

THANK YOU, PHIL

The August issue of *Swimming World Magazine* was Phil Whitten's final issue as editor-in-chief and chief media officer of the magazine and its website, SwimmingWorldMagazine.com. After 14 years--170 issues--Phil stepped down to take on a new challenge as the executive director of the College Swimming Coaches Association of America (CSCAA).

Be sure to read his editorial, "A Voice for the Sport: One Last Thing," in which he says goodbye to all of his readers and friends--but not before he shares his views on one more issue: the potential recurrence of a problem that perennially plagues international sport--politicization.

We at *Swimming World Magazine* would also like to bid farewell to a consummate professional and friend. We wish him all the best in his new position. The CSCAA is too lucky to have him.

We'd also like to share with you a story that we published in January 2005--the life story of Dr. Phillip Whitten, one of our sport's most ardent advocates and passionate champions. Enjoy.

THE VOICE OF THE SPORT

By P.H. Mullen

(P.H. Mullen, a graduate of Dartmouth, is the author of "Gold in the Water.")

As a kid growing up in the Bronx, Phil Whitten excelled at baseball. But when his mother remarried and the family relocated to the agricultural town of Livermore, Calif. near what is now Silicon Valley, he quickly adapted to local customs and took up swimming. The problem was, he wasn't all that good. Freshman year in high school, he was cut from the junior varsity. But that only fueled his desire to succeed. Two years later, he made the team as a fourth-string breaststroker. Little more than a year later, he was ranked No. 1 in the country in age-group breaststroke.

That early success has proved immeasurably important for the swimming world, because after 45 years of swimming, writing and heralding causes, Dr. Phillip Whitten is today our sport's most ardent advocate and passionate champion.

This month, two momentous things happen in the life of the 61-year-old editor-in-chief of this magazine, as well as *Swimming World*, *Swimming Technique*, *SwimInfo.com* and the soon-to-be-launched *Swimming World TV*. First, for his lifetime of work, Whitten becomes the first-ever "contributor" inducted into the International Masters Swimming Hall of Fame, a tremendous achievement for an independent journalist whose career is defined by frequently challenging the administrative powers that be in swimming's small global community. Second, back home in Phoenix, Ariz., he will oversee the sad closure of this magazine and its hopeful rebirth as

part of a larger, more dynamic monthly publication, the new *Swimming World*.

"A whole new era is starting," he says. "I'm just warming up."

Yes, he is. What better time then, to celebrate the life and spirit of the man, Mr. Swim himself, who has led the fight against steroid abuse in swimming, helped save more than a dozen college swim programs from elimination and taught millions of us through his writings how to position our heads, streamline our bodies and love this sport? Here, then, are his three worlds--the journalist, the swimmer and the sport's champion.

THE JOURNALIST

The day starts between 4 and 5 a.m. when Phil Whitten rises to learn what's happened in the swimming world while he was asleep for five or six hours.

The Arizona pre-dawn is frosty. But it's his favorite time of the day. Whitten has Parkinson's disease, diagnosed five years ago, and in the early morning he usually feels it least. He settles in front of his home-office computer. He sips hot coffee and starts to type. There may be several dozen messages and stories waiting in his inbox. More news awaits him in the gray netherworld of the internet.

This is pure speed work. He needs to post news on the **SwimmingWorldMagazine.com** website and do it fast. It's a race against the bigger news organizations, and he wants to win badly. His daily goal: get accurate news published faster than anyone else. Breaking stories will be sent to news bureaus around the world to be republished.

The exhilaration he feels each morning is real. Every time it's like racing an Olympic champion and staying with him as they charge toward the wall.

"He treats every story like a murder case, regardless of the subject," says Brent Rutemiller, CEO of Sports Publications and Whitten's boss. "He wants to get it first, and he wants to get it right. His tenacity is amazing. He's the quintessential gumshoe reporter."

Whitten is unshaven. He's in his pajamas. His graying, chlorinated hair is disheveled. He's been doing this early-morning routine for five years. It hasn't gotten old.

"I take tremendous pride in **SwimmingWorldMagazine.com** being the best news source in the world for information about swimming," he says.

SwimmingWorldMagazine.com was originally a support tool for promoting Sports Publications' various magazines, books and swim shop. But Whitten's vigor has turned it into the company's strongest asset. It has become the one real-time voice in the international swimming community that provides instant information about everything from international Masters meet results to steroid scandals. Very often, it rings with the unmistakable clarion passion of Whitten's moral indignation.

Here in the year of Google, **SwimmingWorldMagazine.com** is an internet jewel for its unbiased, timely information. In 2004, *PC Magazine* named it for the second consecutive year the No. 1 online resource for swimming. Its popularity has skyrocketed: during the 2000 Olympics, it had 36,000 daily unique visitors; four years later for Athens, that figure more than quintupled to 195,000.

