

## **Twenty-Seven IFs in Life on My Path to Becoming a Teacher Sophomore Year – Five Ifs and Freshman Shyness Gone**

### **Beginning of My Football Career**

My football career was about to begin. Frosh-Soph Football sign-ups were again held at the start of the school year. My Freshman year shyness was gone, so this time I did not shy away. I signed up to be the End I had always wanted to be. The Coach made me a Tackle instead.

The Coach's decision to have me play Tackle instead of End did not have any effect on my long-term goal. It was obvious that all the starters on the team would be the Sophomores who had shown up as Freshmen the year before. The End spots were already taken. My chance would have to wait until next year.

The Juniors on this year's Varsity squad would carry their positions from this year with them as they became the Seniors on next year's team. The advantage my Sophomore teammates had in this current year would disappear when we all tried out for Varsity. I would wait until then to earn my End position. I was confident that, when given the chance to prove myself, I would be playing End and not Tackle.

### **Water Polo's Beginning**

Menlo-Atherton had assumed its swimming pool would be completed by the start of this school year. Based on that assumption, M-A's Varsity Water Polo team was already signed up to compete in the Peninsula Athletic League (PAL). The fact that M-A did not yet have a pool did not stop M-A from forming a Varsity team. Since there was no pool, there were no Freshmen sign-ups at the start of the year, and any Sophomores interested in playing were simply included on the varsity squad. The publicly available Burgess Swimming Pool, which was less than a mile from M-A, was the Varsity's home pool for that first year.

### **The Swimming Pool's A-B-C's**

The pool was completed prior to the start of the competitive swimming season. The PAL had A, B, and C levels of competition for swimming. The A level was the varsity level. Swimming coaches throughout the PAL used a special chart that used a combination of age, height, and weight to determine who was A, B, or C.

### **My Father's Belief**

My father believed that being a member of a sports team was an essential part of preparing for life. Paul was a Senior, I was a Sophomore, and Jack was a Freshman. Since we had a pool in our backyard and had already taken competitive swimming lessons in Fresno, my father wanted each of us to try out for M-A's swim teams.

Jack and I had no problem in agreeing to this. Swimming was a springtime sport. It would not interfere with my football ambitions. However, Paul had purchased a car and was working after-school for the Menlo Park Recorder, that city's local paper, to support his car. My father offered to pay Paul the equivalent of his current part-time salary if he would go out for swimming. Paul accepted the offer and the three of us were now M-A swimmers.

### **A Sophomore on the Varsity**

After my age, height, and weight were factored in, I was placed on the A-level varsity swim team. I was definitely not Varsity material. I did so poorly at the first Varsity meet that the person who had calculated my factors decided to redo his calculations and found his mistake. For every meet thereafter, I was on the B team where I belonged.

Before one of our meets, the school-wide intercom/speaker system asked teachers to release the swimmers present in their classrooms to prepare for the meet. I stood up and walked towards the front of the class to reach the exit door. As I was walking, one girl in my class turned to the girl sitting next to her and said, not knowing I could hear. "Is Bob a swimmer?" Answer: "Yes." Question: "Is he any good?" Answer: "No." As I walked by, I said to the two of them, "You saw the wrong race."

### **At The B Level**



Back row, fourth from the left, me at the B Level. Freestyle was the stroke the swimming instructor my mother had sent us to had taught us, so the freestyle events were the ones I would compete in now.

Even though this was M-A's first season of PAL swimming competition, our four-man 100-yard relay team, with me as the lead-off swimmer, was undefeated in league competition. At the end-of-season league championship meet, we won in record-setting time.

Being the lead-off swimmer on a league champion team was a nice start to my career as a swimmer. I was even honored at our end-of-season banquet as the most improved swimmer on the B team. Even so, I did not yet view myself as a swimmer. It was still football all the way for me.

