

## **The Key to Fast Swimming**

*by Lea Loveless Maurer*

In this day and age, everyone wants to know how to make an Olympic Athlete. Most of the coaches in America would have to admit that John Collins, a pupil of the famous Doc Counsilman and coach of three Olympic Gold medalists and numerous outstanding NCAA swimmers, has some understanding of what it takes. Yet year after year, we Badgers prove to the world that there is no one way to make a champion. When someone comes to watch a Badger workout, they are amazed by how motley the Badgers are and they always ask me, "How is it that Rick Carey, Lea Maurer and Cristina Teuscher came out of The Badger Swim Club?" Many people have asked me that question, and I hope John will forgive me for giving away some of his secrets in this article.

When I joined Badger Swim Club, I was convinced that there were three reasons that the Badgers were fast.

1. The Badger swimmers were indoctrinated with a passion for The Doors as we donned "Break On Through" tee shirts.
2. John owned and wore magic pink pants
3. John has never been outdone in the "coolest sneakers on deck game"

After a while, I stopped trying to figure out what was the key to our success, and I started enjoying being a Badger.

My first travel meet with the Senior Badgers was a meet at The University of Texas. I was 12 years old, and my mother had given my money to John to take care of. I decided that I would try to sit back and observe the Badgers and to learn from them during this trip. After arriving in Austin, John picked up the van keys and race-walked faster than most Olympic Walkers toward the car. All the Badgers picked up their bags and race-walked behind him. As we came closer to the van, there were streams of water cutting across the pavement. John yelled to his troops behind him, "Don't touch the water." I watched all of the Badgers leaping and stepping around the water with all of their bags. I followed obediently and passionately and celebrated inside when I had made it successfully to the van without "touching the water." I was relieved to finally walk onto the pool deck.

After workout, we packed back up into the van, and I was convinced that we were on our way to dinner or perhaps the hotel. Much to my surprise, John was conducting a 30-minute historical tour of Austin as he was explaining to us about the Blue lights. The tour ended at the Capital, and John had all the Badgers climb out of the van and sit by the State Capital. I sat there looking at the inspiring building and I listened in awe as John meshed moments from American History together with our swimming goals for the weekend. When John had finished his educational and motivational speech, he told us that we needed to go and eat our "lucky dinner." I figured out that the key to swimming fast in Austin was in learning about Blue Lights and eating a feast of ribs at Iron Works.

I was swimming best times all during the meet. On the last day, I had to race Betsy Mitchell in the 200 Back. When I finished my event, I went up to John for my post race analysis. He told me, "Great job, you w almost able to complete a 175 in the time that it took Betsy to complete the 200." The short of it was that I had done a best time, but I did not make my National cut. I

would have to continue to train harder.

Later that season, I geared up for a meet in Montreal, Canada. The older kids were all telling me that the key to the Montreal Meet was the “awards” that John would give out. After my first swim, I knew that things were not looking good when I was greeted with a small object that would call, “mooo” when I turned it upside down. My teammates were receiving cans of Mighty Dog. The message was clear, I needed to swim better, and maybe I should lose a few pounds. I left the pool determined to receive a positive prize. The next day, I came back, and I swam the 100 Back. I won the event, and I qualified for Senior Nationals. When I went up to receive my medal, they played the Rocky theme song, and John handed me a gift. It was a key chain with a bottle of Tabasco connected to it. John simply said, “You’re hot stuff.” I was glowing.

When I finally went to Senior Nationals, they were in Ft. Lauderdale, Florida. I kept hearing the swimmers talking about “How it is key to stay out of the sun.” Others agreed and chimed in, “and you need to stay off your legs.” I chuckled to myself as I heard these people saying that staying out of the sun and staying off your feet would be the key to swimming fast in Ft. Lauderdale. I had already learned from John Collins that the key to fast swimming at the Hall of Fame pool is going across the street to the beach and playing “find the big fish.”

I hope my message is clear. I could have just written John a note to say “Thank you” but it wouldn’t be the Badger way.