



PETER VERHOEF

An early love for swimming and an analytical mind led Peter Verhoef to the University of Georgia and an early job with SwimMAC's Team Elite, preparing him for his now successful run at The Bolles School.

BY MICHAEL J. STOTT

Q. SWIMMING WORLD: Your pre-college competitive swim days were spent in Virginia and include a state record in the 100 meter butterfly. How did you come to swimming initially?

A. COACH PETER VERHOEF: I started competitive swimming at a YMCA in Wisconsin in fourth grade. Coach Sean Wendt saw me playing in the pool and told my mom I HAD to join his team. We moved to Virginia in sixth grade. What made me fall in love with the sport were the coaches and guys and girls at Coast Guard Blue Dolphins who became my best friends. It formed the vision I want our team to experience today.

SW: You were a 15x CSCAA All-American at Georgia. What attracted you to Athens?

PV: The genuineness and ease of connecting with Jack Bauerle, Harvey Humphries, Carol Capitani and Brian Schrader.

SW: Jack maintains that your presence was like having another coach on deck.

PV: Swimming has always felt like a puzzle to me—putting the pieces together the right way: technique, training, meters, mentality, teamwork. Each day coming into practice was about getting a piece of the puzzle done right. I always remember being engaged with what we were doing. I began to recognize the patterns and the bigger picture of the season plan. That helped me be more specific about it.

SW: As an outstanding business student at Georgia you were analytical and skilled in Management Information Systems, spreadsheets and the like. What lessons did you learn that led to being a head coach now?

PV: I brought a couple years of IT consulting into my first coaching job with David Marsh at SwimMAC. I was just thankful to have the opportunity with David. The biggest aspect of that job was organizing things—schedules, people,

space and time for workouts.

David told me on Day 1 that my job was to make sure the pro group was organized and to help him ensure that SwimMAC as a program benefited from having the pros there. So I had to balance a lot for both the pro group and the SwimMAC program. That meant being involved with three or four different pools, weight rooms, travel meets, SwimMAC staff meetings, age group schedules and David's schedule as a head coach.

I got to use my skills to make all of the chaos simple and easy to understand for everyone else. That was my biggest lesson: If you want to help others, make it easy to understand.

SW: You have always had a joie de vivre for swimming. As a coach committed to excellence, how do you convey that to your swimmers at Bolles?

PV: The best part of swimming forces you to respect a process and allows you to connect with teammates in a unique way. As coaches, we work hard to show the enjoyment we have in leading swimmers in each phase of a season and year over year so they see the respect for process modeled out. We also work hard to connect with them and each other so they get the joy in striving for excellence.

SW: Clarity, standards and non-negotiables characterize your coaching. What were they when you first showed up at Bolles?

PV: I think we do a good job with clarity. I am always looking at ways to make the concepts in swimming more practical. Standards really are set by team culture, which is what the team as a whole believes in. So when we believe in racing fast, working hard, being respectful and being healthy—then the normal behaviors to do those things become the standard. Over the five years at Bolles, each class has been challenged and encouraged to



[Photo Courtesy: Bolles School]

PETER VERHOEF

Head Coach/Aquatics Director

The Bolles School
Jacksonville, Florida

- University of Georgia, B.A., business administration, 2007
- Head coach/aquatics director, The Bolles School, 2019-present
- Senior coach/high performance director, SwimMAC, 2015-18
- Assistant coach, Team Elite/SwimMAC, 2010-19 (where Team Elite athletes won 14 Olympic medals: nine gold, four silver, one bronze)
- Assistant head coach, men's and women's swimming, Queens University, 2013-15
- Volunteer assistant coach, Georgia Tech, 2008-10
- Finalist, USA Olympic Trials, 2004, 2008
- Team captain, silver medal winner, World University Games, 2005; participant, 2007
- Led Bolles boys to 2021 national high school championship; Junior Nationals-East champions, 2021, 2022
- Boys and girls FHSAA 1A champions, 2019-23
- 15x CSCAA UGA All-American
- USMS national champion, 50 fly (21.65), 2010; 2x USMS All-American, 2010

keep growing in those beliefs. As a result, we continue to get better!

SW: Before Bolles, you say you didn't really have a coaching philosophy. Six years in, what is your philosophy now?