While Whitten posts the day's stories, his wife, Donna, a senior manager in corporate finance, still sleeps. They met at a Masters meet and married in 1993. Also sleeping are the other three souls living under his roof--his stepson, daughter-in-law and 4-year-old grandson. Therefore, Whitten tiptoes. He keeps the lights off. Phone work is nearly impossible. In the darkness, his keyboard sings a modern song of clackety-clackety-clack, seven days a week. Each year, he churns out as many as 1,000 stories and oversees hundreds of others written by stringers.

"He loves to get up early," marvels Donna. "That's when his creative juices are flowing."

He will continue to post news throughout the day as warranted, but this morning routine has a hard-stop deadline at 6:30 a.m. That's when his office door usually swings open, and his precocious, 4-year-old grandson Stevie rumbles in.

Stevie doesn't care whether Ian Thorpe just married Britney Spears or if Michael Phelps has entered a Buddhist monastery. Stevie wants Grandpa to make breakfast *now* and play computer games and wrestle *now*. It's their secret time together; the rest of the house still slumbers. Whitten happily pushes away from the computer, often in mid-sentence.

The only thing that could make him happier would be having his other grandson, 3-1/2 year-old Tiger, there, too. (Tiger lives in Santa Barbara, where Whitten's son, Russell, is a chiropractor.)

The rule about kids: they age their parents and rejuvenate their grandparents.

In the old days, Mr. Swim would stand on a pool deck and for hours talk about splits, strategies, technique, training and poolside gossip. If it got wet, Whitten had something to say about it. His recall ability for minutia like times, finishes and splits is uncanny.

"Phil is a walking, talking swimming encyclopedia," says Nancy Ridout, past president of USMS.

The recall still exists, but it's no longer Conversation Topic No. 1, not since Stevie unexpectedly landed in Whitten's house when Donna's son temporarily moved in his family several years ago.

During breaks in action at Olympic Trials last year, the man who is the most authoritative and objective voice in American swimming seemed to be the only journalist not endlessly rhapsodizing about Michael Phelps' chase for seven Olympic gold medals. Instead, he was busy telling friends about Stevie's latest humorous take on the world. He positively glowed.

Says Donna: "I think Phil's greatest aspiration is to be the best grandpa in the world."

And if Whitten had the choice between a private dinner with Ian Thorpe and Stevie?

"A tough choice," laughs Donna. "If Thorpe likes to play 'Star Wars' computer games, the three of them can have dinner together."

In the late morning, Whitten either resumes working in his home office or heads to the Phoenix headquarters of Sports Publications. As editor-in-chief of the country's three top swimming-related magazines for the last dozen years, there has always been at least one publication deadline looming over his head, and sometimes as many as three.

He usually swims a Masters workout at noon and twice a week lifts weights after work. In the evening, he devotes another two hours to editorial and website issues or works on his next book before bedtime. Unexpectedly, he has had more energy and needs less sleep since he came down with Parkinson's. So he goes to bed late. He sets his alarm early. More news awaits, more stories need to be written before the dawn.

THE SWIMMER

It's the middle of a noon swim workout on a gorgeous autumn day. Energized Masters fill the bright lanes at the outdoor Brophy East--formerly, the Phoenix Swim Club--pool in central Phoenix.

The water is crisp and blue, the desert sun is warm, and Phil Whitten is angry. It's the final lap of a hard 200 yard breaststroke, and he can feel his body struggling with each stroke. On deck, anyone can see that the long strokes of his first laps have devolved into rough and jerky karate chops.

It happens every time. It's the Parkinson's. When fatigue sets in, the body loses its gross-motor skills. Whitten, of course, knows this. He accepts it, most days. But he won't let the anger go, because he likes the raw feeling it puts in his breast. It's an athletic urging, an instinctive competitive growl. It's auto-response. It's as natural as breathing.

And Whitten likes it because it lets him know he's still alive, still beating back a disease for which there is no cure, still trying to get to the wall before the white pace clock's slender hand travels too far.

"Outwardly, he approaches it as if it's a non-issue and we're (all) the benefactors of that," says Donna. "Internally, he's fighting it."

Parkinson's is a neurological disorder afflicting 1.5 million Americans (60,000 new U.S. cases annually). The body's nerve cells stop producing a chemical called dopamine, which transmits signals within the brain to produce smooth muscle movement. Without correct levels of dopamine, the nerve cells fire at random, often non-stop, making the muscles move uncontrollably.

Over years, the ability to have willful movement erodes. Walking, talking, typing--it all slowly disappears like the gray star in the center of a

turned-off television screen. For a man whose life defines graceful, muscular movement, the irony is a knife stab.

But Whitten, who has set several Masters world records in breaststroke and backstroke, is managing his Parkinson's perhaps as well as anyone ever has. Scientifically, it is quite remarkable, even eye-popping. Though they usually are mild, he has the tell-tale tremors, particularly in his left hand. But his gross and fine motor skills remain largely intact.

