

FOR THE LOVE OF THE SPORT

CULVER HEADLINES GROUP OF ATHLETES EXCELLING FOR ELGIN BLUE WAVE MASTER SWIM TEAM

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Caption: Elgin Blue Wave swimmer Ben Culver makes his way through the pool at The Centre of Elgin. Culver set a pair of state records at the Illinois Masters Swimming Association State Championship in April. Dave Shields | For The Courier-news

WITH OVER 60 MEMBERS RANGING FROM AGES 18 TO 66, THE ELGIN BLUE WAVE MASTER SWIM TEAM HAS AN ABUNDANCE OF INTRIGUING STORYLINES.

CHIEF AMONG THEM MIGHT BE 34-YEAR-OLD ELGIN GRADUATE BEN CULVER, WHO SET TWO STATE RECORDS IN THE 400 INDIVIDUAL MEDLEY AND THE 1,000 FREESTYLE AT THE ILLINOIS MASTERS SWIMMING ASSOCIATION STATE

CHAMPIONSHIP IN APRIL.

MASTERS SWIMMING IS SEGMENTED BY AGE GROUPS, AND CULVER'S FINAL 1000 FREESTYLE TIME OF 9:46.65 WAS THE FASTEST ACROSS ALL AGE GROUPS.

CULVER'S SUCCESS SEEMED TO BE SOMETHING OF A CATALYST FOR THE REST OF THE TEAM AS THE BLUE WAVE RALLIED FROM A 90-POINT DEFICIT AGAINST THE CHICAGO SMELT ON THE FINAL DAY OF COMPETITION TO FINISH IN THIRD PLACE, A CONSIDERABLE FEAT FOR A 60-SWIMMER TEAM IN A COMPETITION TYPICALLY DOMINATED BY SQUADS CARRYING OVER 100 SWIMMERS.

"FOR (CULVER) TO DO THAT IS REALLY INCREDIBLE," SAID BLUE WAVE HEAD COACH CORRINE GROTENHUIS. "HE'S WORKED HARD FOR A LONG TIME AND IT REALLY SHOWED OFF IN THAT STATE MEET."

AFTER GRADUATING FROM ELGIN IN 1994, CULVER SWAM AT SOUTHERN ILLINOIS UNIVERSITY FOR FOUR YEARS AND IMMEDIATELY JOINED UP WITH THE BLUE WAVE FOR THE FIRST TWO YEARS FOLLOWING HIS COLLEGIATE CAREER. AFTER THAT, THOUGH, CULVER DRIFTED FROM HIS PASSION.

"I GOT BIG AND FAT," CULVER RECALLED WITH A CHUCKLE. "THEN I GOT MARRIED IN 2002 AND LOST ABOUT 50 POUNDS IN THE SPRING OF 2003. I GOT BACK INTO SWIMMING WITH CORRINE MOSTLY BECAUSE OF TRIATHLONS AND SHE REALLY HELPED ME WITH IT."

THOUGH CULVER IS AN EXCEPTIONALLY TALENTED INDIVIDUAL PERFORMER, HE IS QUICK TO GIVE CREDIT TO THE ENTIRE BLUE WAVE FOR HELPING HIM TO REACH HIS POTENTIAL, STARTING WITH GROTENHUIS.

"IT ALL REVOLVES AROUND CORRINE," SAID CULVER. "YOU CAN TRY TO PUSH YOURSELF AND DO LONGER SETS, BUT UNTIL YOU HAVE SOMEONE YELLING AT YOU AND PUSHING YOU, YOU'LL NEVER BE AS GOOD AS YOU CAN.

"THAT GOES FOR TEAMMATES, TOO. I CAN'T TELL YOU HOW MUCH IT HELPS TO HAVE PEOPLE SWIMMING IN THE LANES NEXT TO ME AT PRACTICE. THEY MAY NOT BE AS FAST AS ME, BUT IT HELPS TO HAVE TWO OR THREE OTHER PEOPLE GOING THROUGH WHAT I'M GOING THROUGH AND HELPING ME OUT."

PLENTY OF CULVER'S TEAMMATES GARNERED THEIR OWN SUCCESS AT THE MEET, AS THREE OF THE TEAM'S OLDEST SWIMMERS - 58-YEAR-OLD JIM CAMPANA, 56-YEAR-OLD JACK EGGAR AND CATHERINE QUILL, 61, - EACH ADVANCED TO U.S. MASTERS SWIMMING NATIONAL SHORT COURSE CHAMPIONSHIPS. AT NATIONALS, QUILL HAD FIVE TOP-10 FINISHES, CAMPANA HAD THREE AND EGGAR HAD ONE.

OZ OSBORNE, 63, IS ONE OF THE OLDEST SWIMMERS ON THE TEAM AND HAS ALSO HELPED GROTENHUIS COACH AND RECRUIT FOR THE PAST FIVE YEARS. AT STATE, HE COMPETED IN 11 EVENTS AND WON TWO OF THEM WHILE TALLYING SEVEN TOP-THREE FINISHES.

"ALL THESE PEOPLE ARE HERE BECAUSE THEY WANT TO BE," OSBORNE SAID. "I AM THE MAIN RECRUITER AND I TELL PEOPLE I SEE THAT IT'S NOT LIKE HIGH SCHOOL AND COLLEGE WHERE YOU'RE HERE BECAUSE SOMEONE IS MAKING YOU OR YOU HAVE TO FILL SCHOLARSHIP REQUIREMENTS OR ANYTHING LIKE THAT. THESE PEOPLE REALLY HAVE A PASSION FOR THIS. THEY DO THIS BECAUSE THEY REALLY WANT TO GET BETTER AND IT'S A NICE STRESS RELIEVER."

THE BLUE WAVE IS MOSTLY DORMANT FOR NOW AS A LARGE CONTINGENT OF THE TEAM, INCLUDING CULVER AND 36-YEAR-OLD JENNIFER HARRISON, USE THE SUMMER MONTHS TO TRAIN AND PARTICIPATE IN TRIATHLONS. THE TEAM WILL PICK UP ACTION AGAIN IN LATE SEPTEMBER, AND GROTENHUIS SAID SHE WAS HOPEFUL THE TEAM CAN BUILD ON SUCH A STRONG SHOWING AT THE STATE MEET.

"THE TEAM THIS YEAR WAS THE BIGGEST I EVER HAD," GROTENHUIS SAID. "I EXPECT MOST OF THEM TO BE BACK AND EVERYONE SHOULD GROW AND DEVELOP AND HOPEFULLY WE CAN DO EVEN BETTER AT STATE AND GET SOME MORE STATE RECORDS."