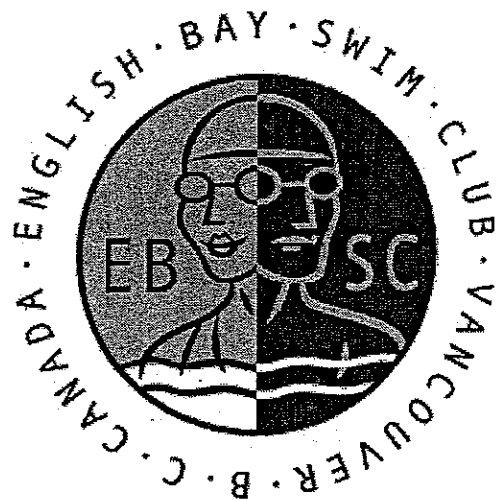


*A Brief History of the
English Bay Swim Club
1982 - 2002*

By Tom Kemple and Nick Phillips



The English Bay Swim Club has been around almost as long as organized Masters' swimming in British Columbia, and we are one of the first gay and lesbian swim teams in the world. We've had a long and sometimes troubled relationship with the Masters Swimming Association of BC (MSABC), but remain one of the largest and certainly most active teams in the province. At a crucial turning point in our history, we became the first Canadian team to host both International Gay and Lesbian Aquatics (IGLA, 1989) and Gay Games (1990) events, which in turn inspired others to form clubs in Canada. Since then, we've continued to be a welcoming place for gay and lesbian swimmers of all abilities, we've hosted numerous sporting and social events, and have consistently performed well in local and international competitions.

Even with all the changes the team has been through, we still have some original members from our beginnings in the fall of 1982. On December 10, 1998, seven "veteran" members of the English Bay Swim Club met with us for dinner at Yun Ping Restaurant on Davie Street. Daniel Collins, Keith Fryer, Patrick Gray, John Hallett, Bob Isnor, Dirk Ricker, and Kevin Simpson generously shared with us their memories and recollections of the team's first ten years, some joyful and some difficult. What follows is based on the conversation we had that night, and some stories we've gathered from other members about highlights from our second decade.



Daniel Collins photo

Of course what we've recorded here only begins to tell the story of EBSC - a story that really includes the participation and energy of hundreds of members of our community.

The Early Years: 1982-1988

Inspired by the good times and camaraderie of the first Gay Games in San Francisco in the summer of 1982, Bill Bennest and Ken Leggatt provided the initiative for the founding of The English Bay Swim Club that fall. Bob recalls that five or six dedicated swimmers of various abilities squished into a single lane for one hour once a week at the Vancouver Aquatic Centre, which is still the team's home pool.

Soon this was extended to two lanes, then four lanes in 1986, until 1988 when we secured the minimum six lanes and three practices a week that we currently have. Bill and Mike Hoche served as volunteer coaches from '83 to '86, Colin Reid from '87 to '89, and EBSC hired its first paid coach in 1988.



Ken Leggatt & John Whistler,
1985 Gay & Lesbian
Community Games



The Team, c. 1987

As one of the first gay and lesbian swim teams in North America, the early years were a gradual coming out process for both our club and our members. Some of our "old timers" recall when the Aquatic Centre staff found out that we were a gay club and the surprising support

management gave us, which still continues. There was considerable discussion about the name of the team and its mission statement, until it was decided to chose the name we now have, which identifies an area that many gay people call home. The purpose of EBSC is "to foster fun, fitness, and competition in an environment inclusive of gays and lesbians."



Ken Leggatt with Patrick Gray

Some other highlights from this period include our team's participation in the 1986-87 AIDS walk, possibly inspired by our own swim marathon the year before, and the formation of a separate English Bay Water Polo Club in 1988, whose pool fees were covered by EBSC that year.

The Turning Point: IGLA '89, Gay Games '90 and Beyond

When English Bay won the rights to host the 3rd International Gay and Lesbian Aquatics Championships in March 1989, the team's profile in our community and on the international swimming scene was enhanced considerably.

