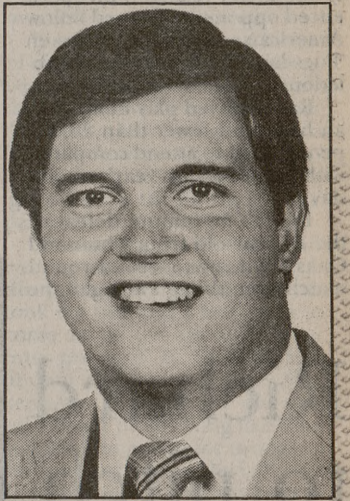
"I was getting a bit of a fear factor about diving, and my dad thought that if he got me on the team, I'd see that no one wants to swim back and forth in a pool for eight hours a day."

"So I got in the pool and I just hated it," he said. "They told me to stick it out for a week and see what happens. Boy, the end of the week came around and I was beating everybody in the pool and I knew that was the sport for me."

The summer before his freshman year in high school, Nash won the National Junior Olympics in the 100-meter backstroke and placed second in the 100-meter butterfly — while still considering himself a diver.

"At about that time, my dad, my high school coach and my AAU coach all sat down with me and said, 'You are a swimmer — admit it,'" Nash recalled.

He then qualified for the all-America team all four years at Gateway High School in Monroeville, Pa., and won the gold medal in the 100-meter backstroke at the Pan American games in 1971. After his senior



Mel Nash

year in 1972, *Swimming World* magazine named Nash high school swimmer of the year.

Then, at the 1972 Olympic trials, Nash was hit with his first big disappointment.

"I got into the prelims and my 'inexperience' paid off," Nash said. "I was swimming all the sprints about half a second faster than all the guys in college."

"My dad and I sat down and we said: 'OK, let's go out and set

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staff photo by Peter Rocha

## Drilling for the future

Fourteen-year-old Kathy Lawson, who's attending the Texas A&M girls basketball camp, works with fellow campers during drills held Tuesday in the East Kyle facility. Lawson, from Palacios, and other girls from around the state are working to improve their basketball skills during the first of three sessions being held. The other sessions will take place June 27-July 2 and Aug. 1-6.

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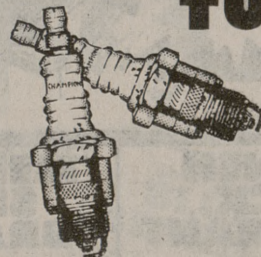
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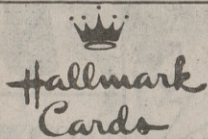
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