

Alan Nichols Swim Career

On behalf of the Hobart Dolphins Masters Swimming Club and wider swimming community, Linda and I would like to share some thoughts and memories of our dear friend Allan.

Swimming was a great passion of Allan's and he leaves behind many life-long friendships from within the Tasmanian swim community.

Some in our club have enjoyed a friendship with Allan from the very earliest swimming days back in the 1960s, and many more have come to know and love Al in recent years since he joined the Hobart Dolphins in 2021.

Allan had an incredible presence within the Dolphins swim club: he was a close friend to many, and a fun, cheeky and often goofy companion to many more. He always had such a good sense of humour and he was such an inspiration to us all, living life to the fullest. He was a real ray of sunshine.

Early in his swimming career, Allan trained with Glenorchy Club, learning to swim with Fran Clark before joining Geoff Dowsley's Tiger Squad - which was where current Dolphins members, sisters Megan and Fiona, trained with him for a number of years. Later, he joined Sandy Bay swim club where he joined Margaret Neale's squad, alongside Amanda, and a number of others who have remained firm friends over time.

Members from Sandy Bay Swimming Club remember and celebrate the man they called Big Al. He was like a father figure to so many young swimmers at the Sandy Bay Swimming Club.

Big Al, big in character, big in heart, and big in spirit. He was cheeky, sharp, playful and always had a twinkle in his eye. He made life a bit more colourful for all of us. But there was much more to Big Al than just the mischief.

He was a mentor, a leader, and an example of what hard work and dogged focus could achieve. He didn't just teach technique—he taught character, discipline, and heart.

At Sandy Bay, Big Al wasn't just a teammate—he was the foundation of a culture. He helped build something that was more than just a club; it was a family. A place where young and 'Jurassic' were seen, supported, challenged, and believed in. He showed what it meant to lead by example.

He was tenacious, he trained hard and he did it with a quiet determination that inspired everyone around him. He showed us that, no matter what phase of life you're in, age is no barrier to success, and that there's always something to strive for, always another hill to climb, another young person to guide, another laugh to be shared over a cheeky comment.

Allan was a champion in many senses of the word. As a teenager at Claremont High School, Allan was the interhouse school champion in the open age group and he broke the existing 55 yard breaststroke record and, in that same year, he was the open boys champion at the Inter High School Carnival. A Tasmanian under-age breaststroke champion in his youth, he travelled many times to the mainland to represent his club and state. As an adult, he was a Masters swimming champion, regularly walking away from race meets with swags of medals, and in 2021 he was our Dolphins Swimmer of the Year.

Allan has swum with several masters clubs: Sandy Bay, Talays, Hobart Aquatic and the Hobart Dolphins. He stamped his presence on the Tasmanian Masters record books, currently still holding 29 individual state records, the oldest of these, which was set way back in 2001, is surprisingly, not for his outstanding breaststroke, but for a 400m butterfly in the 45-49 year-old age group. He was an incredibly determined swimmer and a remarkable breastroker as testified by his many top five national rankings ranging from the 50m to 800m events. In 2008, 2015 and 2017, whilst competing at the National Masters Swimming Championships, he won a swag of medals many of those in his pet breaststroke events. He also won 3 gold and 4 silver medals in the 2009 Oceania Masters Games. An amazing feat.

The other records which Allan still holds are in freestyle, individual medley as well as breaststroke. In addition to the numerous individual records, Allan was a member of 5 relay teams which currently hold state records. While not so competitive over the last couple of years due to health battles, he still claimed 6 Hobart Dolphins club records.

Many of our fellow Masters swimmers will fondly recall a very memorable 200m backstroke at the winter championships in 2016 – one of his classic races where Allan fluffed his final flip turn, surfaced and bobbed up in the next lane and literally met another swimmer head on. The competitor in that lane who was suitably unimpressed. Allan was so devastated that he and Pete quickly and quietly slunk off home! We still laugh about it and often delighted in teasing poor Allan. We couldn't possibly let him forget his rude intrusion on the poor competitor in the next lane!

Allan's chatter on our Dolphin's WhatsApp was often funny and so entertaining, and, with a couple of wines under his belt, his ramblings could sometimes become more edgy and cheeky and go late into the night, to the point where a 10 pm curfew was imposed to limit banter to a reasonable hour.

Living in Lenah Valley, he often trained 4-6 times per week at the Friends pool with Megan, Linda, Amanda, Joe, Jennifer or me, or, when staying down at the shack, he would head to Huonville with Fiona. The Friends pool group was a tight-knit training pack, celebrating hard slogs with good coffee, cake, great companionship and other decadent delights at Daci and Daci. In recent years, Allan even braved the cold ocean waters of Randalls Bay, Eggs and Bacon Bay and Bellerive Beach. We laughed at his aversion to encountering any critters in the water. For someone who once avoided open water swimming like the plague, he was proud to have been the 1st placed male to finish the 1km Devil of a Swim held in atrocious conditions at Bicheno in 2022. On another occasion, whilst swimming at Bellerive, he lost his wedding ring. After fruitless searching, he later replaced it with a \$20 substitute.

He missed competing in the recent State Masters Winter Championships held only 2 weeks ago, but as we were heading back from competing in Launceston 2 weekends ago, he rang us, wanting to congratulate the Dolphins on their performances. Swimming was obviously on his mind. Unfortunately, we didn't ever have that post-op swim with him that he was so desperately wanting, but he'll always be in our hearts as we follow that black line.

Recently, Allan had gained his timekeeping credentials and he had volunteered at the last couple of State Masters Championships. He so missed competing and he had vowed to compete this year. Sadly, that wasn't to be.

Training at Clarence and Friends won't be the same without him. His cheerful smile, his mastery of breaststroke and willingness to help other swimmers will be missed. Allan's love for the water was boundless, and his kindness touched every swimmer. He lifted new and experienced swimmers with simple words - "Well done, "Good on you" – words which made us feel we belonged and he encouraged us to strive for our best.

Allan will always be around us, the smell of chlorine, the mesh bag at the ready, us remembering the good-natured moaning about the upcoming programme and the

laughter and good times which followed over coffee. These moments will forever remind us where Allan has been, and where he will always be: with us.

Allan's passing has left us all deeply saddened. He has left precious memories which will be cherished and records that will stand the test of time. Allan leaves behind a legacy—one built not just on achievements in the pool but on the lives he touched, the values he lived by, and the example he set for all of us.

So today, we don't just say goodbye—we say thank you. Thank you, Allan, for the laughs, the lessons, the hard sessions, the cheeky remarks, and the unwavering belief that we could always do more—be more. You stirred the pot in the best way possible. And we're all better for it.

He will live on in our hearts and in the records books of the Hobart Dolphins Masters Swim Club and Tasmanian Masters. He was truly a fun-loving fellow and we were blessed to have Allan join the Dolphins pod. His absence will be sorely and deeply felt. He died before he'd had enough fun. If he's looking down on us now, we would say "Splish, splash, repeat. Just keep swimming."

And to our dear friend Pete,

Be strong and know you have the support and love of so many around you to hopefully soften the sadness and bring you some comfort in these difficult times.