

Check out the June issue of Swimming World Magazine and read, "Still Kicking: Matt Biondi," a "Where Are They Now" feature about former swimming stars that runs regularly in the magazine. Included in the feature are photos (including a picture of Matt with his wife and two children), a "By the Numbers" section as well as a trivia question, "So You Think You Know Swimming?" See if you can answer the question. Following is the original Matt Biondi feature, including comments from Matt about his role in paving the way for today's professional swimmers, his admiration of today's superstars as well as his memories of his swimming career.

Still Kicking: Matt Biondi

By Phillip Whitten

Without question, Matt Biondi was one of the greatest swimmers ever to don a racing suit. A great white shark in the 50-meter jungle, Matt won a total of 10 Olympic medals, seven of them gold in three Olympic Games. At the 1988 Games in Seoul, he collected seven medals including five gold. He won 17 U.S. national titles in the 50, 100 and 200 free plus the 100 fly; set 12 world records; and twice was named World Swimmer of the Year by Swimming World Magazine.

During his four years at the University of California he set American records in the 50, 100 and 200 freestyle and won 13 NCAA swimming titles and three water polo titles! His records stood for almost 20 years, and his NCAA Championship record in the 200 free still has not been beaten. A fierce competitor in the water and an articulate, forceful advocate for athlete rights in the political arena, Biondi paved the way for today's professional swimmers Michael Phelps, Ian Thorpe, Aaron Peirsol, Brendan Hansen, Natalie Coughlin, Amanda Beard and all the rest. Without Biondi and his Olympian colleagues, Tom Jager and Shaun Jordan, the world of pro swimming would be a very different place today. Indeed, there might not even be professional swimming.

But just as Biondi took a leadership role in making it possible for talented, young swimmers to earn Big Bucks, so, too, does he admire the superstars of today for their accomplishments. It's amazing to me that they can swim that fast. Those times were unimaginable 15 years ago. And it's not just the (hi-tech) swimsuits. I have great respect for guys like Thorpe and Peirsol and Phelps.

Phelps does a much better job than I ever did in handling the media, he acknowledged. He seems to have a lot of compassion for the media and he understands their role and what they do and have done for our

sport. I was especially impressed with Aaron Peirsol at the last Olympics. There's a guy who is an incredible athlete, yet he is genuinely humble and unpretentious. When that Japanese swimmer (Kosuke Kitajima) took illegal dolphin kicks in the 100 breast, Aaron spoke out.

I admire him for speaking his mind. So many athletes would be afraid to do so, fearful of what it might cost them. Then, sure enough, he was DQ'ed in the 200 back that was pure retribution, political payback. (Peirsol's DQ was reversed, and he was reinstated as the gold medalist within 30 minutes.) When I met Aaron at the Golden Goggles in New York last November, I asked him, weren't you worried? He just shrugged and said, I did what I felt was right. The DQ was out of my hands. I shook his hand thinking, that is a quality human being. As for Fred Bouquet's 18.74 for the 50 free that was amazing, simply amazing. But I saw his photo on SwimInfo the guy looks like Hercules. Actually, what impressed me just as much is how long Jager's record (19.05) stood 15 years. Today, just over 6-6 and 210 pounds his competition weight Matt is still imposing. He still wears size 14 shoes and his Wingspan remains longer than his height. His hair may be considerably grayer and thinner than it was in the 1980s and early 90s when he ruled the pool. But Matt no longer spends his days intimidating would-be challengers. Nowadays, Matt's identity is teacher, husband, dad and community member. Still a forceful proponent for athlete rights, Matt has definitely mellowed, no doubt because he's just so...well, happy. Swimming World Magazine caught up with Matt recently in Waimea on the Big Island of Hawaii, where Mr. Biondi teaches algebra, math foundations, history, videography and a course on Personal excellence at the Parker School. The latter is a dose of Biondian philosophy, a 54-day course culled from Matt's motivational speeches that deal with personal choices, such as investing time in meaningful activity or taking on the role of victim. I really enjoy teaching, Matt says, and after four years and a few false starts, I've finally gotten good enough to be effective. It's the equivalent of finally being able to swim across the pool without stopping. It's definitely an achievement, but I still have a lot of improving to do.

I've learned that, to be effective, I've got to hook the kids emotionally. And I've learned that the highest compliment my students can pay me is to say, Mr. Biondi is nice. By that they mean: He challenges me, he's fair and he understands me. I'm not the easiest teacher, as you might expect, but I've found that kids rise to the level of expectations we have for them. I like what I do, he says enthusiastically. Most days I'm excited to go to work. It's fun when I'm at work. That wasn't the case at the end of my career, he recalls. Back then, you were

encouraged to retire after your college eligibility was up. U.S. Swimming officials didn't know what to do with me, but they knew they didn't want me around. I was ostracized. They did everything they could to force me out, and I was depressed for the last two years of my career. I'm so glad it's not that way anymore, he smiles. Swimming has become fun again for Matt. He works out for an hour three mornings a week with fellow members of The Lobster Club, which he describes as a group of old farts. Occasionally, he enters open water races in the warm, inviting surf surrounding Hawaii. Matt has also become the quintessential husband and dad. Matt and Kirsten met in 1993 at Cal, where both were members of the swim team. Matt, who'd decided he would never again date a swimmer after a two-year relationship with a swimmer ended, finally asked Kirsten out when she could no longer swim due to a broken ankle.

Our first date was Feb. 5, 1993, he says, and two years later we were married. Our official anniversary is in August, but we both celebrate Feb. 5. The couple has two young boys: Nate, 6, who Swims the traditional strokes and Lucas, 2-1/2, who Just recently dog-paddled across the pool for the first time. Matt says he'd like his sons to become swimmers, but the important thing is to do something they love swimming, playing the violin, writing and do it well. Asked about Seoul, where he was hyped to duplicate Mark Spitz's seven-for-seven feat and only came away with five gold medals plus silver and bronze, Matt says, Seen in perspective, Seoul was an enormous success in every way for me, my family, the University of California. For a brief moment in time, I was an American hero.

Perspective has shown me that what's important is not that fleeting moment, but the journey and your attitude on the journey. Thomas Edison tried 2,000 times before he invented the incandescent light bulb, and history records that triumph. But I would bet that for Edison, the real triumph was the process, complete with his 1,999 failures.

I'm a better husband, father and teacher today because I feel so fortunate to have enjoyed a marvelous journey. It was a magic journey, fueled by my love of swimming, a journey that began when I was 5 years old.