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## Swimmers of African Descent 1988-2004

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## **Swimmers of African Descent 1988-2004**

### **Abstract**

*This power point presentation is a discussion of the participation levels in competitive swimming organizations. The presenter will suggest that African American participation in competitive swimming is far more frequent than generally believed.*

### **Eric H. Shanks**

Aquatic Director, Campus Recreation, University of Nebraska at Omaha

### **Introduction**

Although no Swimmers of African Descent qualified for the Olympic Trials before 1964, their prominence on the international stage has steadily increased since Anthony Nesty won Olympic gold in 1988. By the year 2000 there were at least a half-dozen swimmers of African descent at the US Olympic Trials. Moreover, there are at least seventeen swimmers of African descent who have competed internationally since 1988.

The International swimming Hall of Fame has a list of 85 significant events in swimming history. Number three on the list reads: "An African slave, shipwrecked off Martinique in 1679, swims in a storm and finally reaches land after swimming for sixty hours." Number sixty-six on the list reads: "Anthony Nesty of Surinam becomes the first swimmer of African descent to win an Olympic Gold Medal when he wins the 100 meter butterfly at the 1988 Seoul Olympics." On August 25, 2005 twenty-seven year old Zambian Masters Swimmer, Victor Malwa entered the Guinness Book or World Records when he became the first sub-Saharan African to swim the English Channel.

### **Evidence of the Participation of Swimmers of African Descent**

USA Swimming compiles annual statistics of its national membership. The NCAA offers a comprehensive report of athlete ethnicity. The YMCA of the USA National Swimming and Diving Advisory Committee offers a web site containing web links to nearly 250 YMCA Swim Teams. The American Red Cross routinely compiles ethnicity data from (non-competitive) program enrollees and instructors.

### **Manually Counting Swimmers**

The YMCA of the USA National Swimming and Diving Advisory Council provides links to 249 YMCA Swim Team web sites representing 34 states. YMCA youth swim teams appear to range from about 25 swimmers to 120 swimmers. When blacks did appear in team photos<sup>1</sup> there were usually two or more per team. Photographs reveal a likely overall participation of African Americans to be about 1.8 percent<sup>2</sup>. In all but one case, a team photograph of fifty or more swimmers reveals the participation of at least one black child.

### **Comparing Participation Rates**

USA Swimming clubs, NCAA Athletes and YMCA clubs -Statistics obtained from the NCAA<sup>3</sup> and USA Swimming<sup>4</sup> show that when compared to White participation, the participation rates of African American competitive swimmers nearly doubles at the

collegiate level. USA Swimming reports that 2004 participation rates of African American members represented a fraction of total membership. For example, in 2004 African American 'year-round' USA Swimming members were .5 percent of 1,155 females, and .4 percent of 870 males. In contrast, NCAA "Ethnicity Percentages" from 1999-2004 revealed that percentages of male and female African American swimmers increased from 1.4 and .9 to 1.5 and 1.2 respectively.

#### **Collegiate females are more likely to swim than men -**

Collegiate females of all races appear to be more likely to swim than men. For example, in 2004 the number of White non-Hispanic females in all NCAA sports was 82% of White non-Hispanic men. However, White non-Hispanic females are 1/3 more likely to swim than White non-Hispanic men. In 2002 there were 112 Black non-Hispanic men and 113 Black non-Hispanic females<sup>5</sup>. Since 2002 Black non-Hispanic female swimmers have shown an increase where the men have not. This may be the result of Title IX increases in athletic opportunities for females. If Title IX is the cause of increased participation, one could conclude that the rate of participation in swimming increases with opportunity, especially in the case of females.

#### **As overall participation increases, more females will swim -**

The increase of African American collegiate athletes both male and female from 1999-2004 was about 3,000 athletes for each gender.<sup>6</sup> That is significant since there are roughly half the number of Black non-Hispanic females than Black non-Hispanic men. Although the overall percentages of Black non-Hispanic collegiate females have increased only 1.2 %, while there is an increase for the same period of 1.8% for men, by 2004, 127 Black non-Hispanic females swam compared to 110 Black non-Hispanic males.

#### **Participation rates of Black non-Hispanic males in swimming is stable -**

Between 1999 and 2002 Black/non-Hispanic female participation in swimming rose steadily. In 2002 Black non-Hispanic males made up approximately 1.6% of all male collegiate athletes and increased to 1.8 by 2004. From 1999 to 2004 overall participation of Black non-Hispanic males, when compared to White non-Hispanic males shows that neither Black or White non-Hispanic swimmers have increased in participation in swimming.<sup>7</sup>

#### **Conclusions**

USA Swimming participation rates of African Americans from 2004 and recent NCAA Ethnicity statistics may indicate that increases in black female swimming participation will outpace increases of black male participation. African American participation in YMCA swim team photographs suggests that African Americans may be more likely to swim competitively at the YMCA than on a USA Swim club. Finally, African American men and women will participate at higher percentages as collegians.

1 A non scientific estimate of African American swimmers on YMCA swim teams was made by manually counting swimmers appearing in fifty team photographs

2 Estimated from 50 photographs of 249 teams.

3 NCAA "Ethnicity Report" 2003-2004

4 USA Swimming “Member Statistics Report 2004”.

5 NCAA “Ethnicity Report” 1999-2002

6 NCAA “Ethnicity Report” 1999-2004

7 NCAA “Ethnicity Report” 1999-2004 Black non-Hispanic participation has remained at about 1/3 the participation of White non-Hispanic males.

**Presenter**

Eric Shanks is the Aquatic Director at the University of Nebraska, Omaha. He supervises a staff of 20 student workers, Physical Therapists and coaches at the Campus Recreation Aquatic Center. He is also head coach for Mav-Rec Masters Swim Program and the Assistant Swim Coach for Lincoln High School. In 1999 Eric coached Manhattan Island Marathon Swimmer, Mark Lohnes and in 2000 he was one of three coaches selected to coach US swimmers at the FINA Masters World Championships in Munich, Germany. Eric is also an accomplished athlete. He has competed in National Championships in swimming, cycling and triathlon. He has also competed in the Tampa Bay Marathon Swim and the Annual Swim Around Key West, Florida.