

RON & RICH BLANC

Since 1996, brothers Ron and Rich Blanc have guided the Santa Margarita Catholic High School swim and dive program to unprecedented success. In 2017, they were named NISCA Outstanding Service Award winners.

BY MICHAEL J. STOTT

Q. SWIMMING WORLD: How did you two get into aquatics?

A. COACHES BLANC: We were told by our learn-to-swim swimming instructor that we could be very successful swimmers. Her encouragement was invaluable.

SW: And then into coaching?

CB: We fell in love with both swimming and water polo. Once our athletic careers ended, we wanted to stay involved. Coaching was a great way to do that. As swimmers, we learned self-confidence, time management skills and to be great teammates. We wanted to pay those life skills forward by giving our swimmers the same opportunities.

SW: Any seminal influences?

CB: Our Orange Coast College coach, Don Watson, was a great influence. Among other things, he showed us how to be part of a team. A great testimony to him is that at some point more than 10 of our college teammates went on to become swim coaches. As for us, we have coached together for our entire coaching careers.

SW: Why high school coaching as opposed to club or college?

CB: We started by going back to our alma mater, Mater Dei High School (Santa Ana, Calif.), which needed a swim coach. We thought we could make a difference there, especially with the high school kids. After the first season, we fell in love with high school coaching, felt needed and just remained there. We both got jobs in secondary education as teachers and administrators, so we also enjoy the high school experience in other capacities as well.

Coaching in college is still a possibility. For seven summers, we coached a club team and enjoyed that very much.

SW: To what do you attribute your unqualified success at Santa Margarita?

CB: Having an amazing talent like Katie McLaughlin and a beautiful 50-meter pool certainly doesn't hurt, but we were coaching long before those two arrived. We began as head coaches back in 1989 and at SM together in 1998, and we have had success building programs along the way.

The championships have been a byproduct of making a difference in the lives of our students. The saying, "Kids don't care how much you know until they know that you care," has been the driving force of our coaching careers.

SW: You've had some very good teams at Santa Margarita over the years. Your 2017 girls' squad was the independent school national high school team of the year. Were they your best ever?

CB: We finished first this year for girls in the Swimming World National High School Championships for independent schools and fourth overall. However, the 2020 team operating in the COVID-

Q & A



[Photos Courtesy Santa Margarita Catholic High School]

Coach Ron Blanc

**Co-head Swimming and Diving Coach
Santa Margarita Catholic High School
Rancho Santa Margarita, Calif.**

- California State University Fullerton, B.S., business administration and accounting, 1990; California State University Long Beach, M.B.A., marketing, 1993; Loyola-Marymount University, M.A., Catholic School Administration, 2009
- Co-head swim coach, SMCHS, 1998-present; assistant coach, 1996-97
- Head swim coach, Mater Dei High School, 1989-95—won California Interscholastic Federation (CIF) Southern Section title in 1990; assistant coach, 1988
- Coached 94 high school All-Americans and 390 All-CIF swimmers
- Named National High School Coaches Association Coach of the Year, 2014
- Named Southern California and Orange County Coach of the Year in 2000 and 2017
- NISCA Outstanding Service Award recipient, 2017
- NISCA Zone 7 director
- ASCA Level 5 coach
- Author of 80-page SMCHS media guide

Coach Rich Blanc

**Co-head Swimming and Diving Coach /Aquatics Manager
Santa Margarita Catholic High School
Rancho Santa Margarita, Calif.**

- California State University Fullerton, B.S., business administration and accounting, 1990; California State University Long Beach, M.B.A., marketing, 1993; Loyola-Marymount University, M.A., Catholic School Administration, 2009
- Co-head swim coach, SMCHS, 1996-present
- Head swim coach, Mater Dei, 1989-95; won California Interscholastic Federation (CIF) Southern Section title in 1990; assistant coach, 1988
- Coached 94 high school All-Americans and 390 All-CIF swimmers
- Coached SMCHS varsity girls 25 years, boys 23
- Named National High School Coaches Association Coach of the Year, 2014
- Named Southern California and Orange County Coach of the Year in 2000 and 2017
- NISCA Outstanding Service Award recipient, 2017

shortened season was our deepest and most talented team ever. How the kids handled the disappointment of not getting the chance to make a run for the national title and the strength of their character in face of that situation makes the team even more memorable.

SW: In the early 1960s, Nort Thornton's Los Altos and Dave Robertson's New Trier teams used to eye each other from afar. Do you consciously measure yourselves against Carmel, Bolles and the other powerhouse U.S. high school teams?