PV: It was never something I needed before Bolles—my job was to implement the head coach's philosophy. I credit my club coach, Steve Griffin, Jack at UGA and David Marsh for giving me some incredible models from which to learn. I hope my philosophy is evolving—trying to match what we are learning about our sport and about the people we coach.

I have certain core tenants that anchor my philosophy. The first starts with the concept that the person always comes first. The other tenants are priorities on long course development, using IM training and racing as a foundation, finding what training works best for each type of athlete and always promoting a sense of TEAM.

SW: You learned about matching emotional tendencies with human rhythms. How do you do that with swimmers at Bolles?

PV: I learned most of my coaching skills from David, especially how to pull the most out of a person. He maintained he could tell how an athlete was going to perform at practice just by watching them walk in the door—and it's true.

It is different at under 18, but the concepts are the same—knowing how school and big events affect their stress levels. It doesn't mean you avoid the work; you have to plan for it and be ready to pull an athlete to it.

Bolles is a great place for this because we are so connected to the academic and social rhythms of the school. We take the whole human into account when we look at the season and each week of practice.

SW: What else did you learn about yourself and swimming while in Charlotte, especially sharing a small apartment with Davis Tarwater?

PV: Davis was a competitor and friend before we spent time as coach/athlete in Charlotte. He was influential in exposing me to a deeper Christian faith and the sense of humility that framed my view of swimming. We talked often and agreed on the fundamental value of the Olympic Games, which are specifically designed to bring humans together through physical sport. That time spent with him really helped shape the call in my life to

coaching and the why behind it.

SW: You maintain that as a coach you have to be willing to let people in. How do you let swimmers in?

PV: I credit this to Jack. He is, above all things, authentic. He never changes who he is or what he believes in just to be more liked or accepted. People can detect inauthenticity a mile away, and today's young swimmers crave authentic connections. You let them in by showing up as yourself—the good, bad, sometimes ugly—and then you balance the structure and limits they need while walking alongside them toward their goals.

SW: Loyalty is a canon in the Georgia aquatic community. As a maturing coach, what lessons have you learned about loyalty?

PV: This was a big reason I loved Georgia and I love Bolles—one of my strongest personal values is loyalty. Being loyal to a team/program/school/family unlocks a special connection and joy that only comes from being committed to something other than yourself. I've learned that you will face situations that challenge your loyalty. Through that, I've grown to understand you can respect others, be loyal and make difficult decisions or have difficult conversations.

SW: And what does loyalty look like in swimming today?

PV: From a practical standpoint, this may look like a lost cause with college transfers and even high school swimmers and parents seeking the "best fit for me." I believe we have to look back to connecting with people beyond just swimming performance. To develop loyalty means a coach needs to first value the athlete as a human. The athlete needs to value the long-term relationship and guidance of a coach. When it becomes strictly about performance, then performance suffers.

SW: Faith is intrinsic to who you are. How do you balance work commitments with a life of faith?

PV: It never feels like a balance—it's more like a tapestry. Being a Christian is about being in a relationship with Jesus. I have to work hard to keep that in perspective. It's not about separating one from the other, but about living out this coaching life with Jesus walking next to me. The more I learn to listen to the Lord, the more connected my faith becomes to

my work and my family.

SW: What advice would you have for young, ambitious coaches who want to coach high-performance swimmers right out of the gate?

PV: I think I am the luckiest coach in the world. Thanks to David Marsh, I got the opportunity to watch and be a part of creating Olympic gold medals as my FIRST coaching job—with only volunteer experience before that. Then I was a part of a collegiate championship with Jeff Dugdale at Queens University, then a junior national championship at SwimMAC. I really went backward pedagogically, so I have a really unique perspective. I also don't need to get to a higher level to feel satisfied.

There is a big difference between "high-performance coaching" and "coaching high performance." For young coaches, your coaching skills are honed when you pour into the swimmers right in front of you—no matter what level. The ability to make complexity and difficulty of swimming "magical" is the same no matter the athlete's ability.

SW: How has being a father changed your perspective on the sport?

PV: Becoming a father did two things. First, it created an immediate appreciation for my wife. Our sport demands a lot of physical, emotional and mental energy, and my wife has to make up for some of that when I am not 100% at home.

