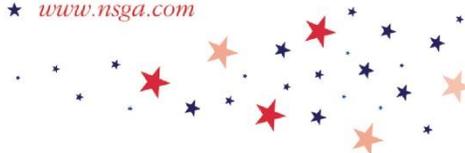




National Senior Games Association

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Personal Best "Class of 2013" Athlete

DeEtte Sauer, 71

Houston, Texas

"I'm stunned I can actually do this"

As she will readily admit, at one time DeEtte Sauer was a mess. The supermom and super-motivated businesswoman had let herself go with decades of inactivity and she became morbidly obese. Her doctors said she was certain to have a heart event within five years.

With one decision and the resolution to change, DeEtte transformed herself and eventually found her second home in the swimming pool at age 58. And no one is more surprised than her to find there had been a competitive swimmer hiding inside. But winning meets is second place to the quality of life she has gained. Read on to hear her "fat to fast" story.



History

Have you always been active in fitness and sports?

No. I was athletic in the neighborhood when I was young but I did nothing as an adult for over 25 years and gained a lot of weight. It's probably the thing that I'm most ashamed of in my life.

October 10, 1986 was the day I turned my life around. Our family was on vacation at a lake resort and I was so obese that I could not maneuver myself into a boat. I had gotten morbidly obese partially because I had quit drinking and smoking and just started eating my way into oblivion. So when I couldn't get into that boat I just told myself 'that's it, I'm not going to live this way anymore.'

Being from Louisiana I loved cooking, it was second nature to me. But the foods I ate growing up were extremely unhealthy. But I learned to adapt my favorite recipes into healthier versions and it has affected my whole family in a positive way. My husband is very healthy and my daughters now cook healthy foods for their families.

How did you go from doing nothing to becoming a medal-winning swimmer?

First was taking off over 100 pounds. I knew I had to be active and regularly walked around the neighborhood. Then I started going to the gym.

Everything I'm doing I owe to one young coach named Stacy Van Horn who worked with me at the beginning. I just showed up one day, I was just kind of bored of regular gym stuff and decided to try swimming with the swim team. I couldn't even get across the pool that first time and wanted to quit.

She said 'No you're not, I'm going to teach you and you're going to do this.' This little 23 year old pipsqueak read me the riot act. Any time I gave her any lip or whined and complained she told me to shut up and keep going. She never let me stop. When I found I was good at it, I started going to masters swimming events and the senior games.



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How do you view the success you've had in competition?

Every medal has been very valuable to me because I'm still stunned that I can actually do this. I've never gotten used to the fact that I've become an athlete in my senior years. I've always admired athletes, and to now be one is just a hoot! I've never gotten over it...and I hope I never will.

Winning the medals in Houston in 2011 on my home turf was the most exciting. The pressure was huge because so many of the people I know were aware of it. It was very "in your face" with the fear that I might not medal and embarrass myself in front of the home crowd.

I've won gold in other competitions but it's been elusive at the National Senior Games. That's a bit of extra motivation for me going into Cleveland this year.

What are you looking forward to about attending the National Senior Games in Cleveland?

I love reconnecting with people that have become friends and I haven't seen since the last games. I love the excitement that's created around the National Senior Games. We've never been to one where we haven't had a really good time. And every time I think it's going to be my year to win a gold medal. So far it hasn't been but I'll never stop trying.

Motivation & Inspiration

Is competition your main motivation for participating in Senior Games activities?

If I didn't compete, I would still work out. However, it's the competition that keeps me challenged and motivated and trying to continually upgrade my workouts.

What else motivates you or rewards you from your activity?

I love being strong. I'll tell you something that was very emotional that motivated me. After 9/11 I was in Lubbock for the Texas Senior Games. It was my 60th birthday. They had shut down all the planes so I had to rent a car to drive home to Houston. The whole way I listened to all the reports of the catastrophe and all the people who were lost. There were so many first responders who lost their lives going back in to bring out people, many who were obese, disabled or old. I made this little vow to myself that I was going to get strong enough to where I could be one of those going in to pull people out and that nobody would ever have to go back for me.

Who inspires you to be your personal best?

There are so many inspirational stories, but I'm amazed at the blind swimmers I've met at Senior Games. There also was a guy at the 1999 games in Virginia who swam the 100 butterfly. His wife would tap him with a stick to let him know when he was approaching the end. And he won a medal. Can you imagine going full speed into a concrete wall blind?

Who else have you inspired by your example maintaining a healthy active lifestyle?

I'm the oldest in my swim club by many years. They look at me and say 'If she can do it, I can do it.' That's what I like. It was demonstrated to me, and now it's my turn.



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Training & Preparation for Competition



How do you adjust your routine for competition?

As I get closer to a competition I'll start working out six days a week. However, two weeks before the competition I taper off because that much swimming keeps me in shape but I'm also pretty sore and tired. So I rest up a bit to get ready for the event.

