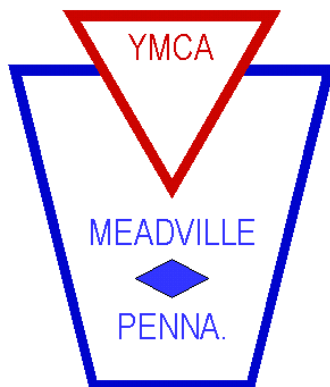


THE EARLY YEARS OF COMPETITIVE SWIMMING IN MEADVILLE

by

David A. Levinson



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THE EARLY YEARS OF COMPETITIVE SWIMMING IN MEADVILLE

by

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The history of competitive swimming in Meadville, Pennsylvania, is a storied one that dates back to the World War II era. But much of what transpired during those years has been lost or forgotten. It is the purpose of this article to bring to light the legacy of Meadville's competitive swimming pioneers.

The Beginning

A necessary condition for there to be competitive swimming in a given locale is the existence of a swimming pool nearby. In Meadville's case, this condition was met in 1941, when the YMCA completed construction of its gymnasium and pool, which have survived to the present day unchanged for the most part. The Y's new pool – 20 yards long with four lanes – was not the first swimming facility to be built in Meadville, however. That distinction belongs to the pool constructed in 1920 at Allegheny College in the basement of Montgomery Gymnasium. According to Jonathan Helmreich, Emeritus Professor of History at Allegheny and official college historian:

When a \$5000 bequest from John W. Horne became available in June 1896, [Allegheny College] President [William H.] Crawford seized the opportunity. In June 1896 he suggested that the trustees allocate the bequest for a gym. They heartily agreed. Debate within the board focused only on whether all or part of the bequest should be utilized. The decision was to use all. [Trustee Frank] Arter immediately pledged another \$1000 as did the student body. Within a day of the trustee authorization, ground was broken on June 25. The building was completed the following June. . . .

[I]nitial plans for what became Montgomery [Gymnasium] called for building the pool immediately. But funds were short and

more years had to pass before it was completed. . . . In 1919 the trustees again responded to President Crawford's cue. Money was raised, including \$10,000 from the student body, for a swimming pool. Montgomery [Gymnasium]'s playing floor was widened to ninety by sixty feet and a swimming pool excavated beneath it. . . . The pool in Montgomery Gym opened the second week of 1921 (so it took a while to get the pool built).

The swimming pool was only eight feet deep with a low ceiling, thus preventing use of a diving board; the pool was only twenty yards long and offered little spectator space. Therefore, when President Lawrence Pelletier approached Richard King Mellon for funds for a fine arts complex and was instead offered financing for a physical fitness facility, he quickly accepted. The Mellon Recreation Building was completed in 1969, containing racquet ball courts, locker rooms, and a fine swimming pool and diving well. . . . The new Mellon Pool hosted its first swimming meet the third week of January 1970.

But despite the fact that there was a swimming pool in Meadville between 1921 and when the Y pool was completed in 1941, the Montgomery facility was intended for the exclusive use of Allegheny College personnel, and could not be expected to be made available to Meadville High School and Meadville YMCA swimming programs. For this reason, it was the opening of the YMCA pool in 1941 that marked the dawn of competitive swimming in Meadville.

Whereas the Y did not field its first swimming team until the fall of 1960, the first Meadville High School team made its debut in the 1943-44 school year. On the sports page of the Thursday, December 2, 1943, edition of *The Tribune-Republican* (the name of the newspaper was not

changed to *The Meadville Tribune* until July 1, 1955), there appeared the following article:

MHS SWIMMERS TO OPEN SEASON
WITH ERIE TECH

First Interscholastic Meet in Local History
Scheduled Tonight

Meadville High School's mermen, getting under way on the first interscholastic swimming season in local history, entertain Erie Tech tonight at 8 o'clock at the Y.M.C.A. pool.

Coach Adam Smith, former Olympic swimmer, said last night his Bulldog charges are set for this first of eight meets on the schedule and went on record that "they'll make a good showing."

Erie Tech, coached by Frank Warneka¹, physical education director at the Erie Y.M.C.A., is reported to have a strong team.

Eight events are on the meet program with a team of 11 named to handle the Bulldog burden.

Entered from Meadville ranks for the various events are:

40-yard freestyle – Bill Byham, Walter Carpenter.

100-yard breaststroke – Werner Heinrich, Milton Minore.

220-yard freestyle – Bill Clark, Ken Smith

100-yard backstroke – Bob Johnston, Merle Brumbaugh.

100-yard freestyle – Bill Spicher, Carpenter.

Diving – Gordon Groves, Dick Jackard.

180-yard medley relay – Johnston, Heinrich, Smith.

160-yard [freestyle] relay – Spicher, Clark, Groves, Byham.

Four special events have been arranged for the initial meet, three of them featuring nonvarsity members of the Bulldog swimming squad. The events and contestants:

40-yard freestyle – Charles Young, John Gizzie, Dave Meehan, Alden Hills.

40-yard freestyle – Zans [sic] Donaldson, Walter Fitch, Leon Armour.

60-yard breaststroke – Skip Stafford, Don Houser, Ralph Stadler.

A 40-yard midget-class exhibition is scheduled with these Y.M. swimmers taking

part: Walter Clark, Charles Lovejoy, Henry Williams, Nevin Phillips, Dick Fisher, Francis Kirkpatrick, Clarence Mercatoris, Jack and Walter Bates.

The initial meet will be followed by these others:

December 10 – At Vincent.

December 16 – Academy.

December 23 – At East.

January 8 – At Tech.

January 14 – At Academy.

January 21 – Vincent.

January 27 – East.

All local meets are scheduled at the Y.M. pool and will be open to the public. A 25 cents admission charge will be made.

Later, three additional meets were added to the schedule – one at Cleveland Shaker Heights High School, and home and away meets with Butler High.

And thus began competitive swimming in Meadville.

Curiously, the author of the *Tribune-Republican* article seemed far less nonchalant in discussing the "midget-class" exhibition swimmers appearing at the meet than he was in noting the remarkable fact that the first-ever Meadville High School swimming coach – Adam Smith – was an Olympian. Records show that there was, in fact, an Adam Smith who competed for the United States in the 1924 Paris Olympic Games at age 20. The year before, he had entered Brown University, but left that same year to prepare for the 1924 Olympic Trials. Smith represented the Erie YMCA at the trials, and qualified for the Olympic team in the 1500-meter freestyle. At the Paris Games, he finished fifth in his semifinal heat of the 1500 and did not qualify for the finals. Despite the fact that Smith did not win a medal, his being a member of the 1924 United States Olympic swimming team meant that he was one of the best swimmers in the world at the time, and Meadville was quite fortunate in 1943 to have a man of his swimming stature as its first coach.

Meadville lost its first two dual meets, but, as *The Tribune-Republican* reported on December 17, 1943:

Meadville High School's swimming team posted its first victory of the season last night, defeating Erie Academy 41-34 before some 100 fans at the Y.M.C.A. pool here.

¹Beginning in 1962, a swimming meet in honor of Frank Warneka would be held annually at Erie Technical Memorial High School's six-lane, 25-yard pool. The author competed in the Second, Third, and Fifth Annual Frank Warneka Swim Meets on May 18, 1963; February 8, 1964; and October 29, 1966; respectively.

The Meadville YMCA did not have a spacious natatorium. The seating consisted mainly of three rows of bleachers parallel to one side of the 20-yard pool, and about one-fourth of that space usually was reserved for members of the home team (the visitors sat in folding chairs on the pool deck in the corner across from where the home team sat). This meant that the 100 spectators referred to in the *Tribune-Republican* article constituted “standing room only”. Competitive swimming obviously had strong fan appeal in Meadville, a standing it would not relinquish in the decades to come.

The caliber of competition faced by the inexperienced Bulldogs in northwestern Pennsylvania was exceedingly high. One Erie Strong Vincent diver, in particular, was making people sit up and take notice. In the January 29, 1944, edition of *The Tribune-Republican*, in an article about an upcoming meet with Erie East, it stated:

Bidding for attention alongside the scholastic tussle will be an exhibition diving program scheduled by Hobart Billingsley of Strong Vincent, who was unable to appear when the Colonels came to town recently [to compete against the Bulldogs]. Billingsley is rated one of the best twist and turn experts in Erie history.