It's the swimming and weight training. He adamantly believes this. The flexibility, the aerobic development, the muscle training, the dopamine produced by vigorous exercise. Some people who've had Parkinson's disease for five years like him are checking out voice-recognition software, testing four-wheel walkers and pricing assisted-living facilities. Whitten swims butterfly. He types easily and works 60 to 70 hours per week. He lectures and bench-presses and competes in Masters nationals. His disease's progress is at a near standstill.

"I believe my continued well-being is largely a direct result of laughter and maintaining physical fitness," he says. "I can't make Parkinson's go away. But there is a lot I can do on my own to control it."

"On my own." That's the key. Whitten is such a medical anomaly that his physicians simply don't know what to do with him. When he strolls through their doors and tells them he's swimming slightly faster now than he was four years ago, he watches them blink in confusion. He watches their pens hover uncertainly over his chart. They don't have a convenient set of words to explain this, though a study presented late last year at a neurological conference bears out Whitten's contention that regular exercise appears to halt the progression of the disease.

Nonetheless, Parkinson's never lets him forget that it holds his nerve cells in its grim fist.

"I have to be extraordinarily careful of my swimming pace," he says. "If I misjudge even a little bit and swim too fast, I'm in trouble. Literally, my left arm and left leg stop working when they get tired."

Take his 200 yard breaststroke. At first he can maintain seven or eight long and powerful strokes per 25 yards. But as the swim progresses, an unnatural fatigue sets in. His muscle control deteriorates. The breakdown happens rapidly and inexorably until by the final lap, he's doing 12 short, spastic strokes instead of seven or eight smooth ones. By now, he's cussing at himself. And happy about it.

"I'm not swearing at the disease," he says. "I'm yelling at my body to fight through the pain. Last year, I made national Top 10 for the first time since I got the P.D. I figure if I continue to improve my times at my present rate, I'll hold the world record in the 100 meter breaststroke when I'm 95 years old. That's my plan."

THE SPORT'S CHAMPION

It all comes together with that voice of his, that moral outrage that resounds across the sport. We heard it in 1994 when the Chinese swim team that showed up for the World Championships was so pumped with steroids, it would have been a cartoon-laugh if it weren't so serious.

There was no evidence, no positive testing results. China owned that meet. And nearly everyone looked the other way.

Except Whitten. He could barely contain his fury. Beginning in 1993, in article after article, and in speeches and on radio, he unleashed a righteous indignation that was backed up with supporting scientific evidence and overwhelming statistical proof that there was one--and only one-- explanation for the Chinese swimmers' performances: widespread, systematic doping.

Ten years on, every one of his contentions has proved correct.

Olympian B.J. Bedford, who was at the meet, remembers: "The athletes couldn't say anything--all we could do was try not to be bad losers. Phil made us feel there was someone on our side."

Despite being called a "racist" by Chinese coaches and officials, Whitten was relentless. Gradually forming alliances and sharing information with a small network of journalists around the world, he kept the pressure on China and FINA, swimming's international governing body, which blithely insisted nothing was amiss. Eventually, half a dozen Chinese swimmers were caught, then, a near torrent of others. Whitten's groundwork ensured the situation was not treated as individual blips on the screen, but as a systematic doping scandal involving the whole Chinese national program. Multiple athletes were barred from the sport, and one subsequent result was the establishment of the World Anti-Doping Agency, now a powerful international watchdog. Today, all sports are cleaner, and penalties for doping--in swimming, at least--are severe.

More recently, we hear that voice as it calls our attention to what he calls "U.S. swimming's biggest crisis": the epidemic elimination of men's collegiate swimming programs through the misuse of gender-equity rules related to Title IX. The intention of Title IX was to build women's athletics, but some complying schools have found it easier to disband men's programs, particularly in Olympic sports, including swimming.

Writing a handbook on "How to Save Your College Swim Program" (published by USA Swimming)--a "how-to" guide to making swim programs virtually invulnerable to the ax--and using his bully pulpit to generate national interest in the debate, Whitten has been instrumental in saving more than a dozen teams and protecting many others.

"I don't seek out big issues," he says. "I'd much rather spend the time with my wife. But when I'm in a position to do something about a problem, I act. It would be an evasion of my responsibility if I didn't speak out."

Now the next chapter is starting. There's the triumphant induction into swimming's hall of fame--something that turns him emotional if he thinks

about it too much. Then there's the closure of this magazine and the thrilling birth of his new one, the revamped *Swimming World*, which debuts in March.

Much to do: many laps to swim, many fights to win on behalf of the sport. And he's only just begun.