What obstacles, if any, do you have in your training plan?

I have arthritis in my shoulders, elbows and lower back. That's why the butterfly events are the most challenging for me. But I'm going to keep doing it as long as I possibly can.

Does your husband get involved too?

My husband is 80 years old and is as healthy as he can be. He does not compete but works out regularly and on other days he walks in the neighborhood. He says he would rather be my handler. (laughs) He travels with me to all of my meets and usually volunteers to help out.

Fitness and Nutrition

Do you train in your sport year round or only to prepare for competitions?

I do train on a year-round basis. I normally work out four days a week swimming 3,000 to 3,500 yards per session. I work out with a swim team and a coach at Memorial Athletic Club in Houston called the M.A.C Masters. I'm the oldest member by far.

How do you approach nutrition?

First of all, we don't eat out except on special occasions. I cook a good healthy meal from scratch every night. We eat mostly fish and also chicken, but no longer eat red meat. And nothing white – no white flour, rice, bread. I only cook with healthy, fresh super foods that are packed with nutrients.



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How else has becoming fit improved your life?

I'll tell you, the strength that I'm gained through my exercise, workouts and completion has helped me participate in the lives of young people. I mentor at the local high school, my husband and I tutor at an afterschool program at a little Hispanic church, and we also sometimes work with middle schoolers. I also teach mothers nutrition and how to cook healthy once a week at a program called Motherwise. I make myself available for speaking engagements and always advocate Senior Games to people.

We also love to go to the big water parks with the grandkids. My husband and I always find the biggest water slide, sometimes we have to climb six stories and we'll do it a hundred times in a day. We never see any other grandparents up there. We're just so grateful we can still do that.

Do you surprise your doctor(s) with your level of fitness for your age?

Oh yes. In the late 90's I went to the Cooper Clinic in Dallas for a workup and they told me I had so much plaque in my arteries due to my previous lifestyle that I would probably have a heart event within five years. That's at the time I started swimming. Then, in 2009 I went to the University of Texas Health Science Center and had another workup with

Dr. Lance Gould, who is a renowned physician. He told me my heart was 100 percent okay. I asked him when I needed to come back again and he said 'Never, as long as you continue to exercise and eat the way you do I never need to see you again.' I was stunned. Swimming literally saved my life.

My doctor is also surprised about my arthritis. He says my spine is so messed up that I shouldn't be walking upright. The swimming had strengthened my core that it supports my spine. So I keep going.

You're gonna hurt, it's a part of life. But I'd rather hurt from sports injuries than being hurt from doing nothing.

What do you say to people you see are not taking care of themselves?

I used to not be as vocal as I've become because I've seen so many friends struggle and die young from heart disease. I know that I can't make it happen for them and I hesitate to get in their face, but if I'm ever asked or see an open door for my opinion I certainly make it known. My speaking engagements allow me to tell my story and show people how they can overcome the things that happen with aging and to make their Golden Years really golden. I'm 72 and my life is full of fun and excitement. I want them to have that too.

I often tell people that aging is fun if you're healthy and fit...but it's NOT fun if you're not. Every day there's a new problem and life becomes a challenge. I see so many of my friends suffering badly. Even though I stay healthy and watch what I eat I'm still going to have problems – you can't escape it. But I have so much more strength to deal with them today than if I had not taken care of myself.

Epilogue

*DeEtte has had a busy year. Her Personal Best exposure has resulted in numerous print and broadcast interviews, and this was further amplified when she was selected to be one of **Humana's Game Changers** as part of a national well being media campaign conducted by our champion sponsor. We are all grateful to*

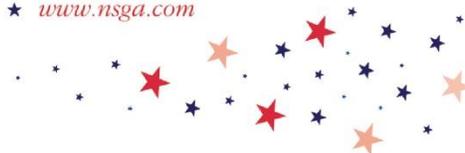
DeEtte for being such an eloquent and passionate spokesperson for the Senior Games Movement. In DeEtte's words:



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I didn't get my Gold, but I was fortunate to win Silver in the 50 fly and 500 free, Bronze in the 100 fly and 200 IM, and I finished 4th in 100 IM. I am so grateful for these awards. It was the toughest competition ever. I have great respect for the women I swam against.



(Photo by Claire Eggers/ Brooks Institute © 2013)

I was really humbled by the company I was in. It is so true that there were almost 11,000 athletes and 11,000 stories there...each more inspirational than the last. The whole week was very emotional. I am in awe of my fellow athletes. Great company!!!

You made me famous among my peers. It was crazy!!! When I walked into the swim center on Tuesday everyone knew who I was. They had either seen the article in Swimmer magazine or my picture plastered all over the program. George and I laughed and laughed. It was just comical. You made me famous for being "fat to fast". Wow!!!

Thanks again for one of the best weeks of my life.

Swimmingly yours, D

[Continue Reading about DeEtte Sauer](#)

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