

IS THERE A DOCTOR IN THE POOL?

by Bill Robinson

Behind the cover of David Gerrard's pleasant, easy to get along with and jovial nature is an extremely determined, goal oriented and dedicated competitor.

Dave's swimming story began in Auckland, New Zealand, as a chubby 12-13 year old when he walked into the Mt. Eden Swimming Pool and asked the then coach at the Centre, Morrie Doidge, if he could try out for his squad. Doidge duly tested the young enthusiastic Gerrard and found that he had not a lot of talent as a freestyler, backstroker and especially breaststroke, which he almost went backwards in, but thought that he could probably do something with his butterfly.

This was in the late 1950's and it wasn't long before Dave displayed his greatest asset, his dedication and determination to succeed. Dave trained tirelessly, according to Doidge, and it wasn't long before swimming followers were beginning to sit up and take notice as Gerrard began to break N.Z. Junior Records in his specialist butterfly stroke.

Dave's first major success came in 1960 when he won the 220 yards butterfly at the N.Z. Championships. This was a title that Gerrard was to win an amazing 10 years in a row spreading from 1960 to 1969. Gerrard also won the 110 yards butterfly several times but this was not his favoured event.

In 1962, Dave swam for N.Z. in the Commonwealth Games in Perth and although not winning any individual medals, gained valuable international experience. The next big moment in the Gerrard story was his gaining selection for the 1964 Tokyo Olympic Games. The New Zealand A.S.A. had set very tough qualifying times for its team for the Tokyo Olympiad. Dave made many qualifying attempts to try to secure a spot in the team. In their wisdom the N.Z. selectors decided to send Dave who made it through to the semis for the 200 butterfly in a time of around 2.15.0 and only narrowly missed the final.

This was the encouragement needed for Dave who was looming as a definite gold medal prospect for the Commonwealth Games in 1966 to be held in Jamaica.

By this time Dave was in his second year as a physiotherapist and had adopted Dunedin as his base during the year and back to Auckland for training during the summer vacation months to train with coach Doidge.

Doidge's very tough, no nonsense approach to training was building a very strong group in Auckland and Dave seemed to thrive in this environment.

1966 was to be a big year for the tough Gerrard and the hard work paid off when Dave won the Commonwealth gold medals for the 200 butterfly in the record time of 2.12.8. This was one of the closest races in recent Commonwealth Games swimming with Australian Brett Hill leading Gerrard for most of the race but Dave, now renowned in swim-



DAVID GERRARD

ing circles for his incredible strength and tenacity, unfinished Hill to take the gold.

Dave continued on swimming at N.Z. National level but was beginning to become more involved in his own very successful physiotherapy practice in Auckland specialising in sports injuries.

Physiotherapy was beginning to frustrate Dave as he wanted to know more about the workings of the body and so decided he would sell his physiotherapy practice and move his wife Barbara and son Brett (named after Brett Hill) back to Dunedin where he would begin a Bachelor of Science degree in order to gain entry to Medical School.

David, displaying the same dedication to his studies as he had in his swimming, eventually graduated as a Doctor of Medicine in 1977.

As a measure of the sort of respect Dave is held in N.Z. swimming circles, Dave was selected as Manager of the very successful N.Z. Commonwealth Games swimming team in 1974.

Dave is now a doctor in Launceston, Tasmania, and it is definitely New Zealand's loss and Australia's gain.