Second, it has made me more aware of how I spend that physical, emotional and mental energy—and as a coach, how I am spending other people's energy. Are they able to create the family they want and still pursue the goals they have? I don't think we always get it right—but I try to keep that perspective.

SW: How did you define success at 28? And now at 40?

PV: Having only coached in successful places has allowed me to stay focused on coaching the person first. As a younger coach, I felt that real success was when I somehow got everything to go just right at big meets. I've since learned success is more about how you can be prepared to handle anything and still stay focused on your goals.

SW: What positive and negative effect is social media having on your student-athletes at Bolles?

PV: It is certainly having a huge effect—it's becoming a normal means of communication. In a positive way, it opens up a lot of creative ways to connect and teach people. Jake Gibbons and Alexis Keto run our social media and they do some awesome things to highlight swimming skills or celebrate kids and accomplishments. For a lot of swimmers, that is more impactful than a classroom session or a ribbon.

The biggest negative is comparison—the thief of joy. Social media creates the unconscious ability for us to compare ourselves to any and everything. Without grounded values and vision, comparisons can blind one to the joy of making progress on one's own.

SW: Where do you see swimming in general 20 years from now?

PV: I think the beauty of our sport is its simplicity—swim to one wall and back as fast as you can. Unlike running, the water element is the great equalizer, so we all have to address drag, power and rhythm to be successful. We are seeing more young athletes learn to eat better, eliminate toxic habits and explore their own emotions and minds to get better.

As coaches, we are getting better at identifying what works best for specific athletes and building programs that highlight those things. We have an opportunity to use our sport to see healthier, stronger, more technical and happier swimmers. That will show up in faster and faster times for more and more people.

SW: What do we do for our young athletes now if there is no college swimming 20 years from now?

PV: I think this is a real possibility. Not to be a harbinger of doom...but we should be prepared to promote swimming for what it is—a great opportunity to learn and grow as physical, emotional and mental human beings. Coaches need to work on how we sell our sport to young swimmers and parents to show them how fun it can be and how well it can develop great people.

Even if the NCAA goes away, our sport can develop great human beings, and we should be prepared to show that to the world. «

Michael J. Stott is an ASCA Level 5 coach, golf and swimming writer. His critically acclaimed coming-of-age golf novel, "Too Much Loft," is in its third printing, and is available from store. Bookbaby.com, Amazon, B&N and distributors worldwide.



>> Peter Verhoef, Bolles head coach and aquatic director

[Photo Courtesy: Fleetimaging.com]

HOW THEY TRAIN

BOLLES RELAY SWIMMERS

Relays require all elements of swimming: technique, speed, poise, athleticism and finishing grit. The Bolles School (Fla.) does a good job of developing student-athletes in those elements in all events—and it is most evident in relays. The training of two relay standouts—Andy Kravchenko and Julia Murphy—illustrates how this dynamic works.

BY MICHAEL J. STOTT

In November, the Bolles School boys and girls won their 36th and 33rd consecutive Florida 1A state swim and dive titles. In the process, the Bulldogs won 13 events, set two state records and five school records, and posted 45 All-America automatic or consideration times.

Intrinsic to those titles were wins in five of the six relays, continuing a proud tradition of outstanding quartet performance that predates the Ryan Murphy, Santo Condorelli, Joseph Schooling, Josh Booth dominance not long ago. In 2023, Bolles boys and girls accounted for nine top-three and 13 top-eight relays at Winter and Summer Junior National meets—with 29 out of 33 relays finishing top 16 to score points.

TEAM has always been central to Bolles' success, and relay success starts with team culture, says head coach and aquatics director Peter Verhoef. "The more pride the athletes take in representing their team in relays, the more success you have. Because of our tradition of great interscholastic competition and team championships at junior nationals, our team really wants to

be a part of winning relays. We nurture and develop that desire for excellence all year, not just at big meets," he says.

"We are proud to coach so many kids who WANT to be a part of a winning team, to compete with each other for relay positions and who are willing to support their teammates. Honestly, that can be really hard to do. However, this positive attitude is maintained through a training program that focuses on different types of athletes working toward the same goals in different ways.