CB: As we go through our season goals at our annual team retreat, we always bring up the results of amazing high school programs

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PROGRESSION OF TIMES

MAGGIE MCGUIRE

SCY	2018	2019	2020	2021
100 Back	58.03	56.17	55.51	55.15
200 Back	2:06.77	1:59.14	1:57.07	1:58.90
200 IM	2:14.07	2:07.99	2:20.29	2:05.12

LC

100 Back	1:04.70	1:04.74	1:04.16	1:03.36
200 Back	2:18.21	2:17.01	2:16.63	2:16.76
200 IM	2:28.22	2:27.02	—	2:25.81

PROGRESSION OF TIMES

JACK NUGENT

SCY	2018	2019	2020	2021
100 Back	1:04.47	59.14	53.80	51.23
200 Back	—	2:05.82	1:52.86	1:49.19
200 IM	2:16.88	2:08.83	1:56.85	1:52.17

LC

100 Back	1:12.09	1:06.09	—	59.06
200 Back	2:31.97	2:17.40	—	2:06.44
200 IM	2:31.87	2:25.83	—	2:10.32

HOW THEY TRAIN

MAGGIE MCGUIRE & JACK NUGENT

BY MICHAEL J. STOTT

Teammates Maggie McGuire and Jack Nugent are poised to continue Santa Margarita Catholic High School's impressive Trinity League and California Interscholastic Federation (CIF) Southern Section success. Both have strong club training backgrounds: McGuire at Socal Aquatics and Nugent with Evolution Racing Club. SMCHS has been a lucky beneficiary.

Maggie McGuire: A backstroke/distance/IM specialist, the 5-10 McGuire is the 14th-ranked Golden State female in the Class of 2023 (114th nationally) by collegeswimming.com (swimcloud). Additionally, she is a two-time NISCA All-American in the 100 yard back (55.15, 47th) and 500 free (4:56.13, 62nd).

"Maggie comes from an athletic family (dad MLB, mom swimming, brother collegiate baseball) and possesses a strong work ethic," says Ron Blanc. "A highly skilled technician, her years of swim training have produced an efficient freestyle, smooth backstroke and an improving IM."

McGuire gained her first junior cuts in 2018 and has performed well in Junior National and U.S. Open competitions when held. "Regrettably, the COVID lockdowns interrupted her rapid progress, but now she is regaining her speed and confidence. Her return to form resulted in her first individual CIF Southern Section title in the 100 backstroke (55.15)," he says.

SAMPLE TRAINING SESSION: MAGGIE MCGUIRE

(Day 21, Week 5—Wednesday, March 31 p.m.)

Warm-up (900 yards)

- 300 freestyle
- 6 x 100 (1st: breast/free, 2nd: back/free, 3rd: fly/free, repeat)
(Take heart rate at 200 yards)
- 4 x 50 freestyle @ :50 (sprint down, easy back)

EN3 (1,600 yards)

- 8 x 200 freestyle
Odds free @ 2:20, evens back @ 2:30
(Maggie held 2:05 on free, 2:15 on back)

Stroke Work (300 yards)

- Turns (6 x 50 choice, full turn from mid-pool)

Kicking (300 yards)

- 6 x 50 choice kick @ 1:00 (high speed, all back kick)

EN3 (1,000 yards)

- 3x {3 x 100 freestyle @ fastest interval possible
(Easy 50 after each set)
(Maggie swam on a 1:05 base and held 1:01s)

EN2 and SP2 (1,400 yards)

- 8 x 100 @ 1:20 (75 free, last 25 is sprint choice)
- 8 x 50 free @ :35
- 8 x 25 choice sprints @ :30

Warm-down (200 yards)

- 4 x 50 easy freestyle @ 1:15

Total: 5,900 yards

Jack Nugent: Like McGuire, Nugent specializes in back, distance and IM. Standing 6-2, he is the third member of his family to swim for SMCHS and is quickly getting faster.

"His level of improvement in the past two years has been astonishing," says Coach Ron Blanc, "and his time drops have positioned him as a major college recruit." At present, collegeswimming.com (swimcloud) has him ranked 21st (state) and 175th (nationally) in the Class of 2023.

"Jack's technique is well-suited for mid-distance backstroke," says his coach. "With increased growth, strength and tempo, he will be a SCY sub-50 backstroker and sub-1:50 IMer. He has connected the intensity requirements in training to produce results in racing. A fierce competitor who doesn't like to lose, he qualified for his first junior nationals this summer."

Examples of his progress include a 51.23 Futures 100 back plus 1:49.19 and 2:06.82 200 backs from the 2021 short and long course junior nationals.

SAMPLE TRAINING SET: JACK NUGENT

(Day 26, Week 7—Monday, April 12 p.m.)

Warm-up (900 yards)

- 300 freestyle
- 6 x 100 (25 choice, 25 free)
(Take heart rate at 200 yards)
- 4 x 50 free @ :50 (25 hard, 25 easy)

EN3 (1,000 yards)

- 20 x 50 freestyle (interval descends by 1

second—swim until failure)

(:55, :54, :53, :52, :51, :50, :49, :48, :47, :46, :45, :44, :43, :42, :41, :40, :39, :38, :37, :36, :35, :34, :33, :32, :31, :30)

(Jack made the :28 interval before missing the :27 interval, so he attempted 29 50s freestyle)

Recovery (300 yards)

- 3 x 100 @ 1:30 (25 choice, 25 free on easy pace)

EN2 and SP2 (900 yards)

- 6 x 150 @ 2:20, 2:25 or 2:30.

