

# SANTA CLARA

*celebrating a legacy*

■ By Diane Krieger Spivak  
Special Splash Correspondent

The legendary Mark Spitz, then a member of the Santa Clara Swim Club, is interviewed a few years before his remarkable performance at the 1972 Olympics in Munich.

For legions of swimmers who have sprung off its starting blocks over the years, the Santa Clara Swim Club has become synonymous with George Haines.

The Hoosier who grew up swimming in quarries in Huntington, Ind., founded the club in 1951 with just 13 swimmers, then took it to the pinnacle of amateur swimming.

Through Haines' guidance, SCSC has produced more swimmers inducted into the International Swimming Hall of Fame than any other swim club in the world. Haines sent 26 swimmers to the Olympics and was a seven-time Olympic coach. SCSC's home, the International Swim Center, has seen nearly a dozen world records, more than 300 American records and more than 50 foreign national records set.

Now, to celebrate the club's rich history and the man who molded it into greatness, alumni have pulled out all the stops for a 55-year reunion, which is to coincide with SCSC's International Invitational next year.

Cynthia Valacer Owens, organizer of the reunion, has come full circle with Santa Clara. Owens swam for Haines in the 1970s. She also served as an age group coach for Haines. A year ago, following the International Invitational at Santa Clara, which hosted 90 percent of the 2004 U.S. Olympic swimmers, Owens' own children caught the swimming bug, and all four joined SCSC.

The Santa Clara staff asked Owens if she'd be interested in compiling a list of alumni, and the idea for the reunion was hatched, set to coincide with the 2006 International Invitational, June 22-25.

"It has just snowballed," Owens said. Olympians, coaches, historians, top swimming brass and of course, Santa Clara's alumni base are all getting on board. They have already reserved a room at the Santa Clara Convention Center, which holds up to 2000 people.

"The response has been overwhelmingly, incredibly positive, enthusiastic, and the excitement is energizing," Owens said. "Everyone is just ready. People are blocking off the dates and offering help. The event is driving itself already."

Overwhelming, yet not surprising, Owens said.

"We were part of this huge, wonderful legacy of the most significant swim club in history. George Haines' resume is not to be equaled. He took the team to 44 national championships, coached 46 Olympic swimmers. You can go down the list of the things this man accomplished... and he was loved by everybody.



"Even though I wasn't one of his Olympians, every day I would walk out on deck, and there would be more than a dozen of them strolling about in their swimsuits," Owens said. "It was inspirational. We were very aware that we were part of something much larger than we were at that time. The aura, the energy, the atmosphere on deck was palpable. It was an exciting place to be, and a fun place to be.

SCSC has hired a cinematographer to create a documentary that will include interviews of a dozen coaches from all over the country, Owens said. The historical documentary will be written by author P.H. Mullen, who penned the book, "Gold in the Water," recounting Santa Clara's journey to the 2000 Olympics.

"Santa Clara was the nexus of the swimming universe for an incredibly

long time," Mullen said. The core of American swimming was inside this nine-lane, 50-meter pool.

"The 1968 Olympics was truly the heyday of this team," Mullen said. "Based on the number of medals won, Santa Clara would have finished fifth as a country in combined sports. That is testament to the power they had. It was a time when world records were set at practice. Donna de Varona did it in the 400 IM by 8 seconds."

The pool has retained its vitality and influence today, Mullen said. "It is one of the oldest, most historic and most venerable venues in American Sports."

American swimming has gone through a movement of diversification, Mullen says. "A new generation of swimmers and coaches over the past 15 to 20 years have produced pockets of excellence. There's no center any more. Santa Clara will remain a historic marker for us. Great coaches, like George Haines, shared their knowledge with younger coaches. It's a testament to George Haines that there are these pockets."

For Dick Jochums, who has carried on the Santa Clara tradition as head coach for 10 years, it is a privilege just to be able to spend each day treading on what he has come to regard as hallowed ground.

"I get to walk his deck," said Jochums. "When you come into that pool, it's like walking into Yankee Stadium."

Jochums commissioned a bronze bust of Haines by noted sculptor Jack Finney for Santa Clara's 50th anniversary. Unfortunately, Haines suffered a debilitating stroke in 2001, and the celebration never took place.

