

Steve Lundquist

Swimming

by Carolyn Farb

At 17, statuesque Steve Lundquist became the first swimmer in history to do the 200-yard breaststroke in under two minutes. Today, the 22-year-old Georgian holds two world records—for the 100-meter breaststroke and as part of the 4 x 100-meter relay—and trains five hours a day for his second shot at the gold this year in Los Angeles (Lundquist was scheduled to go to Moscow in 1980 before the games were cancelled). In 1982, he won six national and world titles and was chosen Swimmer of the Year by "Life" magazine. Personable and eager to please, Lundquist is a sports promoter's dream of brawn with an eye for business, and when his Speedos are drying, this BMOC is a real estate major at Southern Methodist University, where the coeds call him "Lunk."

Carolyn Farb met with Lundquist over strawberries and champagne in her suite at Dallas' posh Mansion on Turtle Creek and found this Southern gentleman just as smooth on dry land as he is in water.

STEVE LUNDQUIST: I started out when I was eight years old. My parents threw me in the water. I've lived near a lake all my life in Georgia and I joined a club program in Forest Park, Georgia and came up through the ranks. Then my dad and Governor Al Tallman built a pool for the community and we had a pretty good team. We ventured out from there and I ended up at S.M.U.—I had gotten my scholarship from S.M.U. simply because people did have the foresight and the plan to afford the training for that kind of thing. I'm very grateful to my dad and Mr. Tallman and all the other people along the way who have helped.

CAROLYN FARB: You've been described by your assistant coach, Eddie Sennett, as the "premier swimmer in America today." Do you feel like you have any competition?

SL: I wish I were as optimistic as you. Gosh, yes. There's more competition than I would like to fathom—especially in the United States. If you're from the United States and you do well in the Olympic trials, you stand a very good chance at placing in the top six in the world. It's pretty tough in the States.

CF: Are you excited about the upcoming Olympics? How important is winning four or five gold medals to you?

SL: Again, you're optimistic. Four or five medals would be great, but I don't know if I'm capable of achieving that. I will certainly set my efforts and my goals toward that but, obviously, it takes a lot of hard training and a lot of hard work and I've just got to be prepared to do what it takes to stand on the awards platform.

CF: What about Victor Davis holding that 200-meter breaststroke world record? Do you feel you can take that record away from him—is that one of your goals?

SL: Any time I get in a pool I want to set a world record. I'm not out there for second place. There's an old saying—first is first, second is last. I try to uphold that even though second place is a good consolation and third place is good. It depends on how your race went and that kind of thing but you find that everybody is out there, essentially, for number one and that's all there is to it. If you're out there just to get second place, I don't know if you should be in the pool.

CF: Do you really like to compete?

SL: A lot of people ask what I think about five hours a day when I'm staring at the

bottom of a pool. That's the last thing I'm thinking about. The first thing I'm thinking about is the competition or my stroke or my technique or race pace or this or that. There are so many variables to think about that it's hard to get bored. I think sometimes that that separates the good from the bad. Those guys who don't concentrate on the detail... The little things count, believe me.

CF: That has been said to be one of your strengths. You concentrate on detail and perfection.

SL: You have to. I'm not the best yet, but I think that's what the best do and I would certainly like to model myself after them.

CF: You had a little water skiing accident. You were skiing barefoot.

SL: No, actually I was falling. I was better at falling that day than I was at skiing. I was on my way to go barefoot and I hit a few waves I really wasn't supposed to.

CF: When you train, what do you do?

SL: We use weights two or three times a week for about an hour and a half to try to gain strength. The difference in the program I've been in for the past year, as opposed to some of the people on the S.M.U. squad, is that I'm just gaining strength. I'm not in it to do a circuit—circuit training is where you go through 30 or 40 stations and you just get so tired you can't move by the end. I believe you get just as tired lifting hard weights and lifting heavier weights. You're in there to get stronger, not to build endurance. You're going to get endurance in the pool and that's where I've gone away from the S.M.U. tradition. I'm not saying their program is bad or anything, I'm just saying that this is what I've found best for me and hopefully, I know my body well enough to know what it needs. Take a typical day—we'll go in the morning and I'll be up at 6:45 and be through swimming around 8:15. Then I go to school after I eat breakfast. I have a nine o'clock class and I'm usually out by 12:00. Then, I eat for about half an hour and have from 12:30 till 3:00 off—that's what you get all day. That's your "free time." Usually a lot of people choose to sleep during that time but I find if I sleep during that time, I won't sleep at night. I don't sleep at night anyway. Then I'm back at school at 3:15 and out at 6:15. You go straight to dinner because that closes at 6:30 and you're through eating at 7:00 so you've got from 7:00 until the next day to prepare for practice and for school and get good grades.

CF: Do you find that the discipline you have from swimming sort of reinforces the school discipline?

SL: Sometimes it does and sometimes it doesn't. I had a 3.8 last semester so it helped me then, but this semester we'll see. I've found, maybe not in school, but in the job market, the job aspect of it—it's another goal. My goal now is as much school as it is a job, and I think I'm slowly redirecting my goals from all swimming and some school, to all job. So I'm going to be able to focus all my attention into a job.

CF: I've heard that you're very well-rounded and entrepreneurial. Have you had any successful inventions?