Although Hobart Billingsley – later known as Hobie Billingsley – failed to appear for that exhibition at Meadville Y, he would go on to achieve prominence in the world of diving. After winning the Pennsylvania Interscholastic Athletic Association (PIAA) state diving championship in 1944, he would enroll at Ohio State University, where, in 1945, his freshman year, he would win the NCAA diving titles on both the one-meter and three-meter boards before leaving school to join the Army Air Corp. He eventually would establish himself as one of the greatest diving coaches who ever lived, as his protégés would win numerous NCAA national, AAU national, Pan American, and Olympic medals. Billingsley would serve as a United States Olympic diving coach in five Olympics, and would be inducted in 1983 into the International Swimming Hall of Fame. But he would not perform a diving exhibition at the Meadville YMCA in 1944.

Billingsley was not the only outstanding diver to come out of northwestern Pennsylvania. Meadville soon would lay claim to one too. In that December 2, 1943, inaugural high school meet at

the Meadville YMCA pool, that exhibition “midget class” 40-yard race featured, among others, a boy named Nevin Phillips. Several years later, Phillips would put Meadville on the aquatic map. More about him later.

Meadville High completed that first dual meet season in 1943-44 with a modest won-lost record of 3-8, copping single victories over Erie Academy, Erie Tech, and Butler. However, the Bulldogs fared much better in the championship portion of the campaign. At the District 10 meet in Erie, six Meadville tankers were among the twenty-seven District 10 qualifiers for the Western Pennsylvania Regionals. As was reported in the Monday, February 28, 1944, *Tribune-Republican*:

Meadville’s mermen, making their first appearance in the annual competitions, captured fourth place Saturday in the P.I.A.A. western regional swimming championships at Slippery Rock State Teachers College pool. . . .

Meadville men to earn places in the engagement were Bill Clark, Virgil Sayre, Dick Jackard, Bill Spicher, Bill Byham, [and] Ken Smith. Clark finished second in both the 40 and 100-yard freestyle tests; Sayre and Jackard placed four-five in the diving, and Spicher, Byham, Smith and Sayre combined to take fourth in the 160-yard [freestyle] relay. . . .

Swimmers who placed among the first five are eligible to compete in the state meet Saturday at State College.

And, in the Monday, March 6, edition of *The Tribune-Republican*, it was noted that:

Meadville’s first-year swimming team, making its state championship debut, finished eighth among 13 teams Saturday at State College.

The Bulldogs’ Bill Clark finished second in the 50-yard freestyle and fifth in the century [100-yard freestyle], while the relay team of Bill Spicher, Bill Byham, Ken Smith, and Virgil Sayre came in fourth in the [200 yard] freestyle event.

All things considered, it was a commendable first year for Meadville High School swimming.

In the Bulldogs’ second season, 1944-45, Olympian Adam Smith, having moved on to other things, no longer was the coach. Taking over the helm of the Meadville High School swimming team was varsity swimmer and team captain Ken

Smith, who functioned that year as a “swimmer-coach” for the Bulldogs. Under his leadership, the Meadville team performed about as well as it had under his predecessor².

Perhaps the marginal success of the Bulldog swimmers during their first two seasons led Ken Smith to conclude that a “feeder” program was necessary for the development of swimmers for the varsity team. A decade and a half later, in 1960, this need would be addressed by the creation of a Meadville YMCA swimming team that would compete against Y teams from other towns, but in 1945 it would take the form of an intramural swimming league headed by Smith at the Meadville Y. As was reported in the Friday, February 16, 1945, edition of *The Tribune-Republican*:

MHS Junior-Cadet³
Swimming Team
Opens Action Today

Under the direction of Ken Smith, who has been coaching the high school swimming team, a new junior-cadet swimming league is being started at the Y.M.C.A. with the first meet this afternoon at 4 o'clock.

Four teams have been organized with members of the high school varsity acting as coaches. Each team numbers seven men now, but their size will be increased as more boys turn out. Any boys interested should appear at the “Y” for the first meet this afternoon.

The squads and their members are: Seals – Dick Fisher, captain, Jim McLamb, Virgil Markey, Paul Hollabaugh, Jack Bates, Jerry Heckman and Donley Smith; Porpoises – Henry Williams, captain, Dick Clayton, Joe Byham, Eugene Loughney, Cutshall [sic], Don Kuder and Jack Snover; Whales – Nevin Phillips, captain, D. Dietch, Sam Miceli, Harold O'Day, John DuMars, Dick Smith and Mosier [sic]; and Minnows – Ronnie Boland, captain, Raymond Wygant, Rene Bideaux, Seymore Wexler, Rex Griffith, Dick Muckinhaupt and Jim Graham.

²According to Nancy Brunot of the Meadville Area Senior High School administrative office, transcript records show that the first name of Ken Smith's father was Ernest, not Adam. One can conclude, therefore, that swimmer Ken Smith was not the son of Coach Adam Smith.

³The Meadville Y called Smith's program the “junior-cadet” swimming league. This name was chosen arbitrarily and bears no relationship to the Cadet (9 and 10), Prep (11 and 12), Junior (13 and 14), and Senior (15 to 18) age group designations employed by YMCA competitive swimming.

Zan Donaldson, Dick Lang, Bill Byham and Jack Euler are coaching the teams. Each member of the winning team will receive a “Y” shirt. The eight events in the meets will include: 100-yard freestyle, 40-yard breaststroke, 20-yard dash, 40-yard backstroke, 40-yard freestyle, diving, 60-yard medley and 80-yard freestyle relay.

Schedule:
Feb. 16 – Seals vs. Porpoises and Whales vs. Minnows.
Feb. 23 – Minnows vs. Seals and Porpoises vs. Whales.
Mar. 2 – Porpoises vs. Minnows and Seals vs. Whales.
Mar. 9 – Whales vs. Minnows and Seals vs. Porpoises.
Mar. 16 – Porpoises vs. Whales and Minnows vs. Seals.
Mar. 23 – Seals vs. Whales and Porpoises vs. Minnows.

It must be remembered that Ken Smith was only a high school student, although obviously mature and responsible well beyond his years, but he literally single-handedly took charge of competitive swimming in Meadville during that 1944-45 season.

The Nevin Phillips Era

Season three (1945-46) for the Meadville High School swimming team brought yet another coach, as swimmer-coach Ken Smith had graduated. This time, the Meadville YMCA Athletic Director, G. K. (Gerry) Hoffman, took over the helm. On this team was the first true aquatic superstar in Meadville swimming history, the aforementioned Nevin Phillips, a freshman. That season, Phillips won the District 10 diving title and placed third at the Western Pennsylvania Regionals. Although young Phillips failed to win a medal at the 1946 PIAA State Swimming Championships at State College, Meadville swimmer Bill Byham, a junior, did nab one, as he tied for fourth place in the 50-yard freestyle with Alan Benson of Erie Strong Vincent High School.

In Phillips' sophomore year, the fourth season of Meadville High School swimming, the team was led by its fourth coach, one J. Dallas Mitchell. The logistics underlying the use of the Y pool by the high school team were made public in a *Tribune-Republican* article on January 14, 1947:

High Merlads Granted Use of 'Y' Pool

Use of the Y.M.C.A. swimming pool for practice and seven home meets by the Meadville High School swimming team has been favorably acted upon according to an announcement made by Chairman Wallace Dean of the athletic committee at a meeting of the Meadville School Board in the high school last night.

The Y.M.C.A. board of directors made the following proposition to the Meadville School District.

1. Use of the pool Monday, Tuesday, Thursday and Friday from 11:30 a.m. to 12:30 p.m., during the swim season of September 15th to March 15th.

2. That during the first three weeks, during tryouts, up to (35) thirty-five boys will be allowed the above privileges.

3. That when the squad is chosen, up to (20) twenty boys will be given a year's "Y" membership dating from September 15th.

4. That the school shall be allowed up to (7) seven home meets with the schedule being first approved by the Y.M.C.A.

5. That for these considerations, the Y.M.C.A. shall be paid the sum of \$250.00 on or before June 30, 1947.

Local school authorities will comply with the above requirements, it was stated at the Board session last night.

(By way of comparison, the posted Meadville YMCA membership rate in 2006 for a youth aged 9-18 was \$135.00 per year. At that rate, twenty "merlads" would incur an annual membership bill of \$2700.00.)

In the spring of 1947, Nevin Phillips won all three major high school diving championships in which he competed – District 10, Western Pennsylvania Regionals, and State. The *Tribune-Republican* headlines read:

Phillips Takes District Diving Laurels at Erie

Phillips Takes Diving Title in Regional Meet

Nevin Phillips To Compete for State Laurels

Meadville Hi Diver Shows Flashy Form

Sports editor Jack Martin wrote the following story about Phillips in the March 20, 1947, edition of *The Tribune-Republican*:

NEVIN PHILLIPS

Meadville's Champion Diver Drills Each Day for Two and a Half Hours

Do you want to be a champion diver?

