

Matt Pohlman - Swim With Gills (SWG) Head Coach/Director of Competitive Swimming

Swim With Gills Head Coach Matt Pohlman joined the SWG family in November of 2022 and has enjoyed working as a Private Swim Instructor and Lifeguard. As well, he currently serves as an Assistant Coach for the Boys' and Girls' Swimming & Diving Team at Jupiter High School. Prior to relocating to Palm Beach County, Coach Matt has had an extensive career coaching competitive swimming in Connecticut. He has had the opportunity to coach swimmers of all ages with several High School and USA Swimming age-group club programs. Coach Matt is thrilled to now bring his decades of experience to south Florida and help build a brand-new USA Swimming member club with Swim With Gills Owner Christina Theiss and Associate Head Coach Chris Dwire.

Going back in time, Matt began his own competitive swimming career as a freshman in the winter of 1985-86 at Stratford High School in Stratford, CT. Having no prior competitive swimming experience, he found out quickly that he had a lot to learn. While most coaches would have advised him to try out for another sport, long-time SHS Coach Bob Newall decided to take on a project. Coach Newall always stuck by the old quote, "Rome wasn't built in a day." After two seasons, Matt started to come into his own as a Junior when he developed a nice butterfly stroke. As a Senior Tri-Captain during the 1988-89 season, he led the team to its first winning season in a decade (7-4-1). Assistant Coach Ed Goodrich joined the staff that winter and helped inject an energy never before seen within the program. The highlight of the season was a rare victory over cross-town rival Bunnell High School where Matt was a triple winner (200 yard Medley Relay, 200 yard Individual Medley, 100 yard Butterfly). The team went on to finish second in the conference and place well at the Class 'S' State Championship meet.

Although his personal competitive career had come to end, Matt's life in the sport had only just begun. He volunteered as an assistant coach the next two seasons at his alma mater which culminated in the school's first and only conference championship during the 1990-91 season. The following year he earned his first official Assistant Coach position at SHS and remained there for two seasons. During the 1993-94 season, Coach Matt decided to take on an internship so he could be mentored by legendary Head Coach Bruce Jaffe at Fairfield Preparatory High School in Fairfield, CT. He then returned to SHS for one more season in 1994-95, the final season for his old friend, Coach Newall.

A big change came in 1995-96 as Coach Matt became Assistant Coach for the Girls' Team at SHS under Head Coach Traci Rossi during the fall. He then moved across town for the winter season to serve as Assistant Coach of the old rival Bunnell High School Boys' Team under Head Coach Ken Poisson. These added experiences led to an even bigger change the following year where his coaching career jumped to the next level.

During the summer of 1996, Coach Matt took on a position as a swim instructor and physical education coordinator for Camp Hafaday at the Westport/Weston YMCA. This directly led to the opportunity of a lifetime as Coach Matt was hired on as Lead Assistant Coach for both the Age Group and Senior/National squads for the national powerhouse Westport/Weston YMCA Water

Rats (WRAT). He had the distinct privilege to learn from and work alongside two legendary coaches, Head Coach Bill Krumm and Senior/National Coach Ellen Johnston. Coach Matt enjoyed two years on staff with the Water Rats working with many of Connecticut's best swimmers, some of whom became YMCA National Champions.

His experience working with the Water Rats also led to Coach Matt earning his first Head Coach position. At the age of 25 he took the helm for the Boys' Swimming & Diving Team at Staples High School in Westport, CT during the 1996-97 winter season. Staples enjoyed a storied tradition throughout the 70s and 80s, however tough times fell on the program during the 90s. Immediately the script was flipped and the Wreckers went on to seven consecutive winning seasons under Coach Matt's tutelage. During that time, Staples boasted several individual and relay State Champions and the team consistently finished in the Top 5 at the Class M State Championship Meet. The 2001 season was their most prolific where the Wreckers placed 3rd and also went on to place 10th overall at the State Open Championship held at Yale University.

During his tenure at Staples (1996-2003) Coach Matt added four more credentials to his resume. In the spring of 1998, he earned his Bachelor's Degree (cum laude) in Exercise Science/Teacher Preparation from Southern Connecticut State University in New Haven, CT. Over the next few years he was employed by both the Town of Stratford and Town of Westport school districts teaching Physical Education to all grades (K-12). Next, he had a brief stint (1998-99) as an Assistant Coach for the Stratford YMCA Sea Dogs (STRY) where he served under Head Coach Pete Mesavage. Coach Matt then served as Director of Swim Lessons and then Pool Director at Longshore Country Club in Westport during the summers of 2001-02. Finally, In the fall of 2001, Coach Matt became Assistant Coach for the Girls' Swimming & Diving Team at Staples alongside Head Coach Mike Laux.

