Lithuania's Rolandas Gimbutis, a 23-year-old sophomore who now swims at the University of California at Berkeley, was featured in Swimming World Magazine’s March issue. Be sure to pick up a copy and read, Coming to America by Tito Morales. The following SwimInfo Interactive article provides even more background on Rolandas.

**Swimming in Lithuania: The Haves and Have Nots**

To begin to gain an appreciation for how far Lithuania's Rolandas Gimbutis has advanced with his swimming career, it's important to recognize the astonishing limitations he has had to overcome since he first chose to pursue the sport. Most of Gimbutis' training during his formative years, for instance, took place in a four-lane, 25-meter pool.

Nothing, perhaps, illuminates the stark contrasts between the global swimming community's haves and have nots than the fact that while Gimbutis has competed in multi-million dollar temporary pop-up pools in venues such as Fukuoka, Barcelona and Indianapolis, there is only one Olympic-length pool in all of Lithuania. And that pool, constructed in the 1970s well before Gimbutis was even born is located in the capital of Vilnius, situated some 70 miles away from the swimmer's hometown.

To be sure, Gimbutis, who currently swims for Coach Nort Thornton at the University of California at Berkeley, is certainly not the only swimmer who has ever made an impact in the sport from Lithuania. One of his heroes while growing up, Raimundas Mazuolis, was a star sprinter who earned medals at both the FINA World Championships (1994) and U.S. nationals (1998). It was Mazuolis' national record in the 100 meter freestyle that Gimbutis lowered in Athens.

Competitive swimming in Lithuania, though, still has plenty of growing up to do.

In 2000 at Sydney, the Lithuanian swimming team consisted of just six athletes. Four years later, in Athens, they were able to improve that number to 11 swimmers. Aside from Gimbutis' performance in the 100 meter freestyle which ranked him sixth in the world last year countryman Vytautas Janusaitis earned the nation's first-ever spot in an Olympics final. Janusaitis eventually placed sixth in the 200 meter IM.

Gimbutis and Janusaitis' recent swims have made for exciting news in Lithuania.

People know our names and they recognize us, says Gimbutis. People started talking about the sport more after the Olympics because of our performances.

Still, though, Gimbutis would be the first to admit that raising the profile of the fledgling sport back in his home country is a long,
arduous undertaking.

I don't think there have been many changes, he says, reflecting back upon what he's witnessed since his earliest days as an age grouper. There is still only one 50 meter pool in the whole country. By Tito Morales

**An Aquatic United Nations**

UC-Berkeley has long been one of the most cosmopolitan of institutions, and ever since he's been a coach at the university, Coach Nort Thornton has gone to great lengths to ensure that the swim team is just as equally diverse.

Former elite internationals who have passed through the East Bay campus included Sweden's Par Arvidsson, who earned gold in the 100 meter fly at the 1980 Olympic Games, and Canada's Graham Smith, who won six gold medals at the 1978 Commonwealth Games.

We have a higher foreign student population on this campus than any other place in the country, explains Thornton, and I think our athletic program reflects that.

In addition to Rolandas Gimbutis, the current squad boasts athletes from Brazil, Croatia, Kuwait, Japan and New Zealand.

My philosophy has always been that you don't close things off and just compete with yourself, says Thornton, who scoffs at the suggestion that American universities should cater only to American-born athletes. You bring in the best and compete with them. If you're going to take a nationalistic approach and you don't train with anybody outside your own country, then everybody suffers. I feel it's just really important to open doors and go with the best. Otherwise, we're looking at a false standard.

Thornton would be the first to admit, though, that it's not as if he actively scans the globe searching for the very best foreign-born talent to bring to the East Bay.

A lot of it is word of mouth, he says, explaining how the academic reputation of Berkeley extends throughout virtually every continent. We get people who go back and tell friends about their experience. It's just one of those deals where it's worked out.

By Tito Morales