Well, brother, it's a tough road to travel.

First of all, it is just a little matter of two and one-half hours of hard practice each day.

Yes sir. That is the routine that Sophomore Nevin Phillips of Meadville High School goes through daily, even though he already has won the district, regional and state P.I.A.A. (Pennsylvania Interscholastic Athletic Association) diving championships.

The lad is on a career that may bring him national honors in the future, providing he continues his arduous training grind – which is not play – in anybody's routine.

The 16-year-old Phillips is the son of Mr. and Mrs. A. W. Phillips of 87 Mead Avenue – his dad is an employee of the State Highway Department.

A native of Meadville, the lad began his swimming career at the age of ten and learned the fundamentals of diving from Adam Smith, former physical director at the local Y.M.C.A. and also gives credit to Virgil Sayre, at present a member of the Allegheny College swimming team, and to his brother "Whitey" Sayre of this city.

Young Phillips started on his water career as a member of the junior class at the local Y.M.C.A. and now as a member of the older boys class and swam on the "Y" team in 1944-45 under the present Physical Director G. K. (Jerry) Hoffman.

Meadville's ace diver won his first District Ten championship at Erie Strong Vincent pool in 1946 and the following week in some mighty tough competition finished third in the Regional P.I.A.A. swim at Slippery Rock State Teachers College that year.

Coming through this past season with flying colors young Phillips captured first place in diving in six dual meets and his best point score of 92.2 at the next to last meet in the local "Y" pool with Erie East.

Phillips romped off with the District Ten championship at Erie Strong Vincent pool easily this year. The following week the competition was a bit stiffer and Phillips came out first in the Regional swim at Slippery Rock State Teachers College. Then a week later with the cream of the crop from all parts of the state Phillips clinched the state diving championship under the eyes of his mother and Coach J. Dallas Mitchell in the State College swimming pool. For his efforts, he has a nice medal for his collection

which evidently will grow to vast proportions as time rolls by.

Besides diving, young Phillips developed the backstroke under Adam Smith and Zan Donaldson, a member of the Meadville High School swimming team.

Phillips was on Coach G. Reed Pierce's Meadville High School track and field team last year and performed in the high jump event. However, he needs a little more "timing" to master this sport, he says.

In diving, the average sports follower is unaware of that fact, [sic] the performer must present eight dives as follows:

Front dive (swan).

Back dive.

Front dive with back twist.

Back dive (jack knife).

Front dive, one and one-half with a pike.

Back dive with a layout (known as a somersault).

Front dive with a full twist.

Front dive with a full gainor [sic].

Phillips will compete in the State Y.M.C.A. swimming championships at Germantown next month.

Despite having a state champion on his team, Mitchell's stint as the Meadville High School swimming coach lasted but one year. In its fifth year – 1947-48 – the team was mentored by its fifth coach, Ken Nelson. For some unexplained reason, the dual-meet season was truncated to just two contests. On December 31, 1947, *The Tribune-Republican* reported on it as follows:

Two Swim Meets for Meadville

Two swimming meets have been arranged for Meadville High School under the direction of Coach Kenneth Nelson.

The opening meet will be with Erie Academy at the local Y.M.C.A. pool next Monday night, at 8 o'clock. Admission will be .50 for adults and .25 for high school and grade school students, according to an announcement made by Faculty Manager of Athletics Carl A. Triola last night.

The other meet arranged will be at Erie Academy on Monday night, January 19.

The Bulldog team will be built around Nevin Phillips, P.I.A.A. diving champion and they will also see competition in the District Ten meet, March 6, at Erie and the P.I.A.A. championship meet at State College, Pa., on March 13.

Meadville lost both of those dual meets, despite two winning performances by Phillips in diving. Anticipation was high that the Meadville High junior would go on in 1948 to defend all three of

his 1947 championship titles (District 10, Western Pennsylvania Regionals, and State).

For his accomplishments as a sophomore the year before, Phillips was named to the 1947 Interscholastic All-America team. According to the February 20, 1948, edition of *The Tribune-Republican*:

Phillips was honored recently as he was named as the nation's 11th top high school diver, according to the All-American high school swimming selections made by Al Neuschaefer, swimming coach at Trenton, N.J., High School.

And here, in 1948, Phillips endeavored to live up to his championship expectations, as he won both the District 10 and Western Pennsylvania Regional diving events. Headlines in *The Tribune-Republican* read:

Phillips Retains District PIAA Diving Laurels

Nevin Phillips Retains Regional Diving Crown

Unfortunately, on March 8, 1948, *The Tribune-Republican* had the unpleasant task of printing:

Nevin Phillips Rates Second in PIAA Diving

According to the accompanying article, a mistake on his fourth dive had caused Phillips to lose to Mike McCarthy of Reading High School by a score of 67.36 points to 65.36, forcing Phillips to settle for the silver medal.

However, Phillips still had one more season of high school eligibility remaining, and with it an opportunity to redeem himself. But, for reasons not explained in *The Tribune-Republican*, Meadville High School abruptly and inexplicably decided to drop the swimming team. In the December 21, 1948, edition of the paper, in an article reporting on a sports assembly that had taken place at the high school the day before, this is all that appeared on the subject:

Swimming letters for last year's team, presented by former Coach Kenneth Nelson, covered an abbreviated season of two meets, Mr. Nelson explained. There will be no M.H.S. swimming team this year.

Letters went to: Captain Nevin Phillips, Henry Williams, Seymour Wexler, Dick Fisher, William Belding and a man who already has been graduated, Charles Hines.

Meadville High went without a swimming team for the next six seasons (1948-49 through 1953-54). Nevertheless, these were far from inglorious years for Meadville swimming.

Although there was no dual meet season in 1948-49, Faculty Manager Carl A. Triola, Sr., accompanied a small contingent of Meadville High School athletes to the District 10 meet in Erie on February 27, 1949⁴. Here, Nevin Phillips finished second to Jack Hellwege of Erie Academy in the diving. The Bulldogs' 160-yard freestyle relay team of Dick Fisher, Seymour Wexler, Nevin Phillips, and Henry Williams came in third. By placing in the top three in the District 10 meet, these four competitors all advanced to the Western Pennsylvania Regional meet the next weekend at Slippery Rock State Teachers College. This time, Phillips turned the tables on Hellwege and won the diving title, with Hellwege finishing second. Meadville's freestyle relay team also performed well, placing third behind Pittsburgh's Oliver High School and Erie East.

On March 12, 1949, Phillips once again achieved diving glory. As the March 14, 1949, *Tribune-Republican* reported:

Nevin Phillips Regains PIAA
State Diving Crown

Meadville's Nevin Phillips took the spotlight as he recaptured the fancy diving title he held as a sophomore in 1947 with 69.86 points in the annual Pennsylvania Interscholastic Athletic Association swimming championships here Saturday afternoon. . . .

In addition, the Bulldog freestyle relay team accorded itself well, placing sixth.

⁴Readers unfamiliar with competitive swimming might be wondering how a school that had no swimming team could send swimmers to a championship meet. The answer is that swimming is both a team sport and an individual sport. Although Meadville didn't field a team from 1948-49 through 1953-54, and consequently had no means of participating during those seasons in dual meet competitions against teams from other high schools, there was nothing whatsoever to prevent individual Meadville High School swimmers, divers, and relay teams from entering the District 10 championship meet as representatives of their school. (In those days, there were no qualifying times that had to be achieved prior to the meet.) Moreover, any points they might score at the meet by placing in the top six in their respective events would be counted as Meadville High School team points toward the District 10 team title, which would be decided at the meet.

Despite not having the benefit of a dual meet season in 1948-49 to hone his competitive skills, Phillips amazingly was able to bring home his second state gold to Meadville. He finished his illustrious high school diving career with two gold medals and one silver in state championship competition, an achievement that has not been matched by any Meadville diver since.

Phillips was named to the 1949 Interscholastic All-America Swimming and Diving Team and won a full scholarship to compete in diving for Indiana University in Bloomington. According to Assistant Media Relations Director Jason Marsteller of the Indiana University Athletics Department, Phillips lettered at IU in both 1952 and 1953, but did not compete in the NCAA Championships at any time during his collegiate diving career. A recent phone call from the author to Phillips' widow revealed that the pressures of high-level university diving competition had taken their toll on Phillips, and consequently the joy he once had found in diving had all but evaporated for him at IU. Mrs. Phillips noted that the only reason Nevin even completed his collegiate diving career was to maintain his athletic scholarship.

