



## Local Legend Let's swim!

### Local Legend David Gildea: World Record Holder

David Gildea, a U.S. Masters swimmer, has set multiple world records in breaststroke events across various age groups. In the 65-69 age group, during the Pacific Masters Short Course Meters Championships, he established records in the 50m breaststroke (35.44 seconds), 100m breaststroke (1:17.01), and 200m breaststroke (2:56.84). Upon entering the 70-74 age group, Gildea continued his record-setting performances. At the Pacific Masters Championships in October 2013, Gildea set a 70-74 age group world record in the 100m breaststroke with a time of 1:24.12. It was later broken by Kenneth Frost's 1:23.65 at the FINA World Masters Championships on August 4, 2014, in Montreal.



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US Master Swimming just published their 2024 wrap up. For the 80-84 AG, Dave placed 1st in 5 events and top 3 in 11 events across short course yards (SCY), long course meters and short course meters. He was top 10 in all 29 events he entered. There are still many 80+ year old entrants. Dave noted that the SCY 100 free had 56 men. So actually, he is National and International Legend material!

### Dave's Story: Getting Out There and Mixing It Up

Swimming has given me so much during my life. Now I'm changing it up more by doing triathlon training, and more weight sessions, and physical therapy, plus weekly running or hiking. I swim as much as twice a week, usually with the Ladera Masters or just on my own. I put on my pull paddles and my float suit and my Garmin watch and go back and forth. I still go to every swim meet with Menlo Masters. I love the competitive spirit of Menlo and the critical mass of swimmers who go to meets (Thanks to Stephanie Couch for running the *Melo Racer* Whatsapp group).



## Those Triathletes Couldn't Really Swim Great, But They Were Having Fun...

I moved into triathlons about ten years ago. I had some really strong swimming goals in my life and then I achieved those goals, and then achieved them a few more times. I just wanted to do something else. I was about 70 when I did my first triathlon. You see, I started out in lane one not so long ago, and gradually moved down and found myself sharing lanes with triathletes, but they weren't really swimmers. They would be talking about their triathlons and it sounded fun, so after listening to them for five or ten years, I thought, "Okay, I'll try it."

I'd never run before and still don't run very well, which means I'll never be a good triathlete. When I first started doing triathlons, I'd finish the swim ahead of most everybody, but I've slowed down a lot, though I'm still in the upper group of swimmers, just not the top group. And I'm an okay biker. You can't really compare me to others in my age group, because I'm often the only one! I started out swimming in lane 1 and I recently set a new goal for myself: to make lane 6! (the slowest lane in the pool.) My dad got tendonitis chopping wood when he was 91. That's what I want to do, get an overuse injury in my 90's!

## Aging Ain't Linear

I notice that the age decline doesn't happen linearly. When I was fifty-five, I'd still be in the fast heat, then, everything went to crap. Then it kind of stabilized for a while and I did okay until my mid-seventies, when I was still swimming in the second-fastest heat, and now it's all just gone to crap. And it turns out that my age group competitors are finding the same thing.

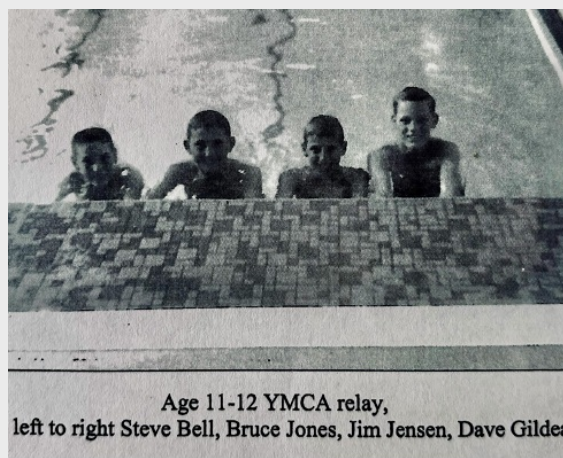
Menlo Masters  
10 age group x 100 yards relay  
World Best  
October 27, 2002