In so many ways, these could be called the 'Dirk years,' because of Dirk Ricker's amazing organizational efforts as coordinator of both IGLA '89 and Gay Games '90, and his leadership on the executive. Dirk initiated a push to involve more women in the club, who peaked at 20% of the membership during this time.



Dirk Ricker (third from right), John Hallett (far right) and friends



John, Bob Isnor, Dirk & Sarah

Dirk recalls a difficult meeting he and John Whistler had with MSABC and Canadian Amateur Swimming Association (CASA) representatives in New Westminster. One week before IGLA was to be held, MSABC was insisting that we charge an exorbitant thirty dollars per swimmer in exchange for sanctioning the competition, citing fears about its character as a gay and lesbian event. Only after a passionate appeal by John did the officials relent, thereby making IGLA '89 the first officially sanctioned gay and lesbian meet ever. Nevertheless, a club profile and report on the games which was solicited for the MSABC newsletter was never printed.

Since that time, however, we have had tremendously positive relations with Swim BC officials working at our meets, and with other Masters' teams

across the province. IGLA '89 was a great success, with 189 participants. It was at this event that the Pink Flamingo relay was born (despite what our Seattle friends may think!). Queen Elizabeth herself (a.k.a. Bill Monroe) presided over the day's festivities. EBSC members also assisted at the 1989 Police and Firefighter Games, which provided more experience for what was to come - and an ad for the 1990 Gay Games was posted in their program.



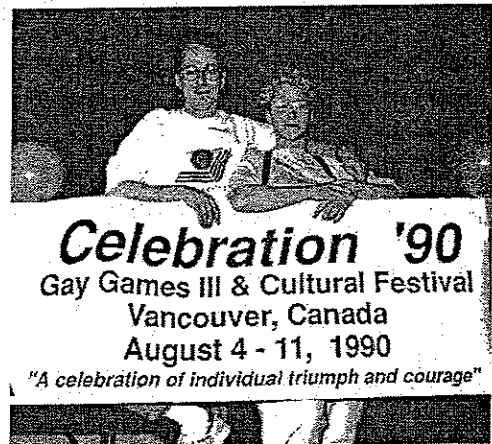
EBSC has an audience with Elizabeth R in '89 (and Daniel joined the Mounties!)

Having passed the IGLA test, EBSC was given the OK to host swimming events at *Celebration '90: Gay Games III and Cultural Festival* over four days in August. This was the largest gay and lesbian competition ever held, with 719 swimmers



Many Marlos make a mighty splash

participating. It was endorsed by then-Mayor Gordon Campbell, and MP Svend Robinson presented medals to the winners, having already been a guest speaker at our Easter Brunch the year before.



Mark & Katherine Wilson

Forty Marlo Thomases flew in from New York to dazzle the crowds at the Pink Flamingo relay, terrifying the lifeguards as they took to the dive towers and threw themselves into the pool below. Flip-flops, sunglasses, and wigs were everywhere! This remains perhaps *the* Pink Flamingo memory of all time.



Blonde bombshells strut their stuff, Beach Party '90

Having hosted annual Beach Parties for several years (highlighted by the legendary swim suit competitions), EBSC pulled out all the stops for Splash Dance! at Science World, at which we raised \$10,000.

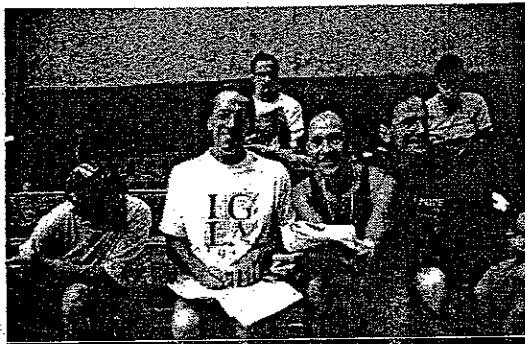
Despite the amazing performances of international swimmers at Gay Games '90, the local media hardly noticed. However, when the dust settled after eight days of world-class competition and cultural events, we realized Vancouver had hosted one of the most impressive festivals in its history.