The comments written by thirty of the classmates who signed my Yearbook that Spring specifically mentioned my being a swimmer. Only two referenced football, which was understandable since I only played a few minutes in one Frosh-Soph game that Fall. The A, B, and C swim teams held their competitions jointly. People who came to watch the Varsity also saw all the B and C team swimmers. My time to be seen by my classmates as a football player had not yet arrived.

### **Water Polo Comments**

There were nine swimmers on the A team and twelve on the B team. Twelve of that group of A and B swimmers had also played Varsity water polo in the Fall. That meant nine A and B swimmers had not played. Two of these nine were Seniors. The twelve were now trying to recruit the remaining seven of us to join them on the team next Fall.

The two comments below were written in my Yearbook by two Varsity swimmers doing some recruiting for next Fall's water polo team:

Bob, I am surprised at you for not coming out for water polo. Football can't compare with this great sport. I'm sure you'd make first string. See you next year. Bill Augenstein

Bob, To a sap who isn't going to play water polo. Andy Schwarz

Both Bill and Andy, who happened to be cousins, would end up playing important roles in my life.

### **The Dolphin Kick**

During one of our swim practices that Spring, a member of the Stanford swimming team was brought in to show us something called a dolphin kick. High school swim teams everywhere were being shown this kick by anyone who could put on an appropriate demonstration. Stanford was only four miles from our school, so their coach sent one of his swimmers to conduct the dolphin kick show-and-tell for us.

The butterfly stroke used in competition during my Sophomore year was propelled by a frog kick. During next year's swimming season, butterfly would be split into two different strokes. The frog kick would be paired with arm strokes that would not be allowed to break the water's surface. This version of the stroke would be called the breaststroke. The dolphin kick would be paired with the current out-of-water, under-water, out-of-

water butterfly arm-stroke cycle. The butterfly name would be tied to this new stroke.

The dolphin kick demonstration was pretty straightforward. The Stanford swimmer simply held onto a kickboard and propelled himself forward using the dolphin kick. However, we did not get to see the new form of butterfly demonstrated. When we asked him how many kicks we were supposed to do with each armstroke, he said he really didn't know. Maybe two or three, or maybe more, or maybe just one, as was true now for the frog-kick.

The breaststroke rule matched one frog kick with one matching set of arm-strokes. The butterfly rule was like freestyle. In freestyle you could kick as much or as little as you wanted. For the butterfly, the same rule applied. So now we had a new kick to try and way too many different ways to try it.

### **F. W. Woolworth's Five and Dime and an IF**

The summer between my Sophomore and Junior years, my brother Jack advanced his budding swimming career by joining the M-A Coach's summer-league age-group swimming team. My youngest brother Bill also joined the team. The team worked out at the same Burgess Pool that M-A's Water Polo team had used.

Swimming was nice, but my focus was still on football. The fact that I turned sixteen that June brought with it a new goal. Just like my brother Paul had done, I wanted to save up to buy a car. No swimming for me. I wanted to earn some money.

A San Francisco business acquaintance of my father had mentioned to him that the store he ran was always running short of stock boys. Stocking shelves? I could handle that. The company was F. W. Woolworth's Five and Dime on Market Street in San Francisco. Commuting to San Francisco would be easy. A bike ride to the Atherton Train Station. A thirty-mile commuter train ride to the City. And an easy summertime walk from the San Francisco Station to Woolworth's on Market Street. Slight problem, though, as it turned out, I was not at all suited for being a stock boy in that San Francisco store.

My father prepared me in advance for my first-ever job interview. I showed up for my stock boy interview in a coat and tie. After a firm introductory handshake, I looked the interviewer straight in the eye as I answered each of his questions. There were two other applicants at that same time. The other two were dressed quite differently, shook nobody's hand, and never looked the interviewer in the eyes. I was hired, but so were the other two applicants.

On my first day at work, we three new stock boys were introduced to the stock boys already working there. I don't remember stocking a single shelf that day. All I remember is the frequent name-calling and the fights that broke out. I don't know what day two would have been like. I quit after day one.

My working days were put on hold. My first part-time job would now have to wait until Christmas shopping season that Fall. The store I would then be working in for the next three years was waiting until September to be built.

### **Butterfly**

Now that I was out of work, I decided I might as well join Bill and Jack and spend my free time doing a little swimming. I would still be playing football in the fall, but it wouldn't hurt to get a little bit better at swimming for next Spring. Football in the Fall. Swimming in the Spring. No problem.

My swimming stroke was still freestyle, but I decided to give butterfly a try as well. The stroke was new, so no one on our team was a proven butterfly swimmer. Since none of us really knew exactly how to do it, we were all just beginners.

The boys in the older age groups were swimmers from our high school swim team. The team's current butterfly person in my 16-17 age group was Bill Augenstein, or Augie, as we all called him. M-A's nine-man varsity swimming team only lost one meet that Spring and came in second in the league. Not bad for a first year. Augie and his cousin Andy were the top two Juniors on that swimming team.

Angie was the number-one butterfly person on our Summer team. There was no number-two person yet, so I volunteered to give it a shot. None of us had mastered the kick, but the most common try, and the one Augie was using, was three kicks with each arm stroke.

In the first meet where I swam butterfly, I was ahead of Augie for the first third of the race but ended up losing. For the second meet, I told myself that this time, I would focus on not letting Augie catch up with me. Since I had been ahead at the start that first time, I would just keep it that way. I didn't think about how to do the dolphin kick at all. My whole focus was just on beating Augie.

My strategy worked. I beat Augie. I also won the race, defeating the swimmers from the other team, as well. As I climbed out of the pool at the end of the race, other members of my team asked me where I had learned to do the butterfly like that. I had no idea what they were talking

about, but it seemed that I had that dolphin kick working just right. Had I used three kicks? I really didn't know.

Since I did not know exactly what I had done, I was not at all sure I could do it again. Since all I had thought about was beating Augie in that race, for the next meet, I made my focus keeping ahead of all the swimmers, not just Augie. I would just let my body do the butterfly anyway it wanted without thinking exactly what that way might be.

I learned by having people watch me and then tell me what I was doing that I was using two kicks per stroke, not three. I ended up not losing any butterfly races in my 16-17 age group that summer except that first one to Augie. I was starting to think I might actually be a swimmer. Even so, football was still my number one priority for the Fall.

### **Five IFs**

IFs cannot be identified looking forward. IFs can only be identified looking back. IF I had not quit the Woolworth job after that first day, then I would not have joined my younger brothers as a member of the Burgess Pool age-group swimming team.

IF there had not been a new butterfly stroke added to our swimming competitions, then freestyle would have remained the only stroke I swam.

IF Augie had not been the only person swimming butterfly, then I would not have thought to volunteer to be the number two man in that event.

IF my first race against Augie had not given me the feeling that it might be possible for a B-level swimmer like me to beat one of the best swimmers on the M-A Varsity team at this new stroke, then I would not have come up with the strategy of never letting Augie catch up with me.

The existence of a new stroke that no one on our team knew exactly how to swim made my feeling possible. Augie was a better swimmer than I was at freestyle. However, since none of us knew exactly how to do this new stroke, then nobody was better than anybody else.

The biggest IF of all in this list of IFs is the butterfly body I brought with me to that race. The reason I was able to beat Augie was because, without telling my body how to do it, my body got it done. My mind only said, "Beat Augie!" My butterfly body did the winning on its own.

IF I had not brought that body with me to the race, then Augie would have won. For whatever reason, my body was so meant to swim butterfly that it never lost a fifty-yard race to any other swimmer in either high school or college.



The IFs that caused me to become M-A's medley-relay butterfly swimmer on relay teams that were undefeated in both my Junior and Senior years were not the same kinds of life-changing IFs that water polo would turn out to be. However, these butterfly IFs placed me on a medley-relay team in my Junior year with Howie Anawalt, Keith Holleuffer, and Andy Schwarz, all of whom would play important roles in my college life.