

Sheila Mortell Stolarski



When the Norwalk High School girls swim program became an FCIAC and state power in the 1970s, **SHEILA MORTELL** was one of the major reasons why.

The four-year record-breaking swimmer carved out a highly decorated All-American career at NHS, displaying her talent right from the beginning. A product of the Norwalk YMCA swim program in her early years, Sheila was only a freshman in the fall of 1976 when she helped spark the Lady Bears to their first—and still only—FCIAC championship in girls swimming. A year later, as a sophomore, she was front and center of another title run as the Norwalkers captured their first state championship in program history.

Mortell was at her best in the biggest meets. At her very first FCIAC Championships, the freshman won two individual events and set new conference records in both, while adding another first-place finish as the anchor on the Bears' medley relay team which also set a new FCIAC record. Two weeks later, Sheila added three more first-place medals at the Class LL state championships, and a week after that she claimed the State Open title in the 200 IM.

Her sophomore season was more of the same, repeating as a double winner at the Class LL state meet while breaking her own state record in the IM as NHS celebrated its first state crown. As a junior, Sheila broke her own state record in the 100 freestyle at the LL trials and was part of the medley relay team—along with sisters Kate and Margaret—that also set a new state record. That same relay team broke the state mark again at the Class LL finals and then again when it won the State Open title.

Sheila capped off her outstanding scholastic career as a senior with another double victory at the FCIACs, setting a new record in the 50 free while just missing the record in the 100 backstroke in her final conference meet. Between the FCIAC, Class LL, and State Open meets, Sheila finished her high school career with more than three dozen medals, many of them for first-place finishes.

That outstanding career at Norwalk High earned Mortell a full scholarship to the University of Arizona, where she earned All-America honors and served as captain of the Wildcats her senior year. Her competitive swimming days were far from over, however, as Sheila soon became a regular at U.S. Masters Swimming meets where—not surprisingly—she continued to enjoy success at every age level.

In fact, in the summer of 2011, she won five gold medals in the 45-49 age group at the Y National Championships while setting a new national record in the 100 meter backstroke. She also ranked as high as third nationally and fourth in the world in both the 100 and 200 back in her age group.

Now 62, Sheila continues to excel in the pool and just this past May she captured six gold

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medals—four individual events and two relays—in the 60-64 age division at the Y Nationals in Fort Lauderdale. What's more, her time in the 50 backstroke ranked No. 1 among the all-time top 10 times in her age group while she was No. 2 all-time in two other events and among the top-10 in her other three events. Since 1988, her times in U.S. Masters Swimming meets have consistently landed in the top-10 all-time in the age division she competed in.

Sheila still trains three times a week and when not competing she manages to find the time to teach swimming. Of course, her love for the sport is certainly no surprise. Her mother, the late Marie Corridon Mortell of Norwalk, won the Olympic gold medal in swimming at the 1948 Summer Games in London. She was honored by the *Norwalk Old Timers* in 1996 and now, 28 years later, is joined by her daughter. ■