



It's Not All About Winning

Janet Evans competes in the women's 800-meter freestyle final at the 1996 Summer Olympics in Atlanta, Georgia.

Olympic star Janet Evans acquired more than medals during her competitive career.

With five Olympic medals in her trophy case, American swimmer Janet Evans had a terrific career. At only 17, she won three gold medals in the 1988 Olympics in Seoul, South Korea, then another gold and a silver in 1992 in Barcelona, Spain.

"When I started swimming competitively, I wasn't as tall as most of the other kids, so people were always telling me I was too

little to be a really competitive swimmer," says Evans. "In my mind, that didn't make any sense. I knew I had the capabilities, I had the desire, and I just thought I could make it happen."

That mindset was with her at her first two Olympics. "I thought that if I didn't go to the Olympics to win, then I was a failure. I never stopped and said, 'Gosh, I'm really honored just to represent my country at the Olympics,'" she says. She was disillusioned

with her silver medal in 1992. "At that time, I thought the Olympics was all about winning."

When it came to 1996, with the Games scheduled in Atlanta, Georgia, Evans says she was looking at the only chance of her Olympic career to swim for her country, in her country. "I was 24, and at the time that was considered aging in swimming.... Just making the Olympic squad was a greater challenge for me than it had been in the



Janet Evans waves to the crowd after winning the 800-meter freestyle swimming competition in the 1992 Barcelona Olympics in Spain.

past,” she says.

Her coach and her parents said to her, “You need to swim in Atlanta not to win. You need to swim in Atlanta to experience the Olympics, to compete in your home country, to realize that life isn’t just about winning.” But Evans went to Atlanta wanting to win. “Who doesn’t want to win? But I’d put a lot of miles on my shoulders by then. I just didn’t have it when I got there, for a variety of reasons,” she says.

“In Atlanta, I really learned it was okay not to win. It was okay to represent my country, do my best, and be satisfied with the results. And I was.” Though she did not win any medals, her participation in

the Games in Atlanta was her third consecutive Olympics—a rare feat in swimming.

Evans recently talked about her struggles, new developments in swimming, and life after the Olympics in a USINFO Webchat.

I’d like to know how you came to be a swimmer. What influenced you?

I became a swimmer because my parents don’t know how to swim. When they moved to California we had a pool in our backyard, so they decided that my two older brothers and I needed to be pool-safe. I was put into swimming lessons when I was about 14 months old and could

swim all four strokes by the time I was three. My mom still doesn’t know how to swim, so we spend a lot of time teasing her that she can’t swim and her daughter is an Olympic champion!

My greatest influence was my parents. They supported me in my dreams but never made me feel that swimming was something I had to do. They took my swimming seriously, but not too seriously, which gave me a great perspective. If I fell short of my goals, they encouraged me to keep trying but not to be too disappointed. After all, swimming is just a sport!

What is your advice for girls in sports?

I think that competing in sports as a girl

For more information:

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LZR Racer

<http://speedo80.com/lzr-racer/features/>

is incredibly beneficial. As a young girl, I learned that I could compete with the boys and do anything I set my mind to. Athletics gave me determination and confidence, and taught me how to set goals.

Even if I hadn't competed at the Olympic level, I believe that competing in sports taught me skills that I need to be successful in everyday life. I encourage every young woman to participate in sports.

So, what do you think about the new swimsuit technology? Are the new materials good for the sport?

I think the new suits are an interesting development in our sport. The athletes that compete in them talk about how fast they feel and how the suits make them feel buoyant. While some complain that this might not be the best thing for our sport...they think that suits should just be plain old suits...I feel that it is simply a technological advancement. By the next Olympics in London, there will be another suit that is better and faster!

A lot of people don't know this, but when [nine-time Olympic gold medalist] Mark Spitz competed, they had not yet invented a low profile goggle. So Mark could only train for two or three hours a day without goggles. When goggles were "invented," swimmers could train longer hours, and all of Mark's records were broken. So, once again, it was simply a technological advancement in our sport. It's not always fun for the athletes whose records are broken because of these advancements, but it's just the nature of sport....

What have you done since your last Olympics? Do you still swim in competitions?

Since the completion of my swimming career, I have been very blessed in that I am still able to be involved in the Olympic movement. For years, I have worked for Olympic sponsors and traveled the world giving motivational speeches about what the Olympics means to me. I am also the chairman of the Athlete's Committee for

FINA (Fédération Internationale de Natation, the governing body of worldwide swimming).

I don't swim in competitions anymore, but I am still able to be a part of the swimming community. I like to say that I have the best of everything...I still get to be around the sport, but I don't have to swim 19 kilometers a day to get ready for the next swim meet!

As an Olympic medalist are you asked to give motivational talks? Where and on what subjects?

Yes, I actually spend a lot of time giving motivational talks. My favorite group to give talks to is young people. I also do a lot of speeches for corporations, particu-

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larly companies that sponsor the Olympic movement. The reason that I love giving motivational speeches is because I love to share with others what the Olympics mean to me.

A lot of us feel that the Olympics are for winning gold medals and for standing on that victory platform listening to your national anthem. While that is an amazing experience, the real point of the Olympics is for athletes from all over the world to come together in the name of sports and to compete fairly and to the best of their ability. I believe that there is often too much importance placed on winning at the Olympics. As an athlete, the most important thing to do at the Games is to compete at your very best.

What advice do you have for aspiring swimmers?

Swimming can be a very tough sport.

You are out there in a cold pool, swimming all by yourself, while staring at the black line on the bottom. On the flip side, it is an incredible sport for your body and can be very relaxing. For an aspiring young swimmer, I think it is important to have fun!

I view workouts as a chance to get better and, competitions, as a chance to be your very best, both mentally and physically. Swimming has so many great benefits. Enjoy the entire process...from those early morning workouts to the competitions. If you stick with it, you will learn lessons that last a lifetime *and* you will have a lot of fun along the way!

Has the sport of swimming changed since you started?

Yes, in so many ways! Where do I begin? First of all, there are the swimsuits. As I previously mentioned, there are technological advancements occurring all the time. From the introduction of lane lines to swim goggles to [Speedo's] new LZR Racer swimsuit, there have always been opportunities to improve your speed in the water.

I also see a lot of differences in the popularity of my sport. With the Internet, swimming fans can have access to our sport 24/7, which is great for us! Our fan base has grown because swimmers are able to share our amazing sport with growing audiences from around the world on a daily basis.

What have you learned from other cultures at the Olympics?

I think that the best part of competing at the Olympics is making friends from all over the world. It is amazing to go to the Games and learn about another athlete's country and culture. After all, you live with 10,000 athletes in the Olympic village, so you are bound to have lunch or dinner in the cafeteria next to someone from another country!

Another amazing experience that comes with competing at the international level is being able to travel the world. The first time I left the United States, I was 14 and traveled to Moscow for a competition. It was quite an experience for me, but it opened my eyes to other cultures and traditions.



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