

JON CARLSON

BY MICHAEL J. STOTT

Coach Jon Carlson has coached champion Gustavus Adolphus College swimming, diving and tennis teams for a combined 57 seasons—28 with swimming and diving, 29 with tennis.

Q. SWIMMING WORLD: You were an outstanding three-sport athlete (football, swimming, tennis). How did you end up as a swim coach?

A. COACH JON CARLSON: My father was a longtime high school coach. He took me everywhere. I've always loved the sport of swimming and admired what my dad did with his athletes. I was better at tennis, and I took the women's tennis job after spending a year at a tennis academy in Florida. We won the national championship my first year! I told Gustavus I'd stick around if they gave me the swimming and diving program. I coached all three teams and taught three classes each semester—for \$16,000! I was in heaven!

SW: Who were your coaching influences?

JC: Mainly my Minnesota Swimming and Diving Hall of Fame father, but also his opposing hall of fame coaches. I met Minnesota hall of fame coaches Tim Johnson, Mike Chopp, Art Downey and Carl Allison, just to name a few. As a kid, I listened to them talk in the coaches lounges at invitationals. The stories inspired me to hopefully impact swimmers like they did.

SW: Why keep a large roster?

JC: We've had as many as 105 because I value swimming as a team experience very highly. In the women's 50 free, I have several swimmers at 23-low and a girl who broke 30 for the first time last season. Each adds value to the other's experience. Learning to compete as a team and how to be a good teammate—especially in an individual sport—is a skill that will serve the student-athletes well in their future jobs and in life. I work hard to make sure every student-athlete on our team knows they are valued and important.

SW: You are also a tennis coach. How do you keep track of so many athletes?

JC: It's fun! I enjoy being a small part of

each student-athlete's story. This requires lots of time and energy, as well as having outstanding assistant coaches.

SW: What's the attraction of Gustavus Adolphus for athletes?

JC: I think it's our team culture of caring, servant leadership and taking care of each other and knowing that there are many invested in taking care of you.

SW: Your 2014 women's team was seventh at NAAs and has fallen on harder times, while the men are experiencing a resurgence. Any rhyme or reason to that?

JC: Nope! I really admire programs that are consistently finishing in the Top 5 every year. Ten to 12 years ago, our men's program finished fifth while the women were placing somewhere in the pack. It is a combination of which borderline Division I or II student-athlete chooses us and the educational opportunities we can offer over some sort of athletic scholarship; and developing talented, but raw, swimmers into the swimmers they can truly become.

SW: Alissa Tinklenberg was a multi-time All-American and Gustavus' 2013 and 2014 Student-Athlete of the Year. Where does the next superstar come from?

JC: Like most of our All-American stories, hers is a classic. Alissa was from a small farm town in west central Minnesota. I had known her since eighth grade. She was just a solid high school swimmer, but I knew she had a burning desire to be great. Through hard work—and reminders of her potential greatness—Alissa blossomed to become one of our all-time best swimmers.

SW: What does it take to return Gustavus aquatic teams to elite championship levels?

JC: Improving strength and flexibility is as important as anything we do in the water. We do the usual strength training and yoga

[PHOTO PROVIDED BY GUSTAVUS ADOLPHUS COLLEGE]



Coach Jon Carlson

Head Men's and Women's Swimming & Diving Coach
Gustavus Adolphus College
St. Peter, Minnesota

- *Gustavus Adolphus College, B.A., physical education, '88*
- *Starting 28th year as Gustie swim coach*
- *Swimming dual meet record is 95-68 (men), 96-63 (women)*
- *44 swimmers (27 men, 17 women) have earned 119 All-American recognitions (90 men, 29 women)*
- *MIAC Men's Swimming Coach of the Year (2004, 2005) and Women's COY (2002, 2010, 2014)*
- *Won 17 MIAC swimming and diving crowns (seven men, 10 women)*

Carlson, a four-year varsity tennis athlete at Gustavus, also begins his 29th year as the school's women's tennis coach. During that time, the Golden Gusties have compiled a 579-193 dual meet record, have produced 29 tennis All-Americans and have won 22 MIAC titles. Coach Carlson, a member of the NCAA Division III Women's Tennis Committee, is an eight-time MIAC Coach of the Year and a two-time ITA Division III Coach of the Year (1994, 2002). His women won the 1990 D-III national title in tennis.

— continued on 50

at least twice a week. Our gymnastics team has taught our swimmers how to tumble and improve spatial awareness! Many swimmers are very good athletes in the water. We also want them to be the best land athletes they can be.

SW: How many All-Americans have you had with a bad attitude?

JC: Zero All-Americans...but I've addressed attitude at my swim camps. Alissa Tinklenberg wasn't an All-American her freshman year, and she didn't have the greatest attitude. When she began viewing her swim-

ming journey as a fun puzzle rather than a short-term, outcome-based mentality, she did the work and got better. Alissa embraced the fact that some days are great, some days are not, but with each day, the puzzle continued to frame the athlete she wanted to be.

SW: To what do you attribute improved diving recruiting?

JC: When you're a small school outside of a big-city metro area, it's hard to keep a coach on staff for any length of time. They usually have other jobs or are going to graduate school to take off for other jobs. We

got lucky to have our diving coach, Alissa Lager, get a solid job at a bank in town. Her family lives close, and this is where she wants to be. Having that consistency in the diving coach position makes a huge difference!

SW: How valuable are your summer swim camps as a recruiting tool?

