

PREP SWIMMING

Paly boys made historic waves 50 years ago

by Bo Crane

Fifty years ago, just a few months after the Kennedy assassination in November, the Beatles first appeared on the Ed Sullivan Show, Feb. 9, 1964. Ed was 62 years old, slightly younger than the current age of those soon attending their 50th high school class reunion.

A couple weeks later on Feb. 25, which was George Harrison's 21st birthday, Muhammad Ali (then Cassius Clay and all of 22) took the heavyweight title from Sonny Liston, 32. To the teenage baby boomers, the Fab Four and new boxing champ were the avatars of the cultural breakthrough known as the '60s, also the golden age of Bay Area high school swimming.

With school still buzzed over the football team's undefeated season in 1963, the Palo Alto boys swimming team began practices on Monday, Feb. 3. That season would end with

Paly '64

(continued from page 75)

Paly being regarded as the No. 2 high school team in the nation, ranked just behind New Trier (Ill.), by Swimming World Magazine. Paly later would be ranked as California's state swim team of the year by Cal-Hi Sports.

"The era was really the Golden Age of swimming for the Bay Area," said former Paly head swim coach Ro Davis, who swam on that memorable Vikings squad in '64. "We had so many great swimmers all around us; many Olympians and many other top swimmers."

Following World War II, Santa Clara Valley orchards gave way to sub-divisions and country club pools, all with swim teams. Future varsity swimmers grew up knowing each other while competing together or opposed in summer leagues before moving onto to the serious AAU club teams and meets.

The earliest competitive club in the valley was Santa Clara Swim Club (SCSC) founded by then-27-year-old George Haines in 1951, using the pool at Santa Clara High where he was also the swim coach. Implementing a vigorous training regimen using intervals, Haines soon had SCSC on top. The Schollander family moved from Oregon in 1962 so its future Olympic star son, Don, could swim for SCSC and enroll in Santa Clara High, class of '64.

"Our area dominated US Swimming and the USA dominated the world in swimming," Davis recalled. "If you wanted to compete, you knew you had to step it up."

Paly's swim team in '64 included seniors Mike Siebert, Rody "Ro" Davis, Steve Kartchner, Don Lee, David Smith and Jim Waggoner. Juniors were Mike's brother Pete, Robin Waples, John

McCrary, twins Roy and Dennis O'Connor, Doug Eisle, Rollie Grogan and Steve Virello. Nick Carter and Jim Stern were the sophomores. Juniors Rick Cassel and Mark Braunstein were divers.

Unlike football with just its after school practices, varsity swimmers had morning sessions at least a couple times a week. After coach Paul Bataille's practice ended at 4 p.m., many returned an hour later to continue training in the pool under Al and Della Sehorn, coaching the Palo Alto-Los Altos (PA-LA) swim club.

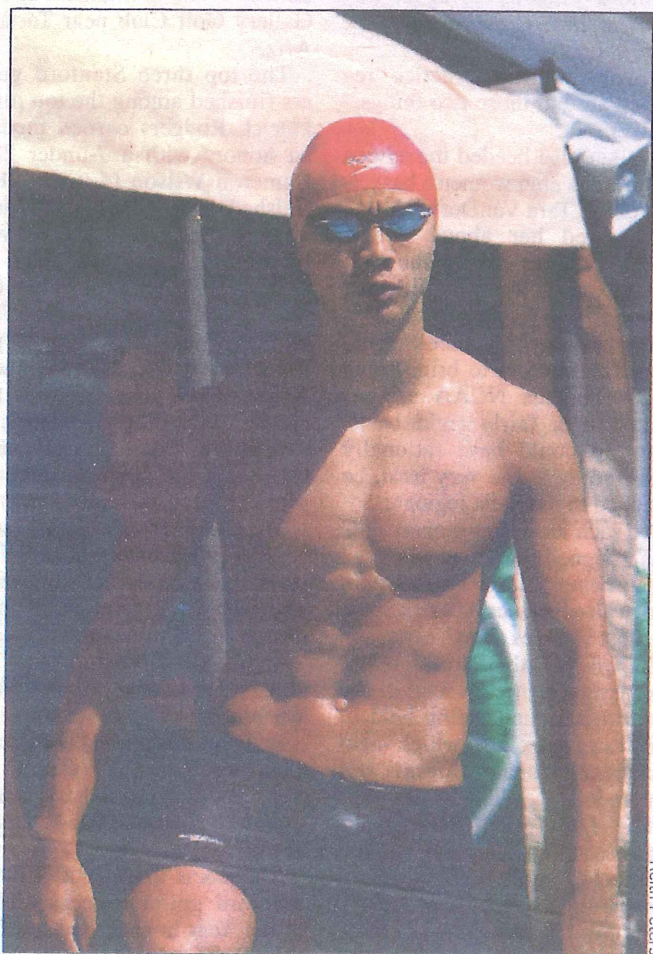
"Santa Clara SC, with George Haines coaching, was great but there were a number of other great coaches like Al and Della Sehorn and Nort Thorton, all of whom I swam for.

"That Paly team was so close. We really did like each other and hung out together, too. Paul Bataille was the perfect high school coach for us, too. He required us to be at his workouts, but he shortened those so many of us could get to our club workouts afterwards."