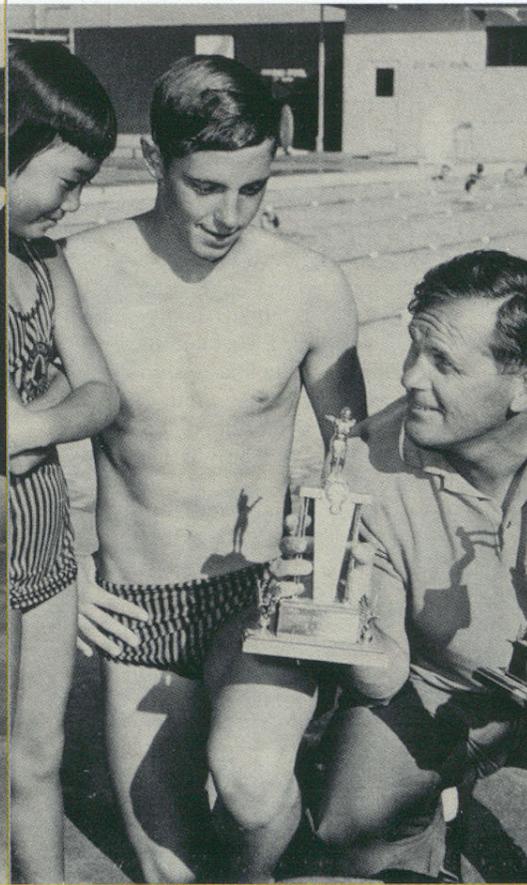
"We were going to have the bust for him as a surprise," Jochums said. Jochums put the bust on the pool deck of what is now called the George F. Haines International Swim Center, and since then, he says, "George looks at that pool every day, 24 hours a day. I say good morning to him every day. He's got his stopwatch and his hat on, and he'll coach for eternity.

"Nobody came close to George Haines," said Jochums. "He was one of my role models."

Jochums ranks Haines with other



Mary Mahoney, Sue Doll, Ann Howry, Carol Tait



Coach and club founder George Haines presents trophies to a couple of his young charges.



Donna DeVarona

renowned swim coaches, including Doc Counsilman, Sherm Chavoor and Peter Daland.

“When he started this club, there were no swimming scholarships,” Jochums said. “He put us on top of the world.”

Haines’ legacy is simply put, Jochums says. “George was just the best coach, bar none, that ever lived. He just did magic. He got kids to be as good as they possibly could be, and it wasn’t just the winners. That’s what coaching is. That’s what sport is supposed to be about.”

Don Schollander, who at the 1964 Olympics in Tokyo became the first person to win four gold medals in swimming in the same Olympiad, recognized Haines’ magic as a young age group swimmer from Oregon.

“We used to go down to swim against the big boys in California,” Schollander said. “That’s when I first noticed Santa Clara. Number one, they had such great swimmers, and number two, they seemed to be having so much fun. I was 12, and those guys would always beat me.”

After his sophomore year in high school, Schollander joined SCSC. “It was great,” he said. “I had immediate success. They trained harder than I was used to, but George made it so much fun. He became like a second father to me, not only from a swimming standpoint, but he made sure I studied hard, too.”

While Schollander praises Haines’ stroke mechanics and workout regimen, it was Haines’ outgoing personality he remembers most of all.

“We knew then he was going to be one of the greatest coaches of all time,” Schollander said. “There might have been coaches who were more scientific, but in terms of attributes overall that make a great, great coach – which really is a great teacher – he was it. He knew his subject matter, and he knew how to convey it to you and how to motivate you and make it fun.

“George had the ability to motivate us in individualistic ways. Some kids lacked confidence, and some needed to be challenged. I remember going to the starting blocks at some of the national championships, and we might have four of the eight finalists from Santa Clara. He talked to everybody individually.

“I’ve always looked back at the Santa Clara Swim Club as the epitome of a

well-run organization,” Schollander said. “I’m constantly amazed by that. Our swim meets went like clockwork.”

Haines’ physical condition will not allow him to attend next year’s reunion, but Schollander, who plans to be there, said if he could speak directly to Haines he would tell him this: “I’d have to thank you for all you did for me and how much it meant to me, not only as a swimmer, but also as a person, the lessons you taught and the examples you set. All of us at Santa Clara are deeply indebted to what you did for each and every one of us.”

