

A YOUNG
MANN
WITH
PLANN

BY STACY BOOTH



AS HE HEADS INTO HIS SENIOR YEAR
OF HIGH SCHOOL, THIS BELLEVUE CLUB
MEMBER IS SWIMMING TO IMPROVE
HIS FUTURE, HIS SPEED AND
THE LIVES OF CHILDREN.



Russell Mahan, Jr., hadn't even celebrated his first birthday before he was introduced to water. By age 2, he was taking swimming lessons.

"He definitely has never had the fear for water," says his mom, Stacey Mahan. "Most kids would sit on the edge (of the pool) and kick; he was the one running for the diving board."

Encouraged by some of his first coaches to start swimming year-round, Russ now trains nine to 11 times a week.

"I'm about a half-second away from Olympic trials (time) and that's kept me going. And college, trying to get a scholarship," says the 17-year-old, who will be a senior this fall.

Russ tried many different sports growing up, and with his active family, it wasn't hard. "We golf as a family, we snowboard, we water-ski," says Stacey. Both she and her husband were active teenagers, and remained that way into adulthood. Russ and his sister, Melanie, both took many different kinds of sport lessons, in addition to family outings. In fact, Stacey says even when they take a slow-paced vacation to Hawaii—instead of skiing and snowboarding in Canada or wakeboarding and water-skiing in Eastern

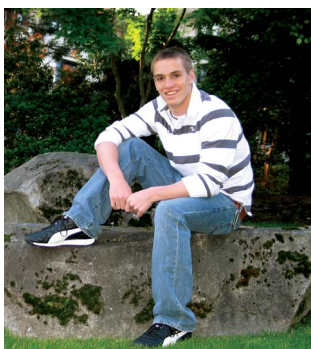
BY the NUMBERS

105.3
TIME (IN SECONDS) OF HIS 100-METER BREASTSTROKE LONG-COURSE RACE (50 METERS)

00
NUMBER OF YEARS HE HAS BEEN SWIMMING WITH THE BELLEVUE CLUB SWIM TEAM

57:00
TIME (IN SECONDS) HE SWAM THE SHORT-COURSE 100-YARD BREASTSTROKE DURING THE 2005 STATE HIGH-SCHOOL MEET, MAKING THE BOOKS AS THE SECOND-FASTEST TIME IN WASHINGTON STATE HIGH-SCHOOL SWIMMING HISTORY

Washington—the family will go golfing. In spite of all that, Russ still sticks with



swimming. "I started meeting a lot of cool people," he says, "and I realized it could help me get into college and also keeps me in good shape." He adds, "And it's just fun to do." He swims for the Bellevue Club Swim Team, the Sammamish High School team and previously swam with a neighborhood team.

His talent for swimming has started taking him around the United States, and might take him around the world. Getting to travel, he said, is one of the pluses. Twice Russ has gone to Colorado Springs, Colo., to the

Olympic Training Center. The center has been the home of the U.S. Olympic Committee since 1978. The state-of-the-art facility—"It takes your handprint to get into the facility, into the lunchroom and everywhere," says Russ. "That's really cool."—houses coaches and athletes, giving them the advice and training they need to improve their sport.

Russ was most recently invited to go as one of the top swimmers in the nation in November 2005. During his time there, he stayed in the residence halls and trained, ate and took classes with fellow swimmers and former Olympians. Classes covered everything from nutrition to drug testing.

Russ called the experience "inspiring." Besides getting to meet the top swimmers in the nation, he said, "I

was part of the top, which was one of the cool things. Usually, I talk to these people, and it's really cool, but to be part of it ... it was very eye opening."

The training paid off. Following his five days at the Olympic Training Center, Russ headed to the U.S. Open in Alabama. At the meet, he dropped seven-tenths of a second in his 100-meter breaststroke. Russ placed sixth in finals, an amazing finish as he was competing against mainly college-aged swimmers.

"I had never been to a meet that was that intense, at that level before," he says of the U.S. Open. "There were a lot of people from Germany and Switzerland there, and they had news crews, a whole press section, which I've never seen. People were breaking American records. My race was between two Olympians from America. It was very cool."

Even with the intensity of the meets and level of competition, Russ says he doesn't let that pressure get to him. "I feel the pressure from myself, trying to swim faster, trying to get a better time. That hits me harder than the pressure from the whole atmosphere."