"All-Americans Andy Kravchenko (third-ranked in Florida, '25) and Julia Murphy (17th, '24, Virginia Tech) have been the backbone of our relays for several seasons," says Verhoef. "Julia (state record holder, 100 yard fly) is a sprint free/fly swimmer with the ability to train up to the 200s, including IM. Andy is primarily a sprint freestyler with a similar ability to train smoothly up to a 200.

"Their training allows them to be prepared for multiple races in a session and be really versatile on different relays."

A mid-season week typically includes

the following practices:

Monday

**G = Gear 1-5 with 5 being fast (100 effort) and 1 being smooth.*

Verhoef: “Monday includes a lifting session (45-50 minutes) and then a light recovery swim. We have two lifts a week focused on the full body. Swim and strength coach, Claire Mills, tailors movements designed to produce better vertical jump heights and pull-ups.

“Monday swim practice features a kick or resistance cord set after warm-up, followed by an aerobic threshold set. For our national group swimmers, we typically write two, sometimes three different versions of a practice to allow swimmers with different strengths and backgrounds to accomplish the same type of work. Andy does really well on threshold work with shorter distances, short rest and a mix of free and backstroke with underwater requirements built in.”

- 4 x (75 Rolling IM @ 1:20 G3, 25 3rd best NF stroke @ :40 G4)
- 4 x 100 @ 1:25; #1-3 IM Trans, #4 Free with 1-4-1 habits

3 Rounds

- 50 Free @ :40 Bre 5
- 100 FRIM @ 1:40 G3 (4 kicks)
- 50 Back @ :40 G4 (6 kicks)
- 3 x 50 Free @ :50 G3 (6 kicks)
- 50 Back @ 1:30 G5 (8 kicks)

Verhoef: “Julia does really well with slightly longer distances and sets that build the intensity. She would likely go into a second version of a threshold set (like the following set). We also have a third set for swimmers focused on longer events.”

- 2 x 50 G1 0:45
- 2 x 100 G2 1:30
- 2 x 150 G2-3 2:15
- 2 x 200 G3-4 fins 3:00

Rest 0:30 Put on fins + pads to do:

- 16 x 25 MAKE IT odds: 0:15 evens: 0:20

Rest 0:30

- 2 x 200 G1 pads 3:00
- 2 x 150 G2-3 2:15
- 2 x 100 G3-4 1:30
- 2 x 50 FAST 0:45

Verhoef: “A typical Tuesday would have everyone focused on 200 effort, either pace or a maximum VO2-type workload. This is typically done with the swimmers’ primary strokes, but that changes throughout the season—and for some swimmers, within the set. An example of a Tuesday set during the short course season (fall) would be the (following one), copied from



>> The Bolles School Sharks’ Andy Kravchenko (far right) is Florida’s third-ranked high school swimmer for the Class of 2025. Andy is primarily a sprint freestyler with a similar ability to train smoothly up to a 200. (Also pictured, from left: Landon Kyser, Carter Lancaster and Wyatt Porch from Bolles’ 15-16 400 medley relay NAG record set at 2022 Winter Junior Nationals.)

[Photo Courtesy: **Fleetimaging.com**]

PROGRESSION OF TIMES				
	Andy Kravchenko		Julia Murphy	
SCY	50 Free	100 Free	100 Free	100 Fly
12	23.80	49.12	56.89	1:03.52
13	21.82	48.33	56.45	1:02.89
14	20.53	45.93	54.46	57.68
15	20.28	44.68	52.97	56.92
16	19.87	43.66	51.73	55.27
17	—	—	50.62	53.79
Relay Split		43.51	50.01	53.47

Jack Bauerle at the University of Georgia:

- 12 x 200 prime 3:20
 - #1: 50 OTB FAST, 150 ez
 - #2: 25 FAST, 25 ez
 - #3: 4 x 50
 - RD1 - 50 build, 2 x 50 ez, 50 P 0:50 + 1:00
 - RD2 - 50 build, 50 ez, 2x50 P 0:50 + 1:00
 - RD3 - 50 build, 3 x 50 P 0:50 + 1:00
 - RD4 - 4 x 50 P
- P = goal 200 P

Verhoef: “Between Wednesday and Thursday, at least one of our main sets will focus on better swimming at a lower-intensity. This is where Andy and Julia have separated themselves to be so consistent on relays. Even on lower-intensity days, they do a good job of maintaining great strokes and good habits.