"Professionally, I only want two things," he says. "First, I want to find new ways to promote the sport of swimming, its lifelong benefits and the fabulous people and values it produces. Second, I want to remain a guardian of the integrity of our sport."

It's enough. It's more than enough.

EIGHT LAPS WITH DR. PHIL WHITTEN

* Whitten was an All-America swimmer at San Jose State University, but was better known as a campus activist promoting civil rights and protesting the Vietnam war.

* Whitten won a graduate scholarship to Harvard and earned an interdisciplinary doctorate.

* In 1970, Whitten started two international relief agencies to assist starving African children and was directly responsible for flying 3,000 children out of war-torn Nigeria and Biafra. The field hospital he helped establish in the Ivory Coast is today one of the largest hospitals in west Africa.

* After a divorce, Whitten raised his son, Russell, now a Santa Barbara chiropractor, as a single parent in the 1970s and '80s. He remarried in 1993.

* Whitten has taught at three universities, including Harvard.

* Whitten has authored or co-authored 18 books, including "The Complete Book of Swimming" (Random House).

* Whitten was the first journalist to procure and publish (in *Swimming World*) documents from the Stasi, the East German secret police, proving East German swimmers were systematically doped.

* In college, Whitten was the lead singer in a rock band. The Parkinson's disease has affected his ability to carry a tune.

VOICES OF APPRECIATION

John Leonard, executive director of the American Swimming Coaches Association: "Very few people are willing to take risks...Phil takes them. Very few people are willing to take on the hard issues in sports...Phil takes them on. Very few people place service above self...Phil does. And in doing so, he provides an example for everyone."

Brent Rutenmiller, CEO of Sports Publications: "He is a champion of the athletes and the coaches and is probably the strongest independent voice these groups will ever have. He has one agenda: to improve the sport."

Dick Deal, publisher of Sports Publications: "I've been privileged to know and work with Phil for over 20 years. His indefatigable commitment to swimming and its athletes is unmatched. Phil is truly one of the sport's most treasured assets."

Head Coach Mickey Wender of the University of Washington: "What Phil did to assist us in saving swimming at UofW and to save it around the country at other schools is priceless. He is fearless, relentless and unafraid to call it like it is. We all owe him a huge debt of gratitude." (Two years after the Huskies were saved from elimination, they were a top 25 team.)

Laura Val, 2003 World Masters Swimmer of the Year: "What's most amazing about Phil is his humility. In all his dealings, he is humble and soft-spoken--except in his editorials, where he uses his platform to say the things that need to be said. There is no better ambassador for swimming. All of us appreciate the work he is doing in understanding what we face as we age. The way he publicly deals with his Parkinson's is inspirational and makes him a true role model."

Misty Hyman, 2000 Olympic champion: "One thing that never fails to amaze me is Phil's youthful love for the sport. He always seems young to me--like an age-grouper excited to drop a second off his time."

Rich Burns, former chair of the USMS Marketing Committee: "*SWIM Magazine* always offered a useful and functional way of providing information to U.S. Masters, but there was a marked change after Phil took over as editor (in 1993). His passion for the sport was evidenced in every issue. In most magazines, the editor's letter is gratuitous. That was certainly the case with *SWIM*, pre-Phil. After assuming the editor post, this corner of the publication took on new energy. It was Phil's forum to express the many concerns, issues and crusades he championed in the name of making

swimming better at all levels. It became the first place I turned every time I received a new issue."

Suzanne Heim Bowen, Masters world record holder and open water champion: "Phil's honesty--that's what struck me when I read an editorial (he wrote) about his Parkinson's. I remember how matter-of-fact he was. My impression from the article was, 'Hey, life is short--play hard.' That is what Phil's intentions are."

Dale Neuberger, FINA vice president and past president of USA Swimming: "Phil is tenacious and relentless...pretty good qualities for a journalist, swimmer and activist to possess in abundance. He and I have not always agreed, but I never doubt his sincerity and passion. He is impatient and strong-willed and wants fast action. Political expediency is not in his vocabulary. He taught all of us that the sanctity of our sport is too valuable to squander or to put at risk."

B.J. Bedford, 2000 Olympic gold medalist: "When I began swimming, there was not much recognition for our sport. Our parents knew how we did...and so did Phil Whitten. He remembered faces, names and times. Phil told our stories to the kids who were hoping to be like their heroes. We all started out like that. We read voraciously to find out what was the key to success--what was it that made Janet Evans so fast? It is because of him that so many of us have thought to ourselves while reading *Swimming World*, 'Someday, that's going to be me.'"

Forbes Carlile, legendary Australian coach: "On many international issues when FINA and U.S Swimming were slow to act, Phil has spurred these governing bodies into action with well-considered and forthright opinions. When there was dithering and political correctness over the question of doping involvement by East Germany, and later China, Phil never let up in his condemnation of what was so clearly happening...I can think of no swimming journalist with such boundless love of swimming."