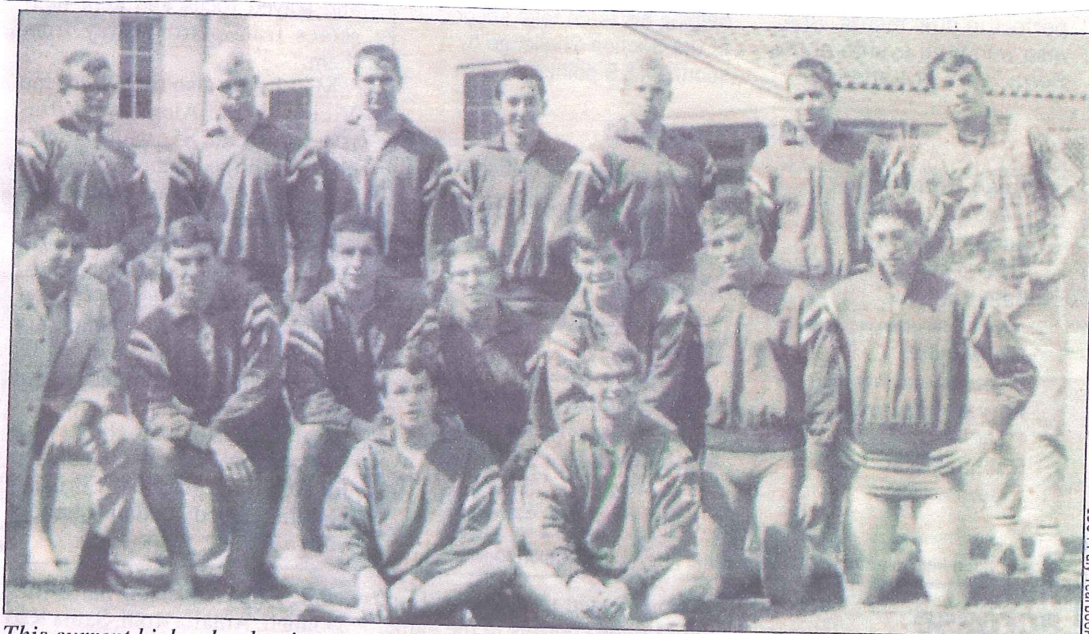
Dual meets were mostly held on Thursdays, with each school allowed two swimmers per event with points given for top three finishers. As the season opened in March, Paly dominated three opponents and then won the Santa Rosa Relays. Two weeks later, in a rare Tuesday meet, the Vikings faced Menlo-Atherton. The 200 IM matched two of the nation's best, M-A's Dick Roth (Class of '65) against Mike Siebert. Roth set a national high school record in the antiquated Paly pool while the Vikings won the meet, 57-38.

Two days later, Palo Alto beat a strong Cubberley team, 54-41, in the Cougars' pool. The following Thursday, Paly finished the season undefeated, extending a streak of 26 straight dual-meet wins.

The Vikings went on to win the



Palo Alto senior Andrew Liang helped the Vikings finish ahead of Bellarmine in the Section Challenge.



1964 Paly Yearbook

This current high school swim season marks 50 years since the Palo Alto boys made big waves nationally with seven All-Americans who made up the country's No. 2-ranked dual-meet team.

South Peninsula Athletic League (SPAL) championship meet by scoring 102 1/2 points to host M-A's 68.

At the North Coast Section (NCS) Championships at Foothill College, entrants were again limited to two events. Pete Siebert won the 100 fly going away, with Roth having failed to qualify in prelims. Waples edged Kidder in the 100 free, an event Schollander skipped despite holding the nation's top time. The Vikings also won the 200 free relay with a meet record and captured the meet with 55 1/2 points while Santa Clara was second with 38 points.

At season's end, four Paly swimmers had their nine best individual times in the nation's top 20 for high schools. Along with the two relay times at NCS, seven Paly swimmers were selected as High School All-Americans. Waples' 100 free was No. 3, Mike Siebert's 400 free was No. 5 as was Pete's 100 fly, with Schollander No. 1 in all three. Mike's 200 IM time trailed only Roth's

mark. Pete's 100 backstroke was 12th. McCrary placed 11th and 9th the 200 and 400 frees. Along with both Sieberts and Waples, Davis and the O'Connors made the list with the nation's No. 2 times in both relays.

At the 1964 Olympic Trials, both Pete and Mike Siebert, representing PA-LA, entered two events each, gaining experience but not making it past the heats. In the Tokyo Olympics that October, Yale freshman Schollander won gold in the 100 and 400 freestyle and in both relays he anchored while M-A senior Roth won gold in the 400 IM.

"The '64 Paly team was very good and they were competing against the very best in California, the U.S. and, in fact, the world," Davis said. "The accomplishments of that '64 Paly team have not been matches in 50 years, and there have been a lot of good swimmers go through there over that span."

Fifty years later, another swim season is heading toward the fin-

ish line with the SCVAL De Anza Division finals on May 9 and the CCS Championships set for May 16-17.

As you might imagine, had Schollander, Roth, Pete Siebert and Robin Waples been swimming at the 2013 section finals, they would have placed either first or second in their individual events — in the girls' division. Against the boys, only Schollander and Siebert, with their '64 times, would have finished in the consolation finals — barely above 13th and 16th place.

In 2013, Palo Alto junior Andrew Liang won the 100 fly in 47.19. At the league finals, Liang broke the 100 fly mark set by Spitz in 1967.

While the times have gotten faster (as expected) in the past 50 years and the competition keen, that memorable 1964 Palo Alto made waves nationally and truly earned its place during a golden age for high school swimming. ■

(Bo Crane is a 1968 graduate of Palo Alto High)