“Toward the end of a season, we include a practice specifically for recovery. We remove the expectations for efforts (some swimmers choose to swim stronger, some smoother—but technique expectations are high) and create three options based on total yards. Julia and Andy generally go into the middle yardage option since it is a great way for them to work endurance for sprint events.”

Middle-Distance Recovery Practice

- 5 x 200 with fins—odds: swim @ 2:30, evens: kick @ 3:30

CONTINUED ON 118 >>



>> Julia Murphy, the 17th-ranked female swimmer in Florida from the Class of 2024, will be swimming this coming fall for Virginia Tech.

[Photo Courtesy: Robert Sohovich]

- 12 x 25 @ :45 odds: front-mid-wind-scrunch scull*
evens: catch-up free, float start, 5 hand hits
* A sculling progression

Verhoef: “In a single 25, swimmers start with a front scull (on front, arms overhead) for one-quarter of 25. Then the next quarter of 25 is mid scull (arms angled downward at 45 degrees), the third quarter of 25 is windshield wiper scull (fingers down and elbows up), and the last quarter, they rotate to feet forward and scrunch up.”

4 Rounds

- 2 x 25 @ :30 Free Swim
- 2 x 50 @ 1:00 Back or Single-arm Fly
- 150 Pull Bre 5 @ 2:15
- 100 Pull Bre 3 @ 1:30
- 50 Pull Bre 3 times @ 1:00
- 8 x (50 Kick, 50 Swim, 25 Kick)
- 50 Dolphin Kick on Back @ :50
- 50 Fly-Free @ :50
- 25 Kick with board @ :50 Breast or Flutter
- Ez 100
- 6 x 50 fins and paddles @ 1:00
- 6 x 25 no equipment 1 stroke challenge

Verhoef: “We treat Fridays as a ‘Fun Fast Friday’ for all three of our practice groups. Done as an entire team (about 90-100 swimmers), this workout contributes to our relay culture. We want to have a racing element in these practices, much like the following:

“Boys’ lanes on one-half of the pool, girls’ lanes on the other half (SCY). We typically start with a team meeting and include team shout-outs.

“After about a 1,200 warm-up, the whole team does the following set of 25s, usually with the best music we can find playing pretty loud; 5 x 25 race @ :35 + 1 easy 25 swim.

RELAY EXCELLENCE

Now an aquatic footnote, prep cognoscenti will remember the 1991 Easterns, where Bolles—swimming in the shallow 6-lane pool at LaSalle University—became the first high school team to go sub-three minutes. Sadly, the 2:59.98 swum by the quartet of Gustavo Borges (43.80), Matt Guyot (45.30), Enrico Linscheer (45.30) and Charlie Santostefano (45.40) failed to gain official recognition because the Bolles swim was deemed “out of season” for the Florida team.

It took 20 years before the mark was surpassed when New Trier posted 2:58.76 in 2011. Two years later, three future Bolles Olympians—Ryan Murphy (42.95), Santo Condorelli (43.11) and Joseph Schooling (43.70)—plus Josh Booth (44.67) clocked a 2:54.43.

And the beat goes on: Bolles relays played an important part in winning this season’s state meet and in placing third (girls) and fourth (boys) nationally in *SW*’s mythical HS Champs. The girls swam the nation’s fastest 200 FR, and the boys had two No. 2 finishes. Interestingly, in placing first at Winter Juniors, the Bolles A and B relays tied for second—a must-see video at:

www.youtube.com/watch?v=9TqWclAgZH4 «

“We do five-to-six rounds with the racing 25s following this pattern by round:

- Kick
- Free
- UW with fins
- Breast with fins
- Backstroke with fins
- Free with fins and paddles

“We will finish the practice long course with either a longer kick set or IM swim set.”

“Our coaching style isn’t really built around holding times/intervals,” says Verhoef. “We do give swimmers pace charts. Based on their goal times, they have some sets where they try to get to their goal paces.

“As an example, for Andy on his fast efforts, we look for time and stroke counts—on his fastest swims, we try to make sure he doesn’t get above 10-12 hand hits per 25 when he is pushing 22-23 seconds on 50s (in the 200 pace set).