But despite a collegiate career that fell somewhat short of the standards he had established in high school, Nevin Phillips remains to this day the greatest diver ever to come out of Meadville.

Coincidentally, Ray Cox, the greatest *swimmer* ever to come out of Meadville, completed his high school career during the final four years of the six-year swimming team hiatus that began with Phillips' senior year.

The Ray Cox Era

Ray Cox was born on March 26, 1936. His mother died two weeks later, and his aunt and uncle, Laura and Ralph Raymond, moved into the Cox house on Baldwin Street to help take care of Ray. For a few years, Ray and the three adults all lived there, but then Ray's father was appointed to the Pennsylvania Securities Commission and moved to Harrisburg. He never remarried. Ray remained in Meadville and was raised by his aunt and uncle. As Ray put it, "In effect, I had a mom (my Aunt Laura) and two dads."

Soon after the YMCA pool was constructed in 1941, Cox began attending the Y, where he was taught how to swim. In 1943, his aunt and uncle sent him to a summer camp located on the shore of Edinboro Lake, about twenty miles north of Meadville. According to Cox:

They had a beach on the lake with docks and swimming lanes between. I got my first taste of competition there. I won some races and beat a lot of the older kids.

Several years later, in one of the Y's intramural meets, Cox was put in the 40-yard backstroke, and he won against a heavy favorite. After several such meets, Cox's remarkable swimming talent caught the eye of Jim McLamb, the head lifeguard at the Y and two years older than Cox, who let Ray help lifeguard. Cox's reward for this service was that he was permitted to stay after general swim and use the pool with some of the older swimmers. Although this didn't involve a lot of training, it did provide Ray with the opportunity to swim a lot, albeit recreationally, which did contribute to his conditioning.

In the fall of 1950, Cox became a ninth-grader, and McLamb, who now was a high school junior, persuaded Cox to enter that season's District 10 swimming meet. As had been the case in connection with Nevin Phillips and company in 1949, Cox was eligible to compete in this meet as a representative of Meadville High School, despite the fact that there was no swimming team at the time and consequently no dual meet season in which Cox could participate during the weeks leading up to the District 10 meet.

The high school (later to become the junior high) was located just a block from the Y, and McLamb helped Cox arrange with the school athletic director, Preston Ditty, to be allowed to leave school and walk over to the Y each noon to train. McLamb accompanied Cox, and suggested workouts for him to do, in addition to providing Cox with encouragement. This bore fruit, for on February 24, 1951, in the 4-lane, 20-yard pool at Erie Strong Vincent High School, Ray Cox placed third in the District 10 meet in the 100-yard backstroke. The February 26, 1951, issue of *The Tribune-Republican* reported on it as follows:

Young Ray Cox Finishes Third In Backstroke

Freshman Raymond Cox, 14 years old, finished third in the 100-yard backstroke event in the District Ten swimming championships held at the Erie Strong Vincent pool Saturday night.

The Meadville Hi [sic] lad has been doing his own training along with James McLamb, a junior, at the local Y.M.C.A. pool. McLamb qualified for the 200-yard freestyle event, but failed to place in the [four-man] final.

There were unusual circumstances surrounding Cox's third place finish in that meet. Erie Academy's star swimmer, John Sampson, did not attend the District 10 meet, but was awarded two first places despite his absence. Although Cox finished second in the 100-yard backstroke behind winner Bill Plavcan of Academy, who swam the race in 1:08.6, Plavcan was awarded second place and Cox third. What was going on? Well, while the 1951 District 10 meet was taking place in Erie, John Sampson was at Princeton University in New Jersey, competing in the prestigious Eastern Interscholastic Swimming Championships, where he won the 150-yard individual medley in 1:40.1 and came in second in the 100-yard backstroke with a time of 1:04.2 behind T. Johnstone of Germantown High School in Philadelphia, who had a 1:03.7. So how was Sampson able to win the District 10 meet all the way from New Jersey? According to *The Erie Dispatch-Herald* of Sunday, February 25, 1951, Sampson appears to have been given a time trial in both the 40-yard freestyle and the 100-yard backstroke prior to his leaving for Princeton. His times were 19.5 and 1:01.1, respectively, and the District 10 officials apparently allowed the times to count, just as if Sampson actually had swum them in person in the District 10 meet. The top finisher in the 40-yard freestyle in the District 10 meet was Dave Warren of Strong Vincent, who swam a 21.1, but he was awarded second place behind the absent Sampson. *The Erie Dispatch-Herald* described it like this:

The [Erie Academy] Lions captured first in four events, two by Johnny Sampson in abstentia in the 40 freestyle and 100-yard backstroke.

The box scores for the two events were given as follows (inconsistent punctuation the *Dispatch's*):

40-yard freestyle–2d, Warren, V. 3d, Campbell, T; 4th, Szparaga, E. Time–21.1. (Sampson, A, qualified for first on time basis earlier with 19.5.

100-yd backstroke–2d, Plavcan, A; 3d, Cox, M; 4th, Schacht, V. Time–1:08.6. (Sampson, A, qualified for first on time basis earlier with 1:01.1)

Note the absence of a first place finisher in each of the box scores.

The Dispatch-Herald describes Plavcan’s swim as follows:

... Plavcan checked in with a 1:08.6 backstroke effort for second place behind Sampson, who was swimming in the Eastern Interscholastics at Princeton, N. J.

Sampson could not have gotten away with a stunt like that in later years. He would have had to pick one meet or the other in which to swim. Because he had been the 1949 PIAA state champion in the 200-yard freestyle (2:05.2), a member of Academy’s 1949 state champion 150-yard medley relay (1:25.7), the 1950 PIAA state champion in the 100-yard backstroke (1:04.8), and a member of Academy’s 1950 state champion medley relay (1:25.5), it is possible that, in deference, the District 10 officials worked out an arrangement on Sampson’s behalf. Still, it smacks of poor sportsmanship and should not have been permitted.

Cox’s third place in the District 10 meet qualified him for the Western Pennsylvania Regionals. Unfortunately, Meadville High School Athletic Director Preston Ditty got the Regionals starting time wrong, and Cox arrived at Slippery Rock State Teachers College several hours too late to swim his event. This would never happen again. As Cox put it,

My folks . . . were quite upset that we missed the meet and I didn’t get to swim. . . . I’m sure my aunt (who was rather outspoken) had something to say to Mr. Ditty about being given the wrong time. . . .

I was not devastated. I was disappointed, but it was OK. I was only a freshman and there was next year.

The following season (1951-52), sophomore Cox won the District 10 100-yard backstroke title. He accomplished the feat on Saturday, February

23, 1952, turning in a 1:07.3 in the preliminary heats at Strong Vincent High School, and then lowering his time to 1:06.1 in the finals to take the gold medal. The Monday, February 25, *Tribune-Republican* noted that Cox “beat second-place Erie East man Green by at least 15 feet.” In only his fourth high school swimming race, Ray Cox had become the District 10 backstroke champion.

At the Western Pennsylvania Regionals on Saturday, March 1, 1952, at Slippery Rock State Teachers College, Cox made sure he arrived on time, and subsequently placed third in the 100-yard backstroke. On Saturday, March 8, he finished fifth in the event in the PIAA State Championships at State College. Al Wiggins of Pittsburgh’s Taylor Allderdice High School swam a 1:02.7 to capture the gold.

By this time, Allegheny College swimming coach Bill Hanson had invited Cox to work out with the Gators after school, so Cox no longer had to resort to training on his own at the Y at noon on school days, without the benefit of a coach. In his junior year (1952-53), Cox again won the 100-yard backstroke at the District 10 meet, covering the distance in 1:05.5 on February 21, 1953. At Regionals, on February 28, 1953, he lowered his time to 1:04.1 to place second behind Wiggins, who, as *The Tribune-Republican* reported, “negotiated the Slippery Rock State Teachers College pool in 58.8 seconds.” And at the state meet, on March 7, 1953, Cox came in third with a 1:04.3 behind Wiggins (59.3) and Mike Andrews of York High School (1:02.5).

