

Nadiator History by Alan Mast:

When did the team start?

The team started in the summer of 1981, the first year that the “new” pool was open. There was never a team in the oval pool. I had just graduated from Urbana High School. I applied to be a life guard at the pool and told them that I wanted to be the swim team coach also. The Park District did not have a swim team but they were willing to start one. The first year I was the assistant coach. The head coach was a guy named Randy (I can not remember his last name). I became the head coach the second year of the team and Geoff Day was the assistant coach. I am pretty sure that it was the second summer that the team was named the Nadiators. There was a big whale (that previously was at Lincoln Square) that was on the deck of the pool and some people wanted to name the team the “Whalers”. I thought Nadiators was a better name. I think it became official when we had it put on the first T-shirt. A lot of people think that the term Nadiator is derived from the Spanish word Nadar, which means to swim, but I really came up with the word because I knew that an indoor pool is called a Natatorium. I was not that good at spelling and thought that it was spelled “Nadatorium” and that is where Nadiator came from.

Were both boys and girls on the team?

Yes

What were the ages of the swimmers?

There were kids from 5 to 18 years old on the team (this includes me, I swam for the Nadiators for the first two years of the team)

Were there different events for the different genders/ages?

Boys and girls swam the same distance events. The distances got longer as the swimmers got older. The events are probably very similar to those swam today. One thing that has changed is that you could not do flip turns on backstroke. You had to stay on your back the whole time. I the old way is better, letting them turn over and swim one stroke of freestyle on backstroke seems like cheating and also gets a lot of kids disqualified now.

How many people joined the team the first year?

There were only 4 kids signed up for the team before the first season started and the park district supervisor asked me if we should really do this. I told her should and that we would recruit kids from the pool over the summer. We did this and the team had about 35 kids by the end of the first summer. A problem was that most of them were not very good swimmers. I taught them how to swing their arms and look cool on the blocks before they got in the water, since they were not going to look cool once they hit the water. I think the second year we grew to about 80 swimmers and then to over 100 the next year. We also had some pretty good swimmers join the team and began win a few meets.

Who did you compete against? How many other teams were in the conference?

We competed in the East Central Illinois Swim Conference. This included Windsor, Indian Acres, Sholem, Charleston, Danville Elks, and maybe another team that I am forgetting (Sullivan?). I think there were usually about 6 teams in the conference.

Were the Nadiators the first team?

They were the first team at Crystal Lake Pool.

What were other pools like at the time?

Most pools were 6 lane, 25 yard/meter pools. Crystal Lake had more lanes and Sholem was 50 meters long. I have not seen the Sholem pool in several years and do not know how it has changed. There was not a wading pool area with fountains stuff, but there was the big water slide. Every year after the Nadiator season banquet we went to the slide (do you still do this?).

What is your favorite memory of the team or Crystal Lake Pool?

This is hard because I have lots of them. It was one of the most fun jobs I have ever had. One memory is the Conference meet where we took first and second (Meghan Gebauer and Debbie Uchtman) in the 8-U girls 25 freestyle and won the 8-U girls free relay. Remember from above, that we were not a very good team and having these girls win was exciting because it showed that we were developing new swimmers. One time I was trying to get the swimmers to do one length no breath and none of them could do it. I challenged them and told them that I could do 3 lengths without breathing and then realized that I would have to do it. After I did it, it made them stop complaining about one length a little. We always tried to make up nicknames for the swimmers. Some that I remember are Megawatt for Meghan Gebauer, Tina the Tuna for Tina Johnson, Matt "No Teeth" Hopkins, and Sandy Fretty Eat Spaghetti. There are lots of other individual things that different swimmers did. I will attach copies of some early Nadiator documents that mention other fun things that happened on the team in the early years.