

MEET THE NEW COACH

Ira Klein was born and raised in New York, growing up near the beach swimming was always part of his life. He didn't begin competitive swimming until college, a graduate of Queens College in New York City. He both swam and played water polo for QC, he continued playing polo during graduate school at UMass in Amherst. Undergraduate study was teaching and Physical education, graduate study in Exercise Science. His coaching career began in 1975 at a YMCA in New York. After five years he moved to the Joliet YMCA where Ira and Sherwood Watts first combined to develop one of the powerhouse programs of Illinois and YMCA Swimming. In that first year, the Joliet team scored only 5 points at Y Nationals, in their third year they finished second as a team. Soon after Joliet, Ira and Sherwood reunited with the Sharks program. In five years at Sarasota, the women and men combined for a total of 8 second place finishes and several dozen Individual National titles and records. They were also conquering the local Florida club scene with several JO team titles as well. In 1988 the Sharks sent three high school aged swimmers to Olympic Trials. Trippi Schwenk, 16 yrs., finished fourth that year but later went on to swim in two Olympics and set an American Record. That year Coach Klein was named the first ever YMCA National Coach of the Year. Coach Klein left Sarasota in 1990 for the Las Vegas Gold Swim Team, again growing a team in both size and competitive level. In Las Vegas he coached Melvin Stewart who went on to be a 1992 Olympic Gold Medalist. Five other swimmers from the Gold finished in the top eight at those Trials. An offer from Dave Marsh pulled Coach Klein to Auburn University for two years. During those years Coach Marsh and Coach Klein brought AU to their first ever SEC title, winning several individual and relay NCAA titles and a second place finish. Three members from that team made it to the Olympics. It did not take long though for Coach Klein to realize that his passion was in club coaching, watching and participating in the development of young athletes at all levels. An opportunity in Santa Barbara put him back into club coaching. In Santa Barbara he took a team of 100 swimmers and tripled its size. At the same time he doubled the size of the Masters program. In 1996 he brought the youngest scoring male to that year's trials, today Mark Warkentin is poised to be an Olympian in open water swimming for the USA. Two of the other standout athletes of that time were Danny Beal who this summer finished 7th in the 200 m. free at trials and Adrienne Binder who in HS swam the fastest [15:42] 1650 by any American in more than a decade. She went on to win an NCAA title in the 500 and to be part of three National Championship teams for Auburn University.

In 2004 Coach Klein was recruited to USA Swimming headquarters in Colorado Springs. He took charge of a new department called Field Services, supervising a dozen consultants who work with clubs around the country. He also helped develop several new programs such as Club Excellence and Club Recognition. But the bug for coaching never left, Coach Klein volunteered with a local High School and for over a year he coached Sheila Toarmina for the swimming part of Modern Pentathlon. Sheila who was a 1996 USA Swimming relay gold medalist, competed for the US in Triathlon in 2000 & 2004 and has now made history by being the only person to ever qualify for three different sports at the Olympic level.

On the National scene Coach Klein has been privileged to coach Olympic Festival and National teams five times. It has taken him to places in Japan, England and Russia. He is often asked to speak at clinics in the states and has also lectured internationally, including in the Philippines and Romania.

Ira has always been involved in the sport as a volunteer working to make swimming better. He has sat on numerous committees for USA Swimming and has been privileged among the many roles he has taken to have been the President of the YMCA Coaches Association, President of the American Swim Coaches Association and also Vice President of USA Swimming.

What these points fail to point out is that the ultimate desire is to create an environment that lends itself to all athletes, of all ages and all levels. A complete program that teaches the important values in life, as well as competition.

Ira is married to Cindy, they met at a YMCA picnic on Siesta Key. This January they will celebrate their twentieth anniversary. Their only companion in life is Charly Brown, a little Daschund Chihuahua mix who rules their home.

Anyone who wishes to contact Coach Klein before he actually arrives in Sarasota, may feel free to contact by e mail at coachira@earthlink.net.