Finally, in Cox’s senior year (1953-54), he won the 100-yard backstroke in all three championship meets [February 27, 1954: District 10 – 1:02.3 (1:02.4 in his qualifying heat); March 6, 1954: Western Pennsylvania Regionals – 1:02.1; March 13, 1954: PIAA State – 1:03.5] and made the 1954 All-America High School Selections in the process. This achievement is all the more remarkable when one considers that Cox’s entire high school swimming career had consisted of only fourteen races, all in the 100-yard backstroke, and spread out over four years.

If that isn’t impressive enough, Cox was swimming with an injury when he won his state title:

[T]he reason my State time was slower was because in the warm-ups I’d aggravated

a knee injury (torn cartilage) that I got playing basketball when I was a sophomore.

During the race, Cox hadn't even been able to take advantage of his outstanding kick, as his knee locked up, but somehow he managed to struggle home on one cylinder and still touch first.

It is interesting to note that in the 1955 *Official NCAA Swimming Guide*, which contains a listing of the 1954 All-America High School Selections, Cox's time is given as 1:02.8. Since the only four official times he recorded in the 1953-54 season were 1:02.4 (District 10 preliminaries), 1:02.3 (District 10 finals), 1:02.1 (Western Pennsylvania Regionals), and 1:03.5 (State Championships), one can well ask where the 1:02.8 came from. A plausible answer is that because all three of Cox's 1:02s were swum in 20-yard courses, which gave him the benefit of an extra turn, the All-America selection committee might have decided to take his best 20-yard course time (1:02.1) and his best (and only) 25-yard course time (1:03.5) and average them, which would have resulted in precisely the 1:02.8 that appears in the All-America listing. Of course, this is mere speculation.

The 20-yard pool unquestionably was the most common course for high school swimming in northwestern Pennsylvania in 1954. As Philip S. Harburger, Chairman of the NCAA Swimming Records Committee, noted in an article entitled "Thirty Years of Swimming Records," which appeared in the 1957 *Official NCAA Swimming Guide*:

High school and preparatory school records will continue to be listed over both twenty-yard and short course classifications, since there are still many twenty-yard pools in use in the schools throughout the country, particularly in the Middle West.

And Meadville, located more than 300 miles west of the east coast, had to be regarded as being located at least on the eastern edge of the "Middle West".

There is evidence that, as late as 1974, some national scholastic records still were being accepted for 20-yard courses. In the *Official NCAA Swimming Guide* for that year, it states that:

National Scholastic Records will be registered for high schools and preparatory

schools in two groups each: *Twenty-Yard Course Records* made in pools not less than 20 yards in length, but less than 25 yards long; and *Short-Course Records*, made in pools not less than 25 yards in length but less than 50 yards in length.

However, according to the 1974 edition of the *Guide*, the only events for which records established in 20-yard courses were recognized that year were the 60-yard freestyle, the 160-yard individual medley, the 160-yard medley relay, and the 160-yard freestyle relay. Times for 100- and 200-yard distances would not be considered unless swum in 25-yard pools.

Beginning with the 1975 *Official NCAA Swimming Guide*, the scholastic records section was eliminated, so one cannot be certain when 20-yard course records ceased to be recognized. But this soon would become a moot issue, for in the 1970s, most of the new swimming pools being built would be 25 yards long, rather than 20, and gradually many of the aging 20-yard pools would be taken out of service, so that by the late 1970s, very few high school or collegiate swimming meets would be held in other than 25-yard pools.

For some unknown reason, Cox's 1954 District 10 time of 1:02.3 – not his Regionals time of 1:02.1 swum the following weekend – became the listed official Meadville High School 100-yard backstroke record, perhaps due to the non-existence of a Meadville High School swimming coach during Cox's career who would have assumed the responsibility for keeping accurate records. The 1:02.3 thus became the standard by which all Meadville backstrokers in the years succeeding Cox would measure themselves. The two-tenths-of-a-second error would not be discovered until August of 2005, while the author was undertaking research for this article. Cox's school record lasted for thirteen years – exceedingly long as swimming records go – until it was broken by the author on the night of January 16, 1967, at the Meadville YMCA pool, when he turned in a time of 1:01.6 during a dual meet between Meadville High School and Erie Academy. Fortunately for the author, his 1:01.6 was faster than both the 1:02.3 and the 1:02.1 swum by Cox. Had the author gone 1:02.2 instead of 1:01.6, the history of that night in 1967 would have had to be rewritten in 2005.

As amazing as Cox's high school swimming career was, his collegiate career surpassed it. An honors student at Meadville High, and chosen by the high school faculty to be a member of the prestigious "Senior Seven" in 1954, Cox enrolled at Allegheny College, where he majored in mathematics and chemistry. On a real swimming team for the first time in his life, he added freestyle and individual medley events to his backstroke repertoire, and began setting school and pool records with astonishing frequency nearly every time he raced. While all of this was going on in college, Cox continued to receive accolades for his high school swimming exploits. On November 20, 1954, *The Tribune-Republican* printed the following article:

Ray Cox Selected Member Of National Swim Team; Presented With Certificate

Ray Cox of Meadville, last year's Pennsylvania Interscholastic Athletic Assn. 100-yard backstroke champion, yesterday received recognition as a member of the National Interscholastic Swimming Team of 1954.

Selection to the mythical team is similar to achieving All-American mention. It was based on Cox' performance while Cox was a senior at Meadville High School. . . .

[Meadville High Athletic Director Preston] Ditty presented Cox [with] a certificate and an Olympic-type felt emblem.

The selection of members to the interscholastic team was made by the Helms Athletic Foundation of Exeter, and was announced by Dan Fowler, chairman of the foundation's selection committee. Cox was named specifically for his 100-yard backstroke work.

In the Ray Cox era, there were no separate NCAA Division I, Division II, and Division III national swimming championships; there was just a single NCAA national championship meet for all collegiate swimmers. At the conclusion of his sophomore season, at Yale University's historic Payne Whitney exhibition pool, Cox placed sixth in the 200-yard backstroke finals in the 1956 edition of this meet, thus becoming, as the March 31, 1956, issue of *The Meadville Tribune* put it, "the first Allegheny swimmer in history to win nationwide recognition." Cox recounts the following story about what happened that day:

There is one incident involving [Ohio State backstroker] Al Wiggins and [Yale freestyler] Joe Robinson [both former Penn-

sylvania high school swimmers] that I'd like to relate. It was the NCAA Championships in my sophomore year at Payne Whitney Gym at Yale. In the prelims, I had tied with a Yale swimmer for 6th place in the 200 back. Since only six went to the finals that night, we were scheduled for a swim off at the end of [the preliminaries of] the other events. During the hour or so wait, first Al [who had qualified for the 200 back final] came up to me and said nice things and encouraged me. Then Joe came along and told me how tough his [Yale] teammate was and not to expect to win [the swim off]. Then, as we were on the deck getting ready to enter the water, [Ohio State Coach] Mike Peppe came up and told me I could take this [Yale] guy, to go out hard, and relax. When the race actually started, I noticed Al and his Ohio State buddies all lined up rooting for me. What was going on, of course, was that Ohio State and Yale were competing for the team championship and so me keeping a Yale guy out of the finals was all right with OSU. Allegheny getting a point or two was of no concern.

The Yale backstroker with whom Cox had tied in the preliminary heats was named Bill Clinton (no relation to the former president). In separate heats, Cox and Clinton both had covered the 200-yard backstroke distance in 2:13.7. In the swim-off for the sixth and last spot in the finals, Cox defeated Clinton, 2:12.7 to 2:15.6, to keep the Yale backstroker out of the finals, much to the approval of the Ohio State team. In the finals, Cox matched his preliminary time of 2:13.7 and placed sixth. Because of the meager amount of training that swimmers did in those days, it was quite a feat in 1956 for a swimmer to successfully undertake three consecutive national-caliber 200-yard races all in the same day, but Cox managed to accomplish it. In recognition of his performance in the NCAA 200-yard backstroke event, Cox was named to the 1956 NCAA All-America Swimming Team.

In Cox's junior year, he found the going a little tougher. This time, the NCAA Championships were held at the University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill, and Cox failed to qualify for the six-man finals. (However, his time of 1:01.1 in the 100-yard backstroke did manage to land him a spot on the 1957 NCAA All-America Swimming team.) But in his senior year, on March 28, 1958, at the University of Michigan in Ann Arbor, Cox redeemed himself by placing fourth in the NCAA 200-yard backstroke finals with a

time of 2:12.3. This feat put the man from Meadville on the 1958 NCAA All-America Swimming Team, giving him All-America honors for the third year in a row. If Ray Cox's swimming exploits are not the stuff legends are made of, then nothing is.