The Growing Years: 1990-1998

With the buzz created by IGLA and the Gay Games, EBSC began to grow enormously, with as many as 107 swimmers on the roster. Keith remembers a record 13 swimmers crammed into a single short course lane at one practice in 1990. In a toughly worded letter to the Director of the Vancouver Board of Parks and Recreation dated December 1989, Howard Faulkner outlined several reasons why a team of our size, with strong local community ties, and a history of good relations with the Aquatic Centre, both needed and deserved more swimming lanes and practice time. Our frustration in this regard continues to this day.



Ted Simpson receiving a medal from MP Svend Robinson, Gay Games '90



Ted with John Hallett

Crucial to the team's success during this period was the excellent volunteer coaching of Ted Simpson from 1988-1992. Ted had achieved almost celebrity status in Canadian swimming as a world class swimmer in the Pan Am and Commonwealth Games of the early '50s, as an Olympic Team coach in the late '70s, and later as coach of the Canadian Pacific Dolphins and Vancouver Pacemakers. Ted's coaching is remembered for his individualized workouts and emphasis on stroke correction, which is why BC

Masters stroke clinics we have hosted since his death in 1994 are named in his honour.

Since 1992, we have established ourselves as a main force in provincial Masters swimming, and in gay and lesbian aquatics internationally. In large part this is due to a committed membership, a dedicated and professional coaching staff, and the generous volunteer spirit of those who have held executive positions or contributed their time and effort in other ways.

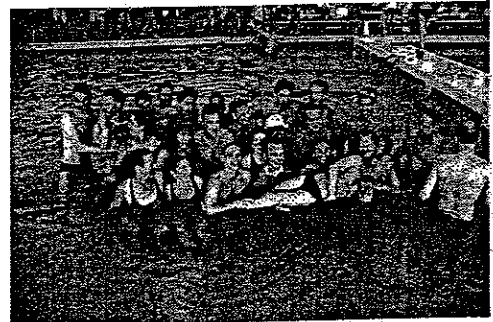


Just can't stop having fun! 1992

Some highlights from this period include:

- A standout of our annual participation in the Gay Pride Parade was winning the prize for Best Marching Unit in 1993, with our memorable undulating swimming pool float.
- We hosted the BC Provincials in April 1995, as well as numerous other sanctioned meets, and fun meets with Seattle Orcas (our 'sister' team) and other IGLA teams.

- EBSC members participated in Gay Games IV in New York (1994); Gay Games V in Amsterdam (1998); and IGLA meets Los Angeles (1991); Seattle (1992); Chicago (1993); Montreal (1995); San Diego (1997); Atlanta (1999).
- Awards banquets became a favourite fall season opener during this period, and have been held at The Sands on Davie, the Hotel Vancouver, and even on a schooner in 1992!
- Until recently, Annual General Meetings were held at the end of June, usually at the Aquatic Centre.
- We continued to donate money to various community groups and causes.
- Regular social events have included an annual Christmas Party, fall picnics, and monthly pizza nights on Thursdays or potlucks on Saturdays.
- Our longest serving coach during this period was Jeff Gerard, from 1994-98. Other coaches included David Yadlowski ('92-'93); Karen Mitchell ('93-'96); and Ron Kowal ('96-'98).
- A new logo, which featured a swimmer across a pink triangle was selected from entries by members in 1993.



Bathing beauties in Seattle, 1991



Into the New Millenium (1998-2002)

In recent years, we have continued to carry on many of the team's traditions while creating some new ones:

- In 1998, the club executive instituted a practice of interviewing all prospective coaches, and of having two coaches on deck whenever possible. The coaches also created a planning system for each part of the season, which incorporates workouts and key meets. In 2002, Nick Phillips took over head coaching duties from Jennifer Mederak, who coached from 1999-2001.
- Since the 1998-1999 season, we have hosted regular competitions, including sanctioned meets at the UBC pool: "2001: A Swim Odyssey" and the "2002 EBSC 20th Anniversary Swim Meet." Paul Carter custom designed a computer program to tabulate the entries and results.
- Saturday practices, first held in 1991, were revived in January 1999 and now alternate between VAC and Percy Norman Pool (our first venue outside the West End).
- In 1999, Tuesday and Thursday practices in July were added to the regular schedule, and will be extended to August in preparation for the Gay Games in Sydney in November 2002. Two-hour Thursday practices also are an option for swimmers preparing for competitions.
- A new team logo designed by Andrew Plewes won the approval of members at the 1999 AGM, and now appears on caps, t-shirts, bathing suits, letterhead and tattoos. Andrew also designed the commemorative t-shirt for EBSC's 20th Anniversary celebrations, which included a party and Gay Games fundraiser at Balthazar's in spring 2002.
- Throughout the 1999-2000 season a series of workshops were held by Jos Arpink which led to the adoption of a new mission statement and "Members Guide." Both can be found on our new our Web site (www.englishbay.org), also designed by Jos.
- At IGLA 2001 in Toronto, the 4 X 100m free relay of Mark Oldham, Gilles Beaudin, John Bell and Tom Kemple set a national record, adding to Mark's individual national records in the 50, 100, and 200m free.
- The problem of overcrowding at practices was finally solved in the Fall of 2001 when two one-hour practices on Tuesday and Thursday nights allowed us to accommodate as many as 65 swimmers per night. Nevertheless, in the past few years membership has grown to more than 130, which has forced us to create a waiting list for prospective members.
- Already in 2001-2002, participation in competitions is at an all-time high thanks to the relentless recruiting tactics of Gilles Beaudin. Our swimmers competed in over six local events, the annual Seattle meet (where a record-breaking 45 swimmers overwhelmed the host team), Nationals in Saskatoon and Gay Games in Sydney.
- The team proudly includes as many women on the team as it had in the early 90s, and more 'out' straight swimmers that at any time in its history. As our network of friends continues to grow, Sarah Marchildon has expanded the social calendar beyond the regular Thursday pizza nights and Saturday potlucks to include snowshoeing, movies, bowling and even bad karaoke...

As we dive into the next 20 years, our successes in and out of the pool will continue to make history.



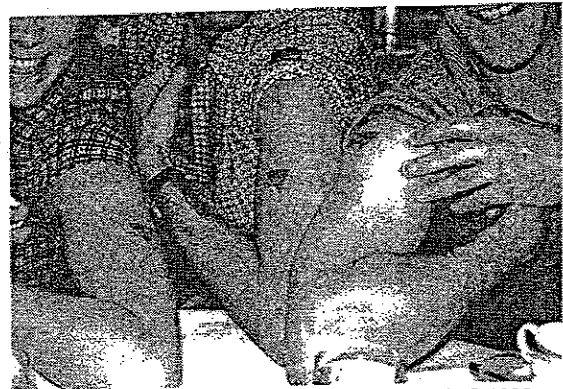
EBSC goes to Amsterdam, 1998



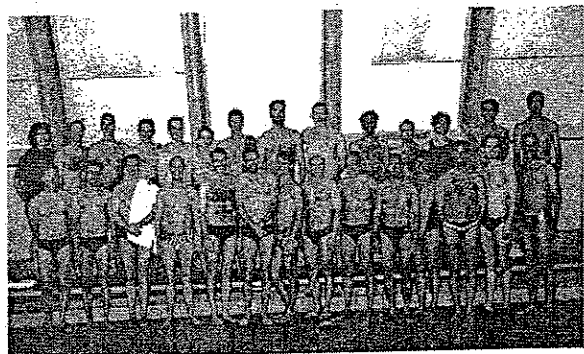
Swimmers brave *another* rainy Pride Parade, 1996



Kevin Simpson, Frank Morgan and Mark Oldham bring home gold from Amsterdam



Tattoo you! Anyone want to arm wrestle Jennifer? 1998



Team photo, 1998 - It kept growing and growing...



Yes, we do swim, too! Tom Kemple showing fine fly form, July '98



John Bell joins the Raging Grannies! Seattle 2000



I found this ice block in my sombrero! Pink Flamingo, Seattle '99



Just try to catch me! MO in '99