70-74	Dick Bennett	1:15.14	45-49	Jim Kemp	54.18
65-69	John Sulzbach	1:10.96	40-44	George Tidmarsh	51.58
60-64	Murray McLachlan	59.39	35-39	Tony Batis	49.62
55-59	Dave Gildea	57.16	30-34	Ed Owen	50.52
50-54	Jeff Strnad	56.26	25-29	Andres Mediavilla	50.71

## I'm Never Leaving Menlo Masters Again

I'm in a national chat group of eight or nine people who all compete with times reported online. It's organized by a friend of mine, Pete Anderson. He lives in San Diego, but swims for Tamalpais Masters. He's never actually lived in Marin, it's just that he wanted to set all the 80-year-old world relay records and he's now succeeded! There are ten relay events, between short course meters and long course meters. But in order to do it, Pete needed to have Richard Burns, and Richard is at Tam. He also asked me to join Tam, but I said, "I left Menlo once before for Stanford. I'm never leaving again." But they didn't really need me anyway. This group of people from around the country joined Tam and set all ten relay records. Not only that, but they made the 80-year-old Pacific records really strong because all their times count toward Pacific records.



Age 11-12 YMCA relay,  
left to right Steve Bell, Bruce Jones, Jim Jensen, Dave Gildea.

## Non-standard Pools...Just Race

I grew up in Whittier, in Southern California. I didn't swim at all until I was 12, and then I pretty much started out racing, before I really learned to swim! I went to the YMCA and they had this team, so I joined and we raced. It was only boys, as I remember. It was a six lane pool, but only 20 yards long, so all our races were 20s and 40s. I did okay in the 20, but had trouble in the 40! Back

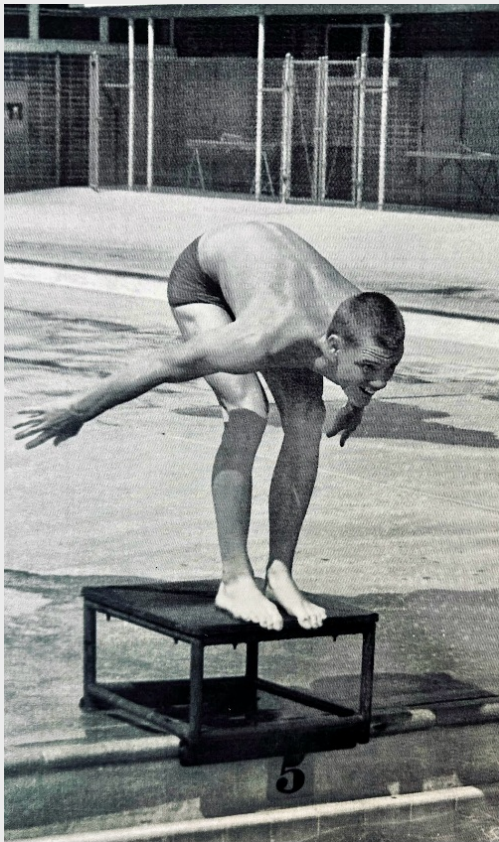
then there weren't even lane lines in the YMCA pool. Recreational swimmers would get mad if you tried to swim back and forth. "Hey! What are you running into me for?" The original pool at Whittier High School was 33 1/3 yards long. So, a 100 yd race would be three lengths!

## The History of the Three Stroke IM

There were just three strokes back then. Throughout my high school years the IM was either a 75 or a 150 with 3 strokes. Before 1952, the butterfly stroke was not considered a separate stroke from the breaststroke. In 1952, World Aquatics made the butterfly an official stroke and the butterfly was added to the IM as a separate stroke.

## Swimming Keeps Evolving

I'm old enough to have seen a lot of evolution in the breaststroke. At the YMCA and in high school, breaststroke was an underwater stroke. You could go as far as you wanted underwater, and it was faster. It was a while before the surface times caught up with the underwater times. When the breaststroke split from the butterfly, it became a fully above the surface stroke. Then in 1987 there was a rule that swimmers no longer needed to keep their heads above the water. The swimmers must break the surface of the water on each stroke cycle, but put their head back into streamline for a faster forward motion. The old rule about keeping your head above the water affected the shape and size of people who could swim breaststroke. You either needed to be light enough to float and stay above the water or strong enough to push your body forward in the race. Swimming for all!