In the April 1, 1958, issue of *The Meadville Tribune*, the following article appeared:

Congratulations, Ray Cox

Meadville residents have cause to share with Allegheny College a hometown pride in Ray Cox who climaxed a spectacular collegiate swimming career with a fourth-place finish in the 200-yard backstroke event of the National Collegiate Athletic Assn. last weekend.

A native of Meadville who attended local schools, Cox has had a brilliant career at Allegheny. Holding numerous Allegheny and Penn-Ohio Swimming Assn. marks, he has established a record in every pool in which he swam with the exception of those in which the NCAA events were held. Finishing sixth in the NCAA meet as a sophomore, he improved with a fourth-place finish this year.

While making his athletic records, he also achieved a brilliant scholastic record. One of three Meadville students ranked among the top eight in scholastic achievement at Allegheny, Cox offers proof that books and athletics can mix profitably.

During his four-year career at Allegheny, Cox never lost a backstroke race in either a dual meet or a Penn-Ohio Conference Championship event.

Upon graduating from Allegheny College, Cox went on to earn a PhD in mathematics at the University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill. As a graduate student, he worked as an instructor in undergraduate mathematics courses. During the summer of 1960, one of his students was an incoming freshman named Thompson Mann, who had decided to begin classes early at UNC and, because he was an outstanding backstroker, to train with the UNC swimming team over the summer. Mann went on to win a gold medal in the 1964 Olympics in Tokyo as a member of the United States' 400-meter medley relay team. Mann led off the relay with a 59.6 split for the 100-meter backstroke leg, in the process becoming the first man to break a minute for the distance. It was only fitting that backstroker Cox be backstroker Mann's college algebra instructor.

The repercussions of Cox's achievements extended well beyond himself. Even as he was beginning his stellar swimming career at Allegheny College, the powers-that-be at Meadville High were reconsidering their decision following the 1947-48 school year to eliminate the swimming team. As *The Tribune-Republican* reported on January 20, 1955:

Meadville Hi [sic] opens its 1955 varsity swimming schedule here tonight against a strong Erie Academy opponent.

The meet – first in six seasons for the Bulldogs – will start at 8 o'clock at the local YMCA pool.

Win or lose, it will be the culmination of more than 10 weeks hard work by the Bulldog hopefuls. The rebuilding program, directed by Coach Jim DiMaria, started early in November.

While Meadville did not have a varsity team the past six seasons, interest in the sport was fanned locally by the exploits of Ray Cox, who climaxed a brilliant high school career by taking the PIAA state backstroke title last year. He currently is an Allegheny College swimmer. . . .

As mysteriously as the swimming team had been discontinued in 1948, it was reconstituted in 1954-55 with Jim DiMaria as coach, and never again would be eliminated. DiMaria succeeded in establishing continuity for Meadville High School swimming during a time of dramatic changes in the sport. On DiMaria's 1954-55 team was a freshman named Bruce Carlile, who eventually would become the next major swimming star in Meadville.

The Bruce Carlile Era

Bruce Carlile was four years younger than Ray Cox, so while Cox was beginning his career at Allegheny College in the fall of 1954, Carlile was starting out on his at Meadville High. Carlile was a true swimming pioneer. His eight-year career spanned the transitional period connecting an older era of competitive swimming to the modern one.

In Carlile's 1954-55 freshman season in high school, there still were no separate butterfly and breaststroke legs on the medley relay or in the individual medley. In 20-yard courses, the relay was 180 yards long. Three swimmers swam 60 yards each: the first did backstroke, the second

breaststroke, and the third one crawl, in that order. The IM was 120 yards – 40 yards each of breaststroke, backstroke, and crawl, in that order. In 25-yard courses, both events were 150 yards long – the relay legs were 50 yards rather than 60, and in the IM the legs were 50 yards rather than 40. Moreover, what was called “breaststroke” could have been either of two things: (1) “orthodox” breaststroke, characterized by a “frog” kick and underwater recovery of the arms, or (2) butterfly-breaststroke, consisting of a frog kick and over-the-water recovery of the arms – as in the modern butterfly armstroke. In those days, both of these were regarded as acceptable variations of breaststroke, and were legal under the definition of breaststroke given in the rule books of the day. The contemporary butterfly stroke with its dolphin kick was illegal.

To see how this state of affairs led to the modern-day breaststroke, butterfly, four-stroke medley relay, and four-stroke IM, some background information is helpful.

As long ago as the late 1800s, breaststroke swimmers employed both of the basic features of twenty-first century breaststroke, namely the underwater arm recovery and the “frog” kick. But this would not last. D. A. Armbruster, the swimming coach at the University of Iowa, provided the following historical material in an article that appeared in the 1937 *Official NCAA Swimming Guide*, entitled “The New Dolphin Breast Stroke on Trial”:

For years American boys have been playfully recovering both arms simultaneously above the surface of the water, using the breast stroke kick with it. But it had occurred to no one to use this stroke in competition, probably because everyone assumed it would be useless on account of rule limitations. However, in 1933, a New York schoolboy did swim a 100-yard race using this simultaneous, double over-arm recovery stroke, in the remarkable time of 1 minute 5 seconds. Here was the first definite proof that the breast stroke, too, could be streamlined as the other strokes; that is, to do away with underwater recovery, eliminate resistance, and speed up the entire stroke.

Immediately following the schoolboy’s performance every breast stroke swimmer in the country began using this so-called “butterfly” breast stroke. In some sections of the country the stroke was ruled legal, but in most places the stroke was disqualified for competition as not being within the pre-

scribed wording of the old historical breast stroke rule. An interpretation was sought from the International Committee as to the legality of the stroke. The answer was slow in forthcoming, but it finally came, to the effect that the recovery was legal, with a few explanatory provisos attached. . . .

The writer then set to work to eliminate the underwater recovery of the legs. . . .

We had a perfect specimen on the team – Jack Sieg. He could go faster under water by just using his legs and body in an undulating action, imitating a fish in motion, and do it better than any person the writer has ever seen. We kept on experimenting with it and found out he could go faster kicking the legs simultaneously than he could do in the alternating kick. With it he could beat anybody on the team using the alternating flutter kick. We then worked to get the arm and leg rhythm timed together. This did not take long, but it was very exhausting at first. We continued working with it until Sieg could swim 100 yards, and the first time he was timed he was clocked in 1:02.3. The performance was so remarkable that we wondered if the watch was in error. Later he duplicated at about the same speed. His fastest 100 yards that season was almost an even minute, the exact time being 60.2 seconds.

It became a question as to whether this kick would be permitted under the rules then in effect – a kick which had been patterned from the crawl stroke kick. This new kick met every requirement in the rule of the orthodox kick except the lateral or outward and inward sweep of the legs. . . .

Rule makers are, however, at present reluctant to make any change in the orthodox breast kick, because it would change the entire character and scope of the stroke and lose its original identity. This is just what they have already done by permitting the arms to recover above the surface of the water.

To follow things out to the logical conclusion just why has the rules committee given sanction to change the arm stroke but hesitated to grant the same privilege for the legs? Since the arms have less resistance in the recovery than the legs, it would seem that the committee should go all the way and eliminate the recovery phase in the legs, and in this way we will have all of our competitive strokes streamlined, modern, and cutting through the water with the least amount of effort to the forward line of progress. . . .

At present there seems to be a sentiment to preserve this original breast stroke and keep it in competition.

There was, in fact, a brief period of time between the discovery of the dolphin kick circa 1935 and when it was actually banned for use in breaststroke competition. In the 1935 *Official NCAA Swimming Guide*, one of the rules governing breaststroke stated that:

The drive of the legs may be made with a rounded and outward sweep, a whip from the knees, or a thrust.

This allowed leeway for a dolphin kick. However, in the 1936 *Guide*, the rule was changed to read:

The legs must be drawn up with a distinct bend in the knees, followed by kicking outward and backward with a separation of the legs laterally. Up and down movements of the legs in the vertical plane are prohibited.

Unequivocally, the frog kick was now mandated for breaststroke swimming and the dolphin kick banned.

So what existed in 1937 when Armbruster's article was published was a conflict between those, on the one hand, who wanted to restore breaststroke to its orthodox purity (underwater arm recovery and frog kick) by making the butterfly armstroke illegal, and those, on the other hand, who sought to legalize the vastly increased speed afforded by integrating a dolphin kick with the currently legal butterfly armstroke. It took nearly two decades for the rule makers to arrive at what now seems like an obvious resolution: Create two separate competitive strokes, namely traditional breaststroke and dolphin butterfly.

