

THE SOUTHWEST OHIO SWIMMING AND DIVING CLASSIC

A BRIEF HISTORY

In the late 1970s, a swimming official from the Cleveland area moved to Cincinnati and joined the Southwest Ohio Swimming and Diving Officials Association (SWOSOA). Stan Kaplan brought with him information on a large swimming and diving invitational held in Cleveland each year. Not long after that, a committee was formed to discuss the possibility of having a similar event in Southwest Ohio. That committee included officials Val Lyons, Claudia Multer, Dave Gordon, Pat Lunsford, and Jim Byrne. Dave Abineri, developer of a meet management program, and Dave Dumond, from swimmeet.com, became active committee members to help develop the multiple sites. Other officials occasionally became involved, along with key coaches in the area. A basic plan was developed, but unfortunately, Stan Kaplan passed away before seeing the Southwest Ohio Swimming and Diving Classic (The Classic) become a reality.

Dave Gordon had a son swimming at Princeton High School at that time who was a standout distance swimmer. Dave brought up the idea of adding collegiate events to The Classic, with the idea that college coaches preferred an actual time for an event, rather than recruit from high school distances. A number of things had to occur for that to happen. First was to arrange an order of events which included college events contested at national championships. High school swimmers were allowed two individual events in a meet. With the addition of collegiate events, the number of individual events was increased to four, making it a two-day competition. Once a basic plan was in place, the committee had to petition the Ohio High School Athletic Association (OHSAA) for an exception to the high school rules. Through extensive communications, it was approved, providing it counted as two dual meets out of the sixteen permitted by the OHSAA for teams entering swimmers and divers on both days.

The first year of The Classic was 1984, and it was held at Keating Natatorium on Martin Luther King holiday weekend, with approximately 300 swimmers from 25 schools. All schools were from the Southwest District geographically. The Classic continued to grow in athlete and school numbers to the point that holding the entire event at Keating was no longer feasible due to fire code restrictions. The committee began looking at alternatives and doing preliminaries at other sites, with finals at Keating Natatorium. Schools were recruited as possible hosts for the preliminary sites. Once several schools agreed, planning began on the details for collecting results from each site to determine the qualifiers for finals. The technology at that time was using fax machines at each site and sending results to a central location.

The Classic continued to grow, which resulted in additional preliminary sites, currently 12, being established. Faxing results back and forth became a real challenge. As technology continued to develop, modems were put into use. This was an improvement but still wasn't the best situation. The internet now allows results to be shared within minutes. The meet has grown into the largest high school invitational in the U.S., with approximately 2,500-3,000 athletes from as many as 120 schools, all of which are within the boundaries of the SW District in Ohio, which includes 15 counties. The basic concept of providing an opportunity for all swimmers and divers, both junior varsity and varsity, to compete in high school and college events, while doing so in the preliminary/final format, still prevails.

Over the years, teams from outside of the district and state, as far as Pennsylvania and Wisconsin, have requested opportunities to participate in The Classic. The Classic committee has denied these requests to keep The Classic competition within the SW District and accessible to all of our swimmers and divers. Over the years, The Classic committee has added JV events, such as 50 free, back, and fly, as well as the 100 IM. These events, which exclude top 16 district-level athletes, allow every level of athlete to experience a championship-style meet. No one in the SW District is excluded from participating. The JV events have recently been expanded to include JV diving. In 2022 two PARA events, were added to the meet. The 50 free and 100 back.

In the early 2000s, a long-time dream of the founders of The Classic was realized with the creation of The Friends of The Classic Scholarship. This scholarship program has grown from the initial four \$500 scholarships to six \$1,000 scholarships in 2026. These scholarships are awarded to three girls and three boys. Twelve event winners are awarded plaques with special recognition of officials and coaches who were instrumental in the development of The Classic or had great influence on swimmers and divers of the SW District. Awards are also given to the top 16 athletes in each event.

Swimming World Magazine and TV coverage have featured The Classic several times. The editor attended some of those sessions. On two separate occasions, a swim clinic was held after The Classic. Presenters have been past Olympians and World Champions, some of whom were participants in The Classic while they attended area high schools. The following Olympians from SW District high schools have participated in The Classic. Joe Hudepohl, Dan Ketchum, Erin Phenix, Carson Foster and Nick Thoman.

The Classic would not be possible without the cooperation and input from officials, coaches, and school administrators, as well as the large number of volunteers who give up their weekend each year to make the event a reality and a success.