



# **Local Boy Breaks 51 Year Old Swim Record**

April 29 2013 8:59 AM



A local boy caught the attention of the Illinois and Missouri swimming world last month by breaking the (age) 8 & Under 25 Yard Freestyle record that had stood for 51 years in the Illinois State YMCA Swim Championships. Edward Roberts, of rural Dow, IL, who swims for the Tri-County Area YMCA Tidalwaves during the winter and for the Summers-Port Sharks in the summer, shattered the 51 year old mark on March 15 in

DeKalb, Illinois at the Illinois and Missouri State Swim Championships. The record was set in 1962, the same year John Glenn became the first man to orbit the earth in space.

The record was set by eight year old Keith Gilliam, who was “a head taller than his competitors at the time and who beat the field by an astounding margin”, recalled a veteran swimmer who saw the 1962 record setting race. Mr. Gilliam was one of three brothers with extraordinary pedigrees in swimming in the 60’s and 70’s. Gilliam swam for 9 years with the YMCA; was awarded “All American” status as a swimmer for Rock Island High School three out of his four years there and was ranked the Number 1 Swimmer in the United States as a high school swimmer his senior year. Along with two of his brothers, he went on to swim for the University of Tennessee. While there, he garnered All American status in nine (9) separate events for Tennessee. He later swam in the 1972 Olympic Trials, the year Mark Spitz won 7 Gold Medals.

For the Summers-Port Sharks last July, Edward bested the 13.5 second iconic Gilliam 1962 record time by .12 seconds when he swam a 13.38. Following that race, his two cousins, each stand-out Summers-Port and YMCA swimmers, searched the internet and found Mr. Gilliam living in Naples, Florida. Then, they found his email address and decided to try to contact him. The cousins, Nick and Rick Roberts, sent an email to Mr. Gilliam informing him that Edward had swum a 13.38 and that they believed Edward had a legitimate chance to best the 51 year old mark at the (now jointly held) Missouri and Illinois State(s) Championship Meet to be held 7 months later. (Because Mr. Gilliam’s YMCA state record could only be set at the state meet, the summer time did not break or set the new record.)

Upon learning from Nick and Rick that Edward truly had a good chance to beat the record, Mr. Gilliam contacted Edward’s parents and began watching Edward’s results throughout the fall and winter YMCA season. Mr. Gilliam sent several notes over those months offering words of encouragement to Edward in his quest to beat the record. On the day of the State meet, the only day Edward could beat the record, Mr. Gilliam sent an email to Edward wishing him good luck.

On that day, Edward was scheduled to swim three individual events and one relay. In his first race, he set a state record time in the 100 Yard Individual Medley. His second race was the big one – the 25 Free. During the several races prior to Edward’s 25 Free, spectators could be heard discussing the possibility that the 51 year old record might fall. These spectators noticed that the meet program listed Edward’s “seed” time at a 13.38, well below the 51 year old record. When the short race was finished, Edward had broken the mark with a 13.22 time, over two seconds faster than his nearest competitor and besting Mr. Gilliam’s mark by almost 3/10s of a second.

The crowd's and officials' reaction to this new record was as unique as it was memorable. Immediately after the race, slowly at first, small groups of people in the crowd began standing and clapping. The meet was then delayed while the announcer reported to the attendees over the loudspeaker that Edward had just broken the oldest record in Illinois and Missouri swimming. Hearing the announcement, those in the crowd who had remained seated rose to their feet to give Edward a standing ovation.

After experiencing the relief of actually breaking Mr. Gilliam's record, Edward went on to break the state record in the 50 yard freestyle as well, completing the meet with three first places and three state records in his three individual events, a rare feat in itself.

Upon hearing of Edward's accomplishment, Mr. Gilliam graciously wrote a note to Edward and his family: "I want to thank you from the bottom of my heart for including me in this journey of Edward's in breaking my 51 year old record. Many of my family and friends from across the country have also been a part of Edward's quest and have been following his times this year.... Champions are made through hard work and dedication. Edward is a true CHAMPION. I am proud and happy to have Edward's name replace mine on that 25 yard Free State Record." He continued by addressing Edward: "Edward, your journey is just beginning and I wish you and your team members the very best. Swimming will be with you your whole life."

Edward recently travelled to Clearwater, Florida for the National Age Group Swimming Championships (for pre-high school age swimmers, 14 and younger), referred to as the NASA Showcase Classic. An effort was made to unite Edward with Mr. Gilliam while down in Florida, but a family matter for Mr. Gilliam forced a cancellation of that meeting. Said Edward: "I really wanted to meet Mr. Gilliam. He has been so nice to me."

At that National Championship meet, Edward, was younger than 75% of his 9 year old competitors. Now, as a 9 year old, he no longer gets to swim the 25 yard freestyle. In his 50 yard freestyle, his second place time of 28.2 topped the prior meet record of 28.28. However, John Bradshaw, from Virginia, out-distanced Edward in that race and now holds the new NASA record. Edward also placed second to Bradshaw in the 100 freestyle. To those two second place medals, Edward added another four including two fourth place finishes, a fifth and a seventh. All of Edward's seven times in Florida were personal best times for him.

Nancy Miller, Edward's coach year-round has been a swim coach for over 20 years. A former stand-out competitive swimmer herself, she observed: "Edward is one of those rare individuals who is blessed with the "whole" package: he is very bright; he understands instructions and the reasoning behind the training and technique we ask him to do; he chooses to swim very fast at practice, thereby choosing to put himself in pain; he trains with older swimmers and chases them and he is very self-motivated. Additionally, he strongly dislikes when his performance is less than a best time."

Right now, Edward holds 57 records in total and hasn't lost a YMCA or Summers-Port race since swimming in a cast in the IL-MO State Meet in March, 2012.

Just finishing his fourth season, Edward began competitive swimming at age 5 and participates in a number of other sports, enjoying a number two ranking nationally in competitive water skiing. He encourages others to swim on the swim team: "It's really fun, but it's hard work sometimes." Coach Miller went on to give even higher praise to Edward: "Most importantly, he is a true sportsman, always respecting teammates and competitors. He is a friend to all and is a joy to coach!"