In the spring of 2003 Matt decided to take a step back from teaching and coaching and moved here to south Florida for the first time, where he split time living in both West Palm Beach and Jupiter. He enjoyed working in a few different managerial positions including stints at Cold Stone Creamery in Jupiter, H.P. Todd's Restaurant in West Palm Beach and Bronze Wine Bar & Bistro in Juno Beach. As well, he trained at CSB School of Broadcasting in Palm Beach Gardens and graduated at the top of his class in March of 2008. The summer of 2009 brought on hard financial times so Matt decided to move back home to Connecticut where he remained until the winter of 2021. Early on in his return Matt co-owned and operated GCP Painting Company and then became the Durable Medical Equipment (DME) Manager at Rotary Drug Store in Stratford.

During his hiatus from coaching, Matt had always promised himself that if the itch was there when he turned 40, he would re-enter the arena with the goal of reaching the highest level of the profession. In the spring of 2012, he did just that and set himself on a new course of coaching competitive swimming. Act II went live when Coach Matt accepted the Associate Head Coach position with the Bridgeport JCC Dolphins (JCCB). An interesting opportunity arose during the 2012-13 winter season as it became known that it would be the club's last season in existence due to the fact that the JCC was going to close down for a complete renovation. This did not

deter Coach Matt or the club's faithful swimmers and parents. Instead, together they decided to create a brand-new USA Swimming club and spent several months working through the process. In the spring of 2013 the Park City Wolfpack was born and began training and competing out of a middle school pool in Bridgeport, CT. As a Co-Founder he also served as Associate Head Coach. During its first year the team roster swelled to well over one hundred swimmers so the program hooked up with the University of Bridgeport as a home facility in the spring of 2014. Interior problems within the organization prompted Coach Matt to step aside during the summer and he held out for just over a year before taking on his next project.

The spring of 2015 brought on the most exciting opportunity Coach Matt has had in his long career. The Head Coach position opened at his hometown Stratford YMCA and he happily accepted the position. A few years prior the program had joined forces with the neighboring Bridgeport YMCA and the team had now become the Bridgeport/Stratford YMCA Torpedoes (BSY). His goal was to restore the program to an elite level of national prominence as it had been a decade earlier. A core group of swimmers and dedicated parents embraced the challenge and BSY soon became one of the most exciting programs in Connecticut. By the time the 2016-17 winter season rolled around the Torpedoes boasted one of the top age group programs in the area. In October of 2017 BSY placed 20th out of 193 teams in the annual YMCA National Virtual Meet. In particular, both the Boys' and Girls' (11-12) age groups placed in the Top 10. Each placed in the Top 3 nationally in the 200-yard Medley and 200-yard Freestyle Relays. As well, the (10/U) Boys' and (10/U) Girls' squads placed swimmers in the Top 16. During the summer of 2018, the first-ever BSY swimmer qualified for the prestigious YMCA National Meet.

By the time the 2018-19 winter season approached, the program had outgrown the size and scope of the Stratford YMCA facility and vision. In a very abrupt way the program was forced out and the roster split up over several different local programs in the area. Coach Matt was offered a position at the nearby Amity Regional Aquatic Club (ARAC) in Orange, CT. Thirty-five swimmers decided to go along with him. Later that season, he was promoted to Assistant Head Coach and the following year, 2019-20, he was awarded the Head Senior Coach position. ARAC had been enjoying tremendous success throughout the season highlighted by a very successful CT Swimming Senior Championship meet in early March 2020. The program was then set for an electrifying Age Group Championship meet but was thwarted by the onset of the covid pandemic just one day before the meet was scheduled to begin.

As the Coach At-Large representative of the Connecticut Swimming, Inc. Board of Directors, Coach Matt was involved in several committees and projects during 2019-20. Unfortunately, everything came to a screeching halt world-wide in the spring of 2020. Included was his tenure with ARAC as Coach Matt decided to go out on his own to build his own program if/when the world returned to normal. He had plans to join forces with his hometown Stratford Recreation Department to form a new USA Swimming club but apprehension and local politics won the day. Ironically, it was the local LA Fitness branch in Stratford that agreed to host Coach Matt and his loyal following during the fall of 2020. He began a new venture named Elite Senior Swimming (ESS). However, in early 2021 new management decided to no longer support the project. A

last gasp was entertained during the summer of 2021 as Coach Matt served as Club Manager and Head Coach of the Paugusset Pool & Tennis Club in Orange, CT. He continued with the idea of officially forming ESS that summer but it became apparent that a new home facility could not be found. During the fall of 2021, Matt packed his bags to once again return to south Florida with the hopes of starting new here in Palm Beach County. This leads us back to the beginning of the story and Coach Matt could not be more pleased to be on board with Swim With Gills where we are committed to creating an exclusive 'boutique-style' program to serve anyone who shares our passion for the sport of competitive swimming.