## What the Hell is Going On at Encinal Pool?

I played water polo in high school, as well as one year at Stanford. I swam on the Stanford Men's Swim Team which is celebrating their 110th season. I wasn't a star. I was, uhm, glue? I was on the medley relay, so that meant I was a part of the team, but I wasn't the one who got first place in the individual events, except at dual meets.

We practiced at the Encinal Pool. It was all guys, and we swam naked! Absolutely! This was in the mid-'60's. Because of the no-suits thing we didn't need to bring anything with us to the pool. We could just drop in whenever. Goggles hadn't been invented. You didn't need to bring a suit. They issued towels. We didn't do team practices naked, just lap swim. At practices we wore suits, really.

When I was a student, women's swimming at Stanford was a club sport. There was a women's pool

over by Roble, but the women thought it was unfair that they couldn't swim at Encinal, so they started coming over to Encinal. There was an overlap period when the men were still coming out of the locker room naked and the women were there swimming. So, eventually, the men started wearing suits! Women's swimming at Stanford University became an NCAA sport in 1981–82, but that was well after my time.

## **Suits(!), Goggles and Ear Plugs Improve Comfort and Performance**

I'm not sure when goggles came out. Definitely not by the late '60's. Goggles began to be mass produced in the 1970s. I remember a swim meet in 1975 and the racers were wearing goggles. "Oh! this is great!" The pool chemicals in those days were really intense! Your eyes would be so sore, and then you'd try to study! I frequently got ear infections. The only thing that worked was lambs' wool slathered with Vaseline pushed into your ear. Lambs' wool is like a cotton ball, but better. We invented what we needed to keep swimming.

## **Safety First**

You could say I took a big break from swimming after Stanford. It was 17 years before I tried to swim fast again, when I joined Rinconada Masters. Coaches Cindy and Carol did wonderful things to help get Masters swimming started. I saw them every couple days for years, rather like Tim all these decades at Menlo.

There were some changes when Tim took over the pool at Rinconada, about 2018. Many swimmers had been there since the 80's. Coach Carol was still there. They didn't see any reason to make any changes. After all, they'd been doing fine. Tim said, "I can't take the safety and liability risks. We have to do things by modern standards." So Coach Carol very reluctantly agreed to do a certification class. They thought that Tim was being really unreasonable!

When they closed Rinconada for repairs, I swam at Stanford for a while before coming to Menlo. Then in the '90s they closed Burgess for renovation. Menlo Masters became nomadic. Tim always found a home for us: Sacred Heart Prep, then Woodside High School and later Herkner Pool in Redwood City. The pool chemicals at Herkner were quite strong and I had a lot of trouble breathing, so I decided to go back to Stanford. I didn't come back to Menlo for a while, which I regret.

## **Check the Specs**

Stanford's was a sort of a dangerous pool. When the 50-meter pool went in, it was very shallow—too shallow. This Stanford Masters swimmer, a very experienced guy, dove in and hit his head. He broke his neck and got a concussion. I guess enough people got so badly hurt that they had to deepen it. But they forgot to make it 50 meters! It was all fine until Stanford hosted the World Masters in 2006 and FINA said, "You need a modern measurement", so they measured the pool and it wasn't 50 meters! They had to drain the pool and fix it on an emergency basis before the meet. It was only off by millimeters, but you have to draw the line somewhere.

**Three World Records in a single meet at regional Pacific Masters short course meters Championships, October, 2008, in 50, 100 & 200 breasts. Also Pacific region record in 100 IM and 5<sup>th</sup> in the US in 100 free. First meet with benefit of 26 months of weight training physical therapy in lieu of to avoid shoulder surgery.**



## **Record Times are a Matter of On-Time Record Keeping**

Masters Swimming started in Woodland Texas in 1972. And Rinconada's Coach Cindy and Carol came real soon after that, within the same year. Ray and Zaida Taft also swam at Rinconada. I remember when I turned 65 and I looked at the records, there was Ray Taft everywhere, and Aldo DeRosa. They set the first records in the '70's and '80's. Walter Reed, was going around trying to find the old records and submitting them to FINA.

