

From Splash Magazine

USA Swimming/Coaching Legends

Peter Daland

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Coins. He was counting coins. Because he collects them. Because Peter Daland has time. But just a little.

“I have one message for those nearing retirement,” Daland said, “and it is this: if you wish to have happy retirement years, you need to line up projects, things to do that you were never able to accomplish during your full-time working years.”

He’s working on three books, coaching a master’s team and serving on several swimming boards, most notably as chairman of the FINA Coaches Commission.

“Only about a third of the way done with the first book,” Daland said. “I just don’t know how much I’ll be able to finish.”

For retirement, it sounds an awful lot like a full-time job – or two.

His coaching resume is a book in itself and includes Olympic chapters (head women’s Olympic coach in 1964, head men’s Olympic coach in 1972) and a stellar college coaching career that included a long reign – and loads of success – at the University of Southern California.

“I don’t really think about that – I only look forward,” Daland said. “I just try to get through my immediate and long-term projects. Oh yes, I’m also the swimming chairman for the World University Games, which means an overseas trip each year. But, you know...”

You know...it sounds an awful lot like Daland hasn’t retired at all. But on this day, he is counting, listing and cataloging his German coins, a part of a huge collection that Daland began assembling at age 9. He has, as mentioned, lots of other things to do.

Like his cache of coins, those others things are almost too numerous count. But the man who bottled intensity and determination throughout his career has simply tapped the reserve flow. And this is really cranking it down for Daland, compared to his illustrious coaching career.

Hard to believe that a man who accomplished it all in the swimming world can't – or won't – pick out a favorite memory.

“I never looked at it like, ‘These are all the great things I’ve done,’” Daland said. “What you do remember are the grievous losses. That keeps you from thinking too much about the past, because you remember the ones that got away in recruiting. Or ones who didn't make it onto the Olympic team when they should have. Or the team that lost the NCAA Championship when it should have won. Or the bad training you gave to someone that led to a bad result. Or someone who drank themselves into a bad swimmer.

“The dissatisfaction from those things fade as things go on, and you get more involved in the present,” Daland said.

As a coach, he remembers the Olympics – but not, ironically, from a coaching perspective.

“I rather disliked that position, because it's not fun being the head Olympic coach,” Daland said. “It's a job. “You're glad you did it when it was over, but when it was going on it wasn't fun. I've never met an Olympic coach who said, ‘Hey, this was great.’ You don't feel that way about it. It's an honor, of course. And something you like to have done.”

What he still likes to do is coach. He was enlisted by a higher power – his wife – to coach the masters team at the swimming club she runs.

“First of all, I like to win,” Daland says. “That's important to me. A lot of people say, ‘When you're 80 years old, that's ridiculous. You should be relaxing. That's why I enjoy masters, to some degree, to give into my competitive feelings.”

The man who put in 35 years as USC's head coach, won eight NCAA titles, and 14 AAU Men's titles – the only man ever to win all three major national team championships (NCAA, AAU Men's, AAU Women's) says he is slowing down. But it's just hard to believe that. He says some memories fade on occasion.

What hasn't faded are the ingredients to build a good swimmer.

“The first thing is, you have to have the right kids who want to work hard and have character,” Daland says. “If you have a team of those people, you have a great chance to excel. It took me a lot of years to figure out that it wasn't fast times, rather it was strong character that makes a good team. I didn't get that in the beginning. Most coaches don't – it takes a while.”