

# PIPING HOT

She holds multiple world masters records today but what would have happened if Karlyn Pipes had not taken a 10-year break as a youngster, asks **Tony Pearce**.

Once upon a time, multiple world masters record holder Karlyn Pipes was a very promising young swimmer in the USA - a national age group winner. But like so many youngsters, she dropped out of swimming. In fact, if the truth were known, she nearly dropped out of life. But that's another story. It was not until some 10 years later that she turned her life around by making a comeback as a masters swimmer - culminating in her being inducted into the International Masters Hall of Fame.

She became a professional masters swimmer, creating the Aquatic Edge Swimming business, and an inspirational speaker, and has now truly achieved worldwide acclaim. Her secret? A certain kind of passion - which she wears inside herself. This passion rubs off on the swimmers she motivates and teaches.

I remember on one particular occasion when Karlyn came to Barnes Swimming Club to conduct her clinics, not only for masters swimmers but also for young age group swimmers. On the last day, she gave an inspirational talk to all the young swimmers with their parents. She then trained with the swimmers, giving training tips. Inspiration by example.

But there was one aspect of her talk which I thought slightly bemused the audience. She mentioned that her old coach (at the time when she was a very young swimmer) used words to the effect that if Karlyn had not dropped out of swimming for those 10 years, you would have never heard of the 1984 US Olympic champion Tracy Caulkins. Firstly, nobody in the audience had ever heard of Tracy Caulkins - unless they were over 50 years of age. Secondly, there is relatively little empirical evidence to prove this. Nevertheless, with my own subjectivity and some concreteness of truth, I will attempt to rationalise below.

## The real item

In 1979, I visited the famous Nashville Aquatic Club, where Tracy Caulkins was a young swimmer. I watched her in training. No doubt about it, in terms of world swimming, she was



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the real item. Later, in 1983, when I viewed the Pan American Games in Caracas, Venezuela, I watched Tracy win the 400m IM. It confirmed my view. Caulkins went on to win the 1984 Olympic Games 400m IM.

When you scan Karlyn's many world masters records, particularly the 400 IM, and take into consideration the aspects of age, performance, and what zoot-suit she was wearing at the time, you come to the conclusion that it could have been conceivable that in the final of the 400m IM, both Tracy and Karlyn would have been on the blocks swimming for the US.

Now one asks the question: if only. Unfortunately, the reality is what is. And Karlyn went down a different route.

## Lost years?

Every swimmer's swimming career, it would

seem, is judged within their era. In the respect of Karlyn's era of 10 supposedly lost years, I beg to differ. This is because I believe that a swimming career is an ongoing process: from infancy to old age, from the very young age group swimmer to seniors and masters. In the real LTADP (Long Term Athlete Development Plan), one particular swim or a certain period of time doesn't define one's swimming career. It is, in fact, a lifetime of similar results that is the real key to one's career. We have adjusted over time to new experiences that have reminded us not only of what we have so far achieved in swimming, but also how much further we can grow in the sport as we get older. Arguably, life imitating swimming.

It is in this respect that we all will continue to fully appreciate Karlyn's inspiration by example for some time to come. **SI**

# REFLECTIONS