FINA (Fédération internationale de natation; International Swimming Federation) was founded in 1908 as the international federation recognised by the International Olympic Committee (IOC) for administering international competitions in water sports. So Walter Reed was going back and finding these times from the '70's and '80's to submit them to FINA. Before that, records were just kept by volunteers. After the late 1980's there was more regulation and official channels for documenting records.

## **You Always Remember Your First...**

In 2023 FINA was renamed World Aquatics. I've been involved in it because of the world records. They are very unforgiving! For example, you have a certain number of days after a meet to properly submit your record on the correct form. The meet official is actually supposed to do this. One of my friends, Richard Todd, lost a world record because the printer ran out of ink and he didn't submit the form on time! I got my first world record down in Southern California, but they didn't submit it! So I followed up and followed up and that's how I learned what the system was. They eventually got it submitted within the deadline by a few days. I wouldn't have gotten my record if I hadn't pursued the submission myself.

It was 200 breast, short course meters. I was in the second-fastest heat. It was quite a big deal because I had the flu and it was affecting my joints, plus I have asthma, which reacts to pool temperature and this was an indoor pool with very poor ventilation. So I was standing at the door

trying to breathe and watching to see when my heat was called. Additionally, the touch pads weren't working consistently in my assigned lane, so I had to round up three human timers in case the touchpad failed. So for the 200 breaststroke I went out in 1:19 for the first 100 meters (which might also have been a world record!) but I still had to swim another 100! I came back at 1:33, and it was extraordinarily painful! I remember that I couldn't see the wall at the finish. I was all browned out. I looked up and couldn't see my timers either, but I could hear them. They said my time was 2:53 and I knew the record was 2:56. Then I couldn't get out of the pool!

I finally made it to the warm-down pool, and this guy, Pete, was there along with Dave Levinson, from Rinconada, who asked, "Do you guys know each other?" Turned out Pete had won the 200m breast at long course nationals. I had missed LC nationals because of a pulled groin muscle. Pete says to me, "I did a 2:53. What did you do?" We were in the same heat, but at opposite sides of the pool and hadn't seen each other. So we're looking at each other, and Levinson is watching us. Finally Pete says, "You probably beat me, I did a .65," and I said, "Yeah, I did a .21." So that was my first world record. I knew I could win it! I knew it! I was doing workouts that I knew no other 60-year-old could do. I was doing sets of 50 meters on the 1:05, and I was holding .42s. And I thought, "This might be my best shot. I might never do this again." Turned out I did, but this was my first world record.

## **A Lifetime Goal, Set When I was 12 years old**

After that, Pete and I became pretty good friends, like brothers. We just raced each other at the nationals in September. We've raced lots of times, traded world records back and forth. Every world record is precious, but especially the first one. Getting a world record had been a goal ever since high school. It wasn't until the 1950's that I even realized that there was a national list. I remember looking at this list of the Top 20 times when I was a Junior in high school and I was eleventh! That was it. I knew that some day I wanted to be number one.

## **The Best Race of My Life Was One I Lost**

The race I describe as my best race was *the race I didn't win*, when I lost the world record I'd had. My goal since my mid-40's was to break 1:20 for 100 meters long course breaststroke. I'd tried 20 times over 20 years, and here I was 66 years old and I hadn't done it. Remember we used to have these meets in Santa Cruz? I'd go down there I'd win my age group, and set a Pacific record, but I wouldn't break 1:20. And then, at 66, I did it! And Ken Frost beat me! I didn't win the race and I lost the world record, but it was my best race ever! Think about it. You've been working for something and you're already in your mid-60's. I looked up at the board and I saw the 1:19. I got it! Ken Frost is a friend of mine. He's better than I am, or he was in that race anyway. He did an 18. and that held for quite a long time. It's a 14. now.