The decision to have two strokes was not without its negative consequences, however. By the 1950s, there were many world-class breaststroke and individual medley swimmers who never had swum either the orthodox breaststroke or the dolphin butterfly in competition, the butterfly-breaststroke (butterfly armstroke and frog kick) being the fastest way to swim in accordance with the rules governing breaststroke. As All-American and 1956 Olympian Al Wiggins (the former Taylor Allderdice and Ohio State star who competed against Ray Cox) pointed out in an article entitled "Impressions of the Dolphin Butterfly," published in the 1958 *Official NCAA Swimming Guide*:

Swimmers who had been progressing well with the frog kick style of butterfly

suddenly found themselves in a frustrating dilemma. There appeared to be no relationship between the frog kick and the dolphin, and swimmers found conversion to the new stroke difficult. Ironically, it was the freestylers and backstrokers who first realized success with the dolphin.

It was at this time of major upheaval in competitive swimming that Bruce Carlile made his debut as a freshman on the Meadville High School team. Faced with breaststroke and butterfly both on the verge of metamorphosis, Carlile also was hampered by the archaic rule requiring a hand touch on all freestyle turns, which made doing flip turns a difficult undertaking, particularly in the longer races. As Ray Cox recalled:

It was tough for freestylers, and lots of turns were missed, but the referees couldn't see it either, so close was OK, sort of. . . . I missed at least 10% of my freestyle turns. . . .

On March 5, 1955, at the Western Pennsylvania Regionals meet in Slippery Rock State Teachers College's 20-yard pool, Meadville was notably absent. In the nine events contested (40-yard freestyle, 100-yard breaststroke, 200-yard freestyle, 100-yard backstroke, 100-yard freestyle, fancy diving, 120-yard individual medley, 180-yard medley relay, and 160-yard freestyle relay), not a single Meadville swimmer or diver had qualified from the District 10 meet the weekend before to compete in Regionals. As *The Tribune-Republican* put it on February 28, 1955:

None of Meadville Hi's [sic] swimmers qualified for regional competition in the District 10 meet Saturday at Erie, but for most of the Bulldogs there will be other years.

Coach Jim DiMaria's youthful team did score three points in the meet won for the sixth straight time by Strong Vincent, but the qualifying opposition was just too strong for the MHS neophytes who revived the sport this year after a long lapse.

Clearly, the newly reconstituted Meadville High School swimming team had a long way to go in its climb back to respectability.

Prior to the start of Carlile's sophomore year (1955-56) at Meadville High, the 180-yard (20-yard course) and 150-yard (25-yard course) medley relays were replaced with 160-yard and 200-yard counterparts, respectively, as a butterfly leg was inserted between the breaststroke and freestyle legs of the older format. Now, only ortho-

dox breaststroke (frog kick and underwater arm recovery) could be swum legally on the breaststroke leg, and the out-of-the-water arm recovery was required on the butterfly leg, although either a frog kick or a dolphin kick was permitted in conjunction with it. (The frog kick would not be outlawed for butterfly swimming until the 1969-70 season. In the 1969 *Official NCAA Swimming Guide*, the rule on butterfly stating that “A contestant may not introduce a side-stroke movement.” would be changed in the 1970 *Guide* to read: “A contestant may not introduce a scissor or breaststroke kicking movement.”)

Also for the 1955-56 season, the hand touch requirement was abolished for freestyle turns in high school meets; contact of the wall by any part of the body – optimally only the feet – now would suffice.

For a second year in a row, Meadville was conspicuously absent from the Western Pennsylvania Regionals, which were held on March 3, 1956, in the 20-yard pool at Slippery Rock State Teachers College. It is interesting to note that here the medley relay event – the first to use the four-stroke format rather than the three-stroke one – was made a 240-yard race rather than the 160-yard one mandated by the new rule. A possible explanation for this can be traced to an editing error in the 1956 *Official NCAA Swimming Guide*'s interscholastic rules section, where it describes the medley relay as:

200-Yard Medley Relay (75-foot pools).
180-Yard Medley Relay (60-foot pools).
(Four swimmers on each team, each to swim one-fourth the distance continuously; first, backstroke; second, breaststroke; third, butterfly; fourth, freestyle.)

Since 180 yards divided by 4 equals 45 yards, coupled with the fact that 45-yard relay legs cannot possibly be swum in a 20-yard (60-foot) pool, the presence in this excerpt of the number 180 – which was the correct distance of the three-stroke medley relay the year before – easily could have been the result of an editor's oversight. The 1956 Regionals meet organizers who read this rule must have reasoned correctly that the 180 was a misprint, but then erroneously concluded that since the three-stroke, 150-yard medley relay of 1955 had given way to a four-stroke, 200-yard medley relay in 1956, then the three-stroke, 180-yard medley relay of 1955 must have been intended to be lengthened by the

same ratio to a four-stroke, 240-yard medley relay in 1956, when, in fact, it was supposed to have been changed to a four-stroke, 160-yard event. The misprint was corrected in the 1957 *Official NCAA Swimming Guide*, where it states:

200-Yard Medley Relay (75-foot pools).
160-Yard Medley Relay (60-foot pools).
(Four swimmers on each team, each to swim one-fourth the distance continuously: first, backstroke; second, breaststroke; third, butterfly; fourth, front crawl stroke.)

In Carlile's junior year (1956-57) at Meadville High, the three-command start – (1) take your marks, (2) get set, (3) pistol shot – gave way to the modern two-command start – (1) take your marks, (2) pistol shot. And, the third time was indeed the charm, for in 1957 – Meadville's third season post six-year hiatus – DiMaria's charges began to make waves. At the District 10 meet at Erie Strong Vincent High School on February 23, 1957, Meadville's Ron Johnston (100-yard backstroke), Richard Record (100-yard backstroke), Bruce Carlile (100-yard freestyle), and the 160-yard medley relay of Johnston (backstroke), Carlile (breaststroke), Bob Henrich (butterfly), and Don Krehely (freestyle) all qualified for the Western Pennsylvania Regionals. Here, at the District 10 meet, Johnston won the backstroke in 1:03.0, with Record finishing third. Carlile set a school record of 56.0 in the heats of the 100 free, and then turned in a 56.5 to get second in the finals. The relay came in first with a time of 1:32.9. This onslaught of points permitted the Bulldogs to finish third as a team behind winner Erie Strong Vincent and second place Erie Academy.

At the Regionals, held in Grove City College's 25-yard pool on March 2, 1957, Johnston won the 100-yard backstroke in 1:04.4, Record came in fourth in the same event with a 1:09.9, Carlile finished second in the 100 free with a 56.8, and the 200-yard medley relay team, consisting of Johnston, Carlile, Henrich, and Krehely, placed second in a time of 1:58.8. With so many of its members scoring points, the Meadville swimming team finished fifth out of the twenty participating western Pennsylvania teams. At the PIAA State Swimming Championships, held at State College on March 9, 1957, Meadville swimmers again made a good showing. Johnston placed fifth in the 100 back with a 1:05.8, Record took twelfth in the same event in 1:13.1, Carlile came in eighth in the 100 free with a

58.2, and the medley relay swam to a fifth place finish with a 2:00.3. According to the Monday, March 11, 1957, issue of *The Meadville Tribune*:

Johnston ran into some trouble in his event, catching a guide rope with his arm during his final lap and losing valuable time.

Part of Johnston's problem was that backstroke flags were nonexistent at the time, as they would not become mandatory until the 1965-66 season, so perhaps his error can be forgiven. (Regarding the use of backstroke flags in swimming meets, the actual wording in the rule book evolved as follows: 1963-64: "recommended"; 1964-65: "should be provided"; 1965-66: "must be provided".)

In time for Carlile's senior season (1957-58), the 100-yard butterfly was added to the high school meet program. Concomitantly, a major restriction was imposed on what was allowed as legal breaststroke, namely that the butterfly armstroke no longer was permitted. For this reason, the 100-yard butterfly was not the only new event on the Pennsylvania high school program in 1957-58; the 100-yard breaststroke was considered a new event too, and all previous 100 breast records were discarded because the faster, but now illegal, butterfly armstroke combined with a frog kick had been permitted in previous years.

The newly-created 100-yard butterfly would turn out to be Carlile's best event.

Carlile did manage to miss one significant rule change during his career at Meadville High: In high school swimming, the 120-yard and 150-yard individual medley events would not be replaced with the 160- and 200-yard IMs, respectively, until the 1959-60 season – two years after Carlile had graduated from high school.