(Jack held 1:40s and went on the 2:20 base)

- 100 free (85%), 10 seconds rest, 50 choice (100%)

Kicking (300 yards)

- 12 x 25 sprint kick @ :45 (:15 sprint wall kick, flip through arms, 25 sprint kick)

Specialty—EN1 and SP3/EN3

(specialty—1,300 yards)

- Specialty (done backstroke)
- 5 x 100 specialty @ 1:20 (25 specialty, 25 free)
- 4x {2 x 50 choice for time (100%) @ 1:30, 100 choice stretch (medium effort) @ 2:00

Warm-down (200 yards)

- 4 x 50 easy freestyle @ 1:15

Total: 5,150 yards ❖

Michael J. Stott is an ASCA Level 5 coach, golf and swimming writer. His critically acclaimed coming-of-age golf novel, "Too Much Loft," was published in June 2021, and is available from Bookbaby.com, Amazon, B&N and book distributors worldwide.

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like Carmel, Southlake Carroll, Sacred Heart, etc. We want our kids to see the big picture of how we compete against the nation's best. We go over times from state high school championship meets as goals for our individual swims and relays.

We would absolutely love to swim against Carmel HS in a dual meet—(Coach Plumb, can we set up a home-and-home series?)—although our state organizations may have a say in that matter.

SW: SMCHS swims a lot of meets, way more than most high school teams. Why is that?

CB: The swim meets are where the athletes

can build team camaraderie. For many, the meets are the most fun they have in high school swimming. In addition, some meets have different formats—like relays only, which are a lot of fun. For the most part, we keep to one swim meet per week and devote much of the season to training.

SW: Is it in the Eagle DNA to swim in college?

CB: I think so. We have coached many talented athletes and had a lot of team success. Our school and teams have developed a culture of striving for academic and athletic excellence. Knowing that encourages others to do the same. Each year the succeeding class wants to continue that legacy of championships and excellence.

SW: What percentage of your athletes also swim club?

CB: Of the 140 athletes on our team, about 30 swim club, so about 20% swim club year-round. The remaining 80% train with us during the high school season.

SW: And what percentage of their training do they do with you at SMCHS?

CB: Our year-round club swimmers are given the option of training with their club teams during the high school season if they make certain time standards. We have a good relationship with our local club coaches. We encourage our club swimmers to train whenever they can at our high school practices, especially during our morning workouts. Because of COVID pool restrictions this past year, many of our club swimmers attended our high school practices for their necessary yardage and conditioning.

SW: What does an average in-season weekly high school program look like?

CB: Our daily swim practices go from 2:30 to 5 p.m. We average between 25,000 and 30,000 yards per week, depending on the time of the season. Our morning workouts are in the weight room for two to three hours a week.

SW: What do the Eagles do for strength and conditioning?

CB: We have a 6,000-square-foot weight room and a strength-and-conditioning coach who has collegiate training experience. Our weight sessions are not lengthy, but are intense and customized to swimmer needs. We don't do any bench press or squats, but work on power, core, joint flexibility and stabilization. It has made a huge difference with our athletes.

SW: Your high school swimming media guide has to be the most comprehensive, professionally-produced document on the

Eagle girls are this year's *Swimming World* independent high school national champions. In addition, they have won 21 Trinity League, eight California Interscholastic Federation (CIF) Southern Section, three CIF state and one NISCA national title. In 2012, 2017, 2018 and 2021, they topped the NISCA independent school national dual meet team rankings (900+) while finishing second in 2014, 2015 and 2019.

SMCHS boys have won 12 Trinity league crowns, have been CIF runners-up four times, and are the 2021 CIFSS champions. In the process, more than 130 of their aquatic graduates have gone on to compete in collegiate programs. ❖

planet.

CB: We started our media guide back in 1989 on our parent's dot-matrix printer, and it has grown to about 80 full-color pages. The media guide was designed to provide publicity for our swimmers and divers that once seemed to be reserved only for football and basketball players. We hope it is a memento that our athletes will continue to cherish. (For author Ron Blanc), it is a labor of love and a mini-thesis each year. Once complete, it's similar to a high school yearbook.

SW: Is it fair to say it is representative of the team parent support?

CB: We cannot run our program without the help and support of the team parents. We would go bananas if we had to do this by ourselves. We want time on our swim team to be a family event where our parents can enjoy their child's four-year high school experience.

SW: The Jessie Rees Foundation: How did SMCHS get involved in that?

CB: When Jessie was going through her cancer, her sister was a member of our swim team. We met Jessie and saw how strong and awesome she was. We got involved with her and her foundation, which was a blessing to all of our swimmers and coaches.

Jessie would have attended our school when she reached her high school years. The year that Jessie was to be a freshman, her family donated money to cover another swimmer's entire team participation fees. They told us that since this would have been Jessie's team, they wanted to help someone else financially so that they could be a team member. Jessie's younger brother was a swimmer with us, so the family stayed with us for a long time. ❖

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