SL: I'm working on a company right now, trying to start—but I don't want to go any further into that. I like to invent little stuff and all that. They usually get shot down before they get to the drawing board. I have a lot of ideas but they take so much

money and research that I couldn't begin to get the venture capital for it, so I don't even begin to worry about it.

CF: Are your parents very supportive?

SL: Yes. I give speeches every now and then to kids and parents and I'll say that if it weren't for their parents, those kids wouldn't be there. Your parents might not totally agree with everything you do, but they're taking you to workout and they're paying the bill—they're behind you. Sometimes you find parents who are too pushy. It's a very fine line between being too pushy and pushing you just enough. I think parents are a very good force for a lot of top athletes from what I've read and heard.

CF: Are swimmers sort of an inbred group?

SL: Well, the S.M.U. team is close. I never really hung out with swimmers back when I was in high school much. But now, in college, it's like a big family simply because we spend so much time together.

CF: Do men and women swim together?

SL: No. They do in meets sometimes, but not in practice—not at S.M.U. In some other programs they do. In U.S.S.—United States Swimming—they do. Our team does in the summer, but in the winter we're directed towards the N.C.T.A. and that's a guy thing. You get the team together and it's a giant bond and a giant mold that you have to fit the team into to come out with an end product that says "number one" on it and that's what we try to stress.

CF: It used to be said that women swimmers are over the hill at 16 and men at 21.

SL: There's a totally different "market." If you're in it for recreation, there is no peak—you're just doing it for fun. If you're talking about finely tuned athletes, it's like a finely tuned car. Say your car is best at 30,000 miles, not 150,000 miles. It's the same with an athlete who is finely tuned. He has to be—he or she—has to be there and has to hit his or her peak. I think the peak is stretching out a bit. Women used to peak at 16, and all that simply because there weren't college scholarships. Now there are college scholarships and it's helped the women's athletic movement. It's kept them in the sport longer which is great. Guys used to peak at 21 or 22, but we had a guy on our team at the Olympic trials in 1980 who was 25 and scored the highest he ever scored at the Olympic trials. I've gotten better with age. Let's hope there isn't a peak too soon.

CF: The shave is fascinating to me. It's something of a ritual in swimming. Do you feel that it's valid or psychological?

SL: It's very valid. Often you have a football team or something and they'll shave their heads for the state high school thing and really go wild. They do that for the psych and they have caps.

CF: Is it a special feeling?

SL: I'm getting to that. They have caps so you don't need to shave your head. But the rest of the body—you're not only shaving your hair off, you're shaving off a dead layer of skin. So what happens is when you jump into that water—a lot of people use sandpaper on their hands too—all you're trying to do is get a better feeling in the water and when you hit that water you feel as if you're glass. It feels like you're a piece of ice moving on another piece of ice. That's how good it feels. It's like putting on a racing suit versus a pair of shorts with big pockets. That's the difference. It's

not as noticeable as that, but I guarantee you that it is to a swimmer who is in finely tuned shape. Psychologically, it can't help but help you—you're feeling your stroke for the first time in a half a year to a year. You only shave twice a year.

CF: Before a big meet?

SL: It depends. I'll shave for the U.S. Nationals....

CF: You don't shave your head?

SL: No, I did that once. I had to sneak up on a glass of water—it was ridiculous. Once was enough for me. We found that it's a good feeling though. Because you're more sensitive to the water, because you only do it two times a year, that's going to help you psychologically. We have what they called shaved and unshaved time. Back when I was 12 or 13 years old I'd look at college sheets and it would say, "shaved time" or "unshaved time" and I'd say, "What's the difference—it's just psychological." Then I started doing it and—wow!

CF: When you made the Olympic team in 1980, and you did not go to Moscow, was this frustrating for you?

SL: I can't really explain it except that it's something you tried for all your life and then the rug gets pulled out from under your feet right as you get there. I was upset when it first happened, but then I considered what commitments I had to it. I had all my life committed to it but, fortunately, I was still in college, and my college was covered by a scholarship—and that was a reason to keep swimming. Other than that, I had no reason to keep swimming. A lot of athletes had either dropped out of college or quit jobs or something like that and then no Olympics—think of what that did to them. Breaking up households and that type of thing because you're so concentrated and focused and they give all that up for the Olympics and then it doesn't happen. I don't think it's for the press or anything else. People do it just to be the best in the world for that given day. I don't think you can replace that with money or anything. You don't see people up on the awards platform crying because they're going to make a heck of a lot of money through endorsements or something. You see it because it's a great feeling.

CF: Do you think you live dangerously?

SL: It's been said.

CF: You like motorcycles.

SL: I like motorcycles, skiing, I like to drive fast cars. If I had a fast car, I'd drive it. *Carpe diem*—it's a Latin phrase meaning "seize the moment," and that's kind of what I believe in.

CF: Does your philosophy of life revolve around swimming?

SL: No. Not at all. Unlike a lot of swimmers, unlike a lot of athletes, I try not to hide under my guise as "the swimmer." I like to get out and do my own thing and have a good time and think about swimming last. That's been my problem. It's caused me a few problems with coaching and all that. It's like saying I'm not serious enough, but that breaks the stress and strain. I need a release and that's it. My release is going out and getting crazy.

CF: How do you feel about being considered the All-American Boy?

SL: I've never heard that. That surprises me. I like kids and I love people, but in anything else I don't think I'm the All-American Boy. I love to go out and have fun—I guess that's what America is all about. □

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