In the February 21, 1958, District 10 meet, the first one held in the new six-lane, 25-yard pool at Technical Memorial High School in Erie, the Meadville team again placed third behind champion Erie Strong Vincent and runner-up Erie Academy. Even the *Erie Times-News* was impressed, as they reported:

The Bulldogs churned to a very fast 1:57.5 clocking in the 200 yard medley relay behind a team of Bruce Carlisle [sic], Ray [sic] Henrich, Ray [sic] Johnston, and Jack [sic] Flick. . . .

Another meet highlight was Carlisle's [sic] effort in the 100-yard butterfly – a new event in district competition. The Meadville whiz was timed in 1:02.7.

Despite the *Erie Times-News*' difficulties with the names of Ron Johnston, Bruce Carlile, Bob Henrich, and Jay Flick, every knowledgeable person at the meet understood clearly that over the past two seasons, Meadville had become a significant force to be reckoned with in north-western Pennsylvania swimming.

In addition to the medley relay win and Carlile's 100 fly triumph, points for Meadville were provided by Johnston (second in the 100-yard backstroke), Henrich (third in the 100 fly), Richard Record (fifth in the 100 back), and the Bulldogs' 200-yard freestyle relay team of Dirk Sippy, Frank Noble, Ted Miller, and Dick Wilson, that finished fourth.

At the Western Pennsylvania Regionals of March 1, 1958, Carlile placed second in the 100-yard butterfly with an outstanding time of 1:01.4. Bob Henrich finished eighth in the same event with a 1:13.2. Ron Johnston was second in the 100-yard backstroke with a 1:05.4, and the Bulldogs' 200-yard medley relay team of Johnston, Carlile, Henrich, and Flick placed second with a time of 1:57.3.

The next Saturday, on March 8, 1958, at Glendon Pool at Penn State University, the Meadville swimmers fared well at the PIAA State Swimming Championships, as Carlile took fourth in the 100-yard fly with a 1:02.1, Johnston got fifth in the 100 back with a 1:06.5, and the medley relay placed third with a 1:55.8. On the basis of the six-place scoring system used in all championship meets of the day (7 points for first, 5 for second, 4 for third, etc., and double for relays), Carlile's 100 fly gave Meadville 4 points, Johnston's 100 back was good for 2 more, and the relay contributed 8 to the Bulldogs' total of 13, which ranked the Meadville swimming team sixth overall in the state. York High was the state team champion with 60 points.

By the time he graduated from Meadville High, Carlile owned six of the nine individual school swimming records (40 free, 18.8; 50 free, 24.4; 100 fly, 1:01.2; 100 free, 56.0; 120 IM, 1:14.9; 150 IM, 1:40.5) and was a member of three (160 medley, 200 medley, 160 freestyle) school record relay teams.

When Bruce Carlile entered Allegheny College in the fall of 1958, he had to contend with still more rule changes. Although the four-stroke IM was not to replace the three-stroke IM in high school swimming until the 1959-60 season, the change already had been made four years earlier in collegiate swimming in time for the 1955-56 season. However, the very next season (1956-57), the IM was dropped from the collegiate dual meet program and replaced with the 200-yard butterfly. For some reason, the NCAA rule makers decided that they didn't want both a 200 IM and a 200 fly on the collegiate dual meet program at the same time, which meant that the fledgling four-stroke IM had remained a collegiate dual meet swimming event for only that single 1955-56 season. So, during Carlile's freshman campaign at Allegheny (1958-59), there was no IM whatsoever in dual meets. Unfazed, he became an instant star in the 200-yard butterfly, setting a record in nearly every pool in which he swam it, but the absence of an IM on the program left him without an ideal second event. This posed no problem for the versatile Carlile, as he regularly swam the 220- or 440-yard freestyle in addition to the 200 fly, and excelled in those events too. But here he did have to cope again with the troublesome hand-touch requirement on freestyle turns. That rule, which had been abolished for high school swimming beginning with the 1955-56 season, would not be done away with on the collegiate level until the 1962-63 season, one year too late for Carlile, who would graduate in the spring of 1962. Fortunately, in time for his collegiate sophomore season (1959-60), the IM was added back permanently to the dual meet program after a three-year absence, and Carlile immediately embarked on a record spree in that too.

During his tenure at Allegheny College from 1958 until 1962, Carlile won ten Presidents Athletic Conference titles for Coach Bill Hanson's Gators – six in individual events and four in relays. Carlile's name regularly appeared in the *Meadville Tribune* sports pages during swimming season. It was not uncommon to see such headlines as:

Carlile Sets Pool Mark

Butterfly Record Sunk By Carlile

Carlile Sets Pool Record

Carlile Sets Record As Tankers Win

Carlile Sets Another; Gators Win

Carlile Sets New Record

Carlile Sets Another Mark

The secret to Carlile's success, in an era when heavy swimming training was unheard of, was that he kept ahead of his competition simply by being more fit than most of them. During the swimming season, Carlile would eat healthy food, get plenty of sleep, drink no Coca Cola or other soft drinks, never smoke, and even would put wheat germ on his cereal. This level of dedication made a significant difference to a 200-fly swimmer like Carlile. In four years of competition, he was undefeated in dual meet 200-yard butterfly races, winning 35 of them, and won all four 200 fly races he swam in Presidents Athletic Conference Championships. Overall, in four years of dual meets, Carlile won 72 individual races and was on 20 winning relay teams. He finished in second place only five times and third only once. When Carlile graduated from Allegheny, he held school records in the 200-yard butterfly (2:20.4), the 160-yard individual medley (1:43.3), and the 200-yard individual medley (2:16.9), in addition to being a member of the school record 400-yard medley and 400-yard freestyle relay teams. He also owned untold numbers of pool records throughout western Pennsylvania and the Presidents Athletic Conference. Carlile did make one trip to the NCAA Championships – in 1962, his senior year – where he competed in the 200- and 100-yard butterfly events, as well as the 200-yard IM. Although he did not qualify for the six-man finals as had his predecessor Ray Cox, Bruce Carlile has to be considered as one of Meadville's greatest swimmers of all time.

The Modern Era

Jim DiMaria resigned from his position as the Meadville High swimming coach at the end of the 1958-59 season – his fifth – in order to pursue his dream of becoming the Bulldogs' head football coach. He replaced an extremely strict and apparently unpopular gridiron mentor named Tom Duff. As *The Meadville Tribune* of Thursday, September 10, 1959, reported in an article entitled,

Meadville Anxiously Awaits Head Coaching
Debut of Bulldogs' Jim DiMaria

sports editor Jim Dippel summed it up like this:

Jim DiMaria, the understudy who waited in Meadville High's coaching wings for six years, makes his debut as head coach Friday night and an air of suspense surrounds the occasion. . . .

His training rules are the same that were in force during the recent Duff regime, but the strictness has abated somewhat. Dates are now permitted during the weekends and dancing has been dropped from the forbidden list.

With no dating or dancing allowed during football season on Duff's teams, and Duff being "noted for his ability to shame players into improvement," it is not difficult to see why "the team's attitude, a constant source of trouble in 1958, . . . improved tremendously" under DiMaria.

Beginning with the 1959-60 school year – the dawn of the modern era of competitive swimming – the reins of the high school swimming program were turned over to Ken Nelson, who had last coached the team way back during the mysteriously abbreviated 1947-48 swimming season – the final one prior to the equally inexplicable six-year hiatus, when there was no team at all. In the fall of 1960, the Meadville YMCA formed its first real swimming team – one that would compete in dual meets against Y teams from other towns, not just hold intramural competitions. The author of the present article was a ten-year-old Cadet swimmer on that first team, and would compete four seasons for Meadville Y (1960-61 through 1963-64). Nelson would coach the high school team for nine seasons (1959-60 through 1967-68), the last four of which (1964-65 through 1967-68) would comprise the high school swimming career of the author.

But all of that is another story.

Despite being a small town in northwestern Pennsylvania, whose only competitive swimming facilities were two four-lane, 20-yard pools, Meadville managed to produce such great champions in the 1940s and 1950s as Nevin Phillips, Ray Cox, and Bruce Carlile, as well as their very successful compatriots, such as Bill Clark, Ron Johnston, and others. Many decades later,

Meadville would acquire six-lane, 25-yard pools of its own, and develop modern competitive swimming programs on a par with the very best in the entire country. It is the author's hope that the Meadville swimmers who are products of these programs always remember the remarkable legacy of which they are a part.

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