

Texas A&M

The Battalion Sports

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Plans for the future

A&M swimming coach Nash believes squad can gain national prominence

Editor's note: This is the second in a two-part series in which Mel Nash of the Texas A&M swim team discusses his swimming and coaching career. Nash says he expects the Aggie program to progress each year, and he expresses hope that the team can break into the national Top 20 lineup soon.

Councilman, the Aggie coach found transition from college swimming into college coaching a smooth experience.

But before taking a post as an Indiana assistant coach in 1977, Nash completed a high school and college career that had its fortes and its diminished strains, its victories and its failures, its exciting moments and its disappointments.

Nash, however, says he has no regrets, complaints or second thoughts about his swimming

team, and my father had films showing the relay that we obviously did not false start on, so we sent those films off to the NCAA Rules Committee.

"That was nearly 10 years ago, and we do not have the films back to this day — it was pretty wild," Nash said. "That's when I realized that you have to win by so much that there's no doubt involved."

"Don't play games, because even in swimming, something as cut and dried as who touches the touchpad first can be worked around by the politics."

That summer, Nash said, he didn't swim well, and "everything went wrong." He managed only a 12th-place finish at the national meet, and by his junior year at Indiana, Nash thought his swimming career might be near its end.

The Hoosiers took a trip to Florida for a three-week training camp during Nash's junior season. But on the 22-hour road trip, while his teammates were relaxing and thinking about the next three weeks, Nash did some serious soul-searching about his career and his future.

"During 22 hours, you do a lot of thinking," Nash said. "I went to the back of the van and sat for eight hours straight. It was my sleep period, and I didn't sleep."

"I don't know if you've ever really sat down for eight hours and actually looked inside yourself and done a little self-therapy. I looked at what I'd done over my swimming and school career. I told myself: 'You're very talented, you're very intelligent, and you're really performing in a mediocre way

at this point.'

"So, in that eight-hour period, I reversed the entire negative flow of everything that had been going on," Nash said.

And Nash didn't waste any time when he and his teammates reached the training camp.

"At the time, John Nabor of USC was the big backstroker in the nation," he said. "Every single stroke I took down there, I was saying, out loud, 'Get Nabor, Beat Nabor.' They thought I was going a little bit over the edge."

"That was all I thought about for the next three months, but I didn't beat Nabor at the NCAA meet. That was the perfect end of the success story. But I got third in the 100 backstroke at the NAAs, and got fourth in the 50-meter freestyle that year, and I got seventh in the 200-meter backstroke. I was high point man for Indiana in that meet, and that made my comeback."

Nash wanted to compete in the 1976 Olympic trials, but upon advice from the Hoosiers' Councilman, he didn't. After seeing that Nash had injured his back while lifting a refrigerator, and after having seen Nash gain about 15 pounds, the Indiana coach advised his former swimmer to forget about the 1976 Games.

When it came time for the 1980 Olympic games, however, Nash's back had healed, he had lost 15 pounds and he had taken three seconds off his time on the 50-meter backstroke sprint. In the trials, he finished fifth, and missed the team by 16 one-

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staff photo by John Ryan

The end of the race

Chris Stegent from Houston crosses the finish line ahead of Longview's Ron Johnson in the Senior 800-yard dash, which took place during the Track Day

sponsored by the All-Sports Camp at Texas A&M. The three-week camp, in which 185 boys and girls are participating, will last through next week.



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