JC: They produce probably a third of our team. Our camp goal is to help swimmers improve and have fun. I think they remember the fun they had at camp, and want to have that atmosphere in their

HOW THEY TRAIN:



[PHOTO PROVIDED BY GUSTAVUS ADOLPHUS COLLEGE]

PROGRESSION OF TIMES

| SCY | 2015 | 2016 | 2017 |
|------------|---------|---------|---------|
| 100 Breast | 58.53 | 56.69 | 54.81 |
| 200 Breast | 2:07.25 | 2:04.06 | 1:58.98 |
| 200 IM | 1:57.24 | 1:55.51 | 1:53.06 |

SAMPLE SET

- 4 x 50 breast @ :35
- 100 ez choice @ 2:00-2:30
- 6 x 50 breast @ :35
- 100 ez choice @ 2:00-2:30
- 8 x 50 breast @ :35
- 100 ez choice @ 2:00-2:30
- 10 x 50 breast @ :35

Coach Carlson: "If you miss, you move the 50 interval to :40. Tanner is an amazing 'glider.' We didn't want to force his turnover. We wanted more explosiveness from each stroke. Once he was able to do this all the way through on the :35, we knew he could go under 2:00. We combined that set with a lot of timed 25s. Once we got him hitting under 1:10, we felt we were on track for both a fast 100 and 200 breast."

TANNER SONNEK

BY MICHAEL J. STOTT

It would take "blood, toil, tears and sweat" to be triumphant, intoned Winston Churchill back in 1940. More than 75 years later, he could have been talking about Gustavus Adolphus breaststroker Tanner Sonnek.

A latecomer to the sport, Sonnek started swimming as a ninth-grader at Mankato (Minn.) West High School. His senior year, standing 5-11 and weighing 165 pounds, he finished fourth in the Class A state meet in both the 100 yard breast (58.53) and 200 IM (1:57.24), and clocked free and breast relay splits of 21.64 and 26.52 to help the Scarlets to a fourth-place team finish.

"One of my biggest regrets is not starting earlier than I did," says Sonnek. After ninth grade, he joined the Mantas Swim Club, sending him on an upward trajectory. "The reason I chose Gustavus was the team feeling of family I felt on my recruiting trip. Gustavus has helped me improve an incredible amount in just two years."

Just how much has been evident in his performance in year-end meets. This past season, he was chosen as Minnesota Intercollegiate Athletic Conference (MIAC) Male Swimmer of the Year for his wins in the 100 and 200 yard breast (55.10, 2:02.12) and the 200 IM (1:53.06). He also swam on four all-conference Gustie relays. "Tanner had an amazing meet, stepping up big time. The honor is well-deserved," says Coach Jon Carlson.

At the NCAA Division III Championships, Sonnek finished his season by blasting personal bests of 54.81 in the 100 breast (seventh) and 1:58.98 in the 200 (fifth). In a fitting coda, he was named Gustavus Adolphus Male Athlete of the Year.

"First and foremost, Tanner loves his teammates," says Carlson. "His favorite time of the day is practice, where he has the chance to see his friends. Tanner loves the opportunity to work hard, and teammates love training with Tanner! He always brings great intensity, and he takes time to cheer and encourage his teammates during tough sets. He's the guy that tells everyone that they are going to make it."

The camaraderie Sonnek saw as a recruit was borne out his freshman year when he received a royal welcome after surging the last 25 to win the MIAC conference title in the 200 breast. He repaid them during senior night 2017: "I cry pretty rarely, but seeing all the seniors who would be leaving the program gave me a pretty good hug/cry session with them." ♦

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collegiate experience.

SW: What does a weekly in-season practice schedule look like—in-water and dry-land?

JC: We have morning practices from 6:15 to 7:30 three times per week. It is when we do strength training with all groups, get distance swimmers some extra yards, and middle distance and sprint people some extra speed work.

In the afternoons, athletes can pick from two or three practices (12:30, 2:30 or 4:30). The sessions allow me to get in quality coaching with each swimmer. We also do yoga after practice one to two days a week. On Fridays, the team is absolutely crazy and loud. It's like the chaos of an open-pool session with a bunch of 12-year-olds! I have them all practice together and try to trick them into 4,000 to 5,000 yards and get them out of there.

SW: So, weekly volume is...?

JC: Depending on the training group, we do about mid-5,000s to mid-6,000s each day most of the year. Distance gets in at least 10,000 between two practices on the days they have mornings. We usually try to kick at least 1,000 yards, and on many days, more

yards than that, going as high as 2,500.

SW: You are an advocate of cupping. How often do your athletes avail themselves of that therapy?

JC: I'm an advocate of whatever keeps my athletes healthy and pain-free! Cupping does help. We have an athletic trainer who is very good at the science of cupping. It is an important part of the recovery/healing process for some of our swimmers.

SW: What was the motivation for the "Race 4 Grace"?

JC: Grace Goblirsch swam at Gustavus starting her freshman year in the fall of 2011. She was diagnosed with leukemia during her sophomore season and passed away in August of that year. She was everything I look for in a swimmer: hard-working and full of smiles. Grace was someone who enhanced everyone's experience in the program.


I try to keep her memory alive by having her former teammates come down and speak about Grace to the team. We have an invitational and a bone marrow drive on campus in her honor. Two of my swimmers have been bone marrow donors. "Race 4 Grace" simply means race for each other. Compete as hard as you can when it's time to race...then smile

and have fun with your teammates the rest of the time.

SW: You have coached women's tennis at Gustavus for 29 years and are perennial winners. In the early '90s, you won a national championship. What has changed?

JC: Other teams have gotten better. We had a streak from the early '90s until around 2009 when we finished in the top eight in Division III every year. Title IX has helped develop the many Division II programs in our area by offering a lot more athletic scholarship money to balance out their football programs. More and more, players are opting for a Division II program due to that scholarship money. ❖

Michael J. Stott is an ASCA Level 5 coach whose Collegiate School (Richmond, Va.) teams won nine state high school championships. He has been named a 2017 recipient of NISCA's Outstanding Service Award.

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