Winning is partly about swimming smart and leaving it all in the pool, swimming your best race. I don't care where the other finishers are. Well...I won't say that. I like to beat them, but it's not a big deal. The big deal is if I did everything right and left it all in the pool.

## **Outside of Swimming?**

A pretty average life. Two grown daughters, and one granddaughter, who is now seven. She's gorgeous and cute and fun and smart! I last retired in my early 70's, but I've retired three times! I wanted to retire when I was thirty to sail the South Pacific, so Jane and I did that. We bought a 34-foot boat, and we figured out how to sail. I already knew how to race! Masters swimming wasn't available when I got out of college, and I wanted to be in some sport. Then, on my first day of work at Hewlett Packard I asked the guy next to me, "What do people here do outside of work?" and he said, "We sail." So, that evening we went out sailing, and then I got a boat and started racing! I thought I might get first place in the USA in sailing! I got up to fourth place in a major competition.

## **My Three Retirements**

I retired at 30 and Jane left her teaching job and we went off sailing in the South Pacific, pretty much for five years. We loved it the whole time, and when we didn't love it any more, we sailed back here. I probably have a thousand stories from that trip. We spent a whole year in Tahiti. A lot of that time was just working on the boat. We went snorkeling and we met people. What do you do around here for fun? We spent 300 days out of sight of land. The coral reefs were amazing for sea life, but scary for navigation. They weren't all charted, or weren't charted correctly. You know

adventures aren't necessarily all a good thing. You have to be careful.

When we came back, I went back to work for another company, but when I turned 50, I just didn't want to work anymore, I didn't want to put up with the politics and bureaucracy of working for a company. Then I went into business for myself writing patents. I took some classes about it and I had a couple friends mentoring me to get started. And I had this deep network of contacts in engineering, so I was able to get business. I did that for 20 years. I worked right here in my home office. Little did I know I was ahead of my time! I retired for the final time at 71.



## Have Fun Forever. Period.

It doesn't take as much to keep me busy and make me tired now as it used to. We watch the Warriors on television. We have some precious times with the family. They're all local. It's great! One daughter with her husband is in Menlo Park, and the other is in the Outer Sunset. I'd say my only remaining swimming goal, aside from making it to lane 6, is to have fun forever. I don't have any age goals or anything. I just always want to do the next thing, whatever it is! Don't think too far ahead. Like this past summer, there were all these great triathlons and swim meets. Just go one at a time.

It's strange—I thought it might be harder, but I don't have any problem with being in one of the slowest swim heats. However, it's a bit tough to work out with (Triathlon) Team Sheeper, because I can't keep up on the run. My knees are actually better now than they were ten years ago thanks to exercising and physical therapy. I do have the willpower and my body has responded well, but I've slowed down. The main thing is that I'm just having fun doing triathlons. I'm never going to be a good triathlete, My feet are so big so it's hard to get the wetsuit off quickly! But swimmers don't usually make excuses. Have you noticed that? I guess it's true of all athletes. We tend to just say, "I've just got to make myself better."

## My Role Model

Tim is absolutely my role model. He is one of the best 60-year-old triathletes in the world. He's under 7 minutes for his runs now. And his cycling! He goes past me just like a car! And his swim is great too. But more than that it's his person. He's the whole deal. An example is how he refers to all of us as athletes and he says the swim lanes are "fast, faster and fastest". Everything is positive. You never hear a negative word. And he never makes excuses for anything. No matter what's happened, he always finds something about it that's positive. He's out there coaching, and he knows everyone's name, and he knows what they can do. He knows what a good time would be for that particular person. It's just astounding! If I have 2 heroes in my life. I have to pick my father first, and Tim is #2. In my whole life.

*Editor's Note: This interview was collected and transcribed by Frances Reneau. Kim Freitas edited Dave's important story.*



## About Local Legends

Menlo Masters is gathering and sharing stories of extraordinary individuals on the team. We hope these narratives will connect us with each other and inspire us to swim often.

If you want to shine our warm spotlight on someone you know, please contact [tasha@menlomasters.com](mailto:tasha@menlomasters.com)

**Menlo Swim & Sport [menloswim.com](http://menloswim.com)**