Russ says he likes traveling to meets and seeing different parts of the country, but meets at home like the recent Spring Nationals Meet held at the King County Aquatics Center in Federal Way, are, in some ways, better. "As much fun as traveling is, it's nice to sleep in your own bed," he says. "It was nice to be able to get in the car and drive down to the pool and be at a meet that was that big."

In training for these races, Russ says he works on his core, and does what he calls "raw training." He concentrates, outside of the pool, on sit-ups, Pilates and other core work.



TOP LEFT TO RIGHT

FIRST TWO PHOTOS: Russ instructs swimmers participating in the swim-a-thon he organized to benefit the Kinderling Center in Bellevue. Swimmers complete laps to raise money during the swim-a-thon.

LAST THREE PHOTOS: Russ at Spring Nationals in March 2006—waiting to begin; Russ (center) getting ready for his event; racing the breaststroke.

OPPOSITE PAGE BOTTOM Russ relaxes outside the Bellevue Club.

BELOW At the Swim Team Banquet: Russ (center right) with Thomas Weitzendorfer, Tyler Hayden and Paige Anderson (l-r).

But, he says, “Once you get down to a meet, a week or two before, you can’t do anything to help that. So you go down to the starts, the turns, trying to fix minor things.”

Russ didn’t swim for Sammamish High School during this school year (because he is training to make the Olympic trials time with the Bellevue Club, he can’t compete in a high-school league) but he is going to rejoin the team for his senior year. High-school swimming, he says, is probably the most fun. “There are a lot more people there cheering. Everyone’s in school colors and everyone is chanting ... everyone is there cheering you on.”

Although Russ says more people attend his high-school meets, his family still tries to watch most of his swim meets, whether they are through Sammamish High or not.

“With computers, we can watch online and see how his meets are going,” says Stacey. “That’s kind of fun.” She says Russ usually travels with Klaas Schenk, senior swim coach at the Bellevue Club or with another coach from the area, and the family likes to attend out-of-state meets when they can.

After high school, Russ would like to go to college on a swimming scholarship and eventually become an orthodontist. And although he would like a shot at the Olympics in 2008, “My main goal is to get into college, try and get a scholarship and hopefully swim on a team like USC,” he says.

In addition to his athletic accolades for a college application, Russ has racked up volunteer hours, including organizing and running a swim-a-thon in 2005 that raised more than \$1,000 for the Kinderling Center in Bellevue. Russ chose the Kinderling Center because the facility is close to his home.

“I remembered walk-a-thons back when I was in elementary school, and then the Bellevue Club used to do a swim-a-thon,” Russ says. “It ran a little bit differently, but it was basically the same idea. So I decided to try to put one of those on.” He recruited fellow swimmers and gained pledges for the distances each swimmer went. Russ worked with an employee of the Kinderling Center, a nonprofit neuro-developmental center that provides services for children birth to 3 years with special needs and their families. Russ, however, did most of the work, says Jennifer Pineda, the director of advancement at the center.

“One of the employees met with Russell several times and went over his plan, and provided marketing materials he might need and advice, and from there, Russell really took it and ran with it.” Jennifer adds that whenever young people get involved with the center, it means a lot, not only because any money raised is always needed and appreciated, but also because information about the center is then passed along to people beyond their normal population. Also, she says, “It sets an example for others.”

Russ’s mom was just as moved: “He did an amazing amount of work with that. He put it together with very little help from Russ (his father) and I. He raised some good money for a wonderful organization.”

The experience left an impression on Russ, also. After being shown

around the Kinderling Center and meeting some of the children using the facility, he says, “Walking into the building with that \$1,000-plus was pretty cool.” He adds that he is thinking about doing another swim-a-thon with the goal of raising \$1,500 to \$2,000 for the center.

Next up for Russ is the Senior Nationals Meet in Irvine, Calif., on Aug. 1. This meet, he says, is similar to the U.S. Open, but larger. More



swimmers attend this meet, including Michael Phelps, eight-time medalist at the 2004 Olympics. Russ will swim the 100-meter breaststroke and the 50-meter freestyle events.

Swimming has proven, for Russ, to be an incredible catalyst to do great things. Says his mom, “swimming has just been such a good sport. It keeps him going.” She also praised the Club’s swim program for allowing Russ to both do and learn a lot. “If his swimming doesn’t go any further than today, all the experiences he’s gotten have been amazing. It’s just a wonderful thing for kids to be in.”