Haines’ daughter, Kerry Haines Derr, remembers swimming for her dad.

“His sense of humor is probably the strongest memory I have,” said Derr, a former national team member. “He made swimming fun for everyone. He entertained us as we swam up and down the pool. He’d toss a kickboard like a Frisbee. He’d dance a little soft shoe. He really had a tremendous sense of humor and was very charismatic.”

Haines also had a tremendous drive to be the best, and Derr echoed Schollander when she spoke of her father’s ability to motivate each swimmer individually.

“If you had two swimmers of equal talent, each came away from a coaching session with him feeling they had the tools to win the race,” she said. “I’ve learned since he had his stroke, from the people who have emailed me, that he

had a real sense of each individual. He took his time with each swimmer. He made them feel special and unique and talented and capable.

“Nobody called him Mr. Haines,” Derr said. “It was always George. We had T-shirts made up for nationals one year, and they said ‘Santa Clara Swim Club’ on the front, and on the back it said, ‘By George.’”

There are lots of stories to tell. One of Derr’s favorite memories of Santa Clara and her father goes back more than four decades.

“Prior to 1964, all of our long-distance training was held in Stevens Creek Reservoir,” she said. “He’d just point out there and say, ‘Start swimming,’ so we swam amongst the pollywogs.

“Dad was filled with humor, but a lot of hard work was associated with that,” Derr said. “He was a man of his word, and he had a certain code of ethics that he expected of his swimmers, and it was a code of conduct that he was bound to live by himself.

“His swimmers loved him, his family certainly loves him, and the other thing that’s so remarkable is that his fellow coaches have an affection and a respect for him to this day.”

Renowned coach Peter Daland first met Haines in 1953. “He seemed like a personable young man, and he seemed to be doing a very good job with his swimmers,” Daland said. Later, when Daland moved to California, their clubs

would compete against each other.

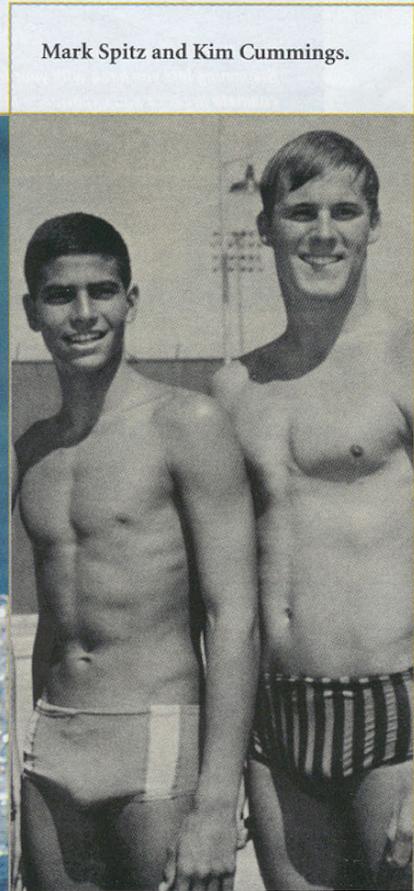
“Every time we beat Santa Clara, I’d put an ‘X’ mark down and said, ‘One for us.’ That meant something,” Daland said.

But it was a friendly competition throughout Haines’ career. “I’d say we were friends,” Daland said. “He’s probably the best coach America’s ever produced, judging by his record. He had all the honors there were to be had in swimming.”

Olympian Tom Wilkens swam for Jochums at Santa Clara beginning in 1996.

“Northern California is traditionally a hotbed for very good swimmers,” he said. “As a New Jersey transplant, I was always honored to represent Santa Clara. I think most people know that it’s probably the most storied swim club in the country in terms of national titles and the types of swimmers who have come through that program.”

But more than its accomplishments, the club itself is an amazing place in which to train, Wilkens said. “I really enjoyed the family atmosphere there. It really is a special place. The families involved do so much work, and the community as a whole really embraces the swim club and are very big fans of swimming. Whenever Santa Clara hosts a swim meet, everything is taken care of, and they treat the athletes well.” ◊



Mark Spitz and Kim Cummings.