

Gillanders uses pool as incentive

By Michael D. Smith
GAZETTE STAFF

To many, swimming is a form of exercise.

Some swimmers may compete at some time or another in age-group or masters events, but for the most part, swimming is a recreational activity.

For those who have competed, and have been successful at it, it's something they never forget.

Almost 26 years ago, J. David Gillanders of Jonesboro was at the pinnacle of swimming — the Olympics at Rome.

Actually, that was a secondary pinnacle as far as the competition was concerned; the toughest competition was in the national championships.

Gillanders managed to come home with a bronze medal in the 200-meter butterfly.

But, like many, Gillanders got away from competitive swimming for 10 to 15 years after graduating from college. Ten years ago, Gillanders, now 48, discovered masters swimming and returned to competition.

"I still have some competitive urges," Gillanders, an electrical engineering instructor at Arkansas State University, said. "I like to do well, I like to win. It's an incentive to stay in shape."

Today, one thinks of the Olympics as being the best competition available. The best athletes in the world are there and that's where the competition is.



—Photos by Tom Moore/ASU News Service

Practicing at the ASU pool, Gillanders stays in touch with swimming through masters meets.

Australians, once a swimming power, to provide the competition in the Games. One Australian was sandwiched between Michael Troy of the United States and Gillanders.

Needless to say, the United States took most of the medals that year. One of them is hanging on a wall in Gillanders' house at Jonesboro.

"Swimming is a more gentle form of exercise, but if you go at it hard, it's difficult."

Gillanders tried running, but wasn't that interested in it. He even did a triathlon, probably the sport of the '80s, but didn't enjoy that, either.

"Most triathlons put most of their emphasis on biking and running instead of swimming," he said. "So, I'm not that interested in

push. It's just not the same as swimming with someone next to you."

More problems crop up for Gillanders if he can't get free to use the pool at that specific time. He tries to get about 2,000 yards a day, but sometimes gets in only 1,000. That means he has to go 3,000 yards another day.

That seems like a lot of time to be in the pool, but it's not really

It wasn't always that way. The Russians didn't begin competing in the Games until Melbourne in 1956 and Germany competed as one team until 1968, when it split into two teams.



"In 1960, most of the world's best swimmers were in the United States," Gillanders said. "So, [Rome] wasn't a whole

lot different than the nationals."

As an example, Gillanders said the top four finishers in his event broke the world record in the Trials.

"It couldn't get much tougher than that," he said.

With most of the best swimmers in the United States, it fell to the

"I was proud to make the Olympic team," he said. "It's the highlight, one of the top highlights [of his swimming career]. It's an exciting atmosphere to be a part of the Olympic Games."

Masters swimming isn't exactly the Olympics, but the competition is there and the sport is growing each year.

"The top 10 times keep improving each year," Gillanders said. "Even the older swimmers, more and more of them are recording lower times.

"[Masters swimming] is growing, not as fast as it was, but it's still growing."

Gillanders sees quite a physical advantage in swimming.

"It's less stressful than running or jogging," he said. "With running or jogging you have problems with your joints as well as various other aches and pains.

said. "So, I'm not that interested in them."

There's only one problem with choosing swimming as a form of exercise: You have to have a pool.

When Gillanders lived in Kingsville, Tex., (he moved to Arkansas almost two years ago) he was able to workout almost at will.

The high school swimming coach also was the coach of the age-group team. He told Gillanders he could workout with either team, giving him somewhat of a competitive edge. He was able to work with younger, faster swimmers and push himself a little more.

Now, at Jonesboro, he has to pretty much work by himself in the hour or so a day the pool at Arkansas State is available for lap swimming.

"It's harder to push in a workout by yourself," he said. "You just have to set up the pace clock and

be in the pool, but it's not really. Last month, Gillanders swam the 1,650-yard freestyle in the masters Region VIII Championships at the University of Arkansas at Little Rock. That took him 22 minutes, 10.04 seconds.

Using that time, it would take him about 45 minutes to get in 3,000 yards on those rare days.

"There's a doctor [dermatologist] in Florida who is 52 and he swims 5,000 yards a day," Gillanders said. "But he doesn't have a lot of medical emergencies and can pretty much arrange his schedule to swim."

Today, Gillanders has to work to find time to swim, but he can always think back to 1960 when he was the third best in the world in the 200-meter butterfly. If he should forget, all he has to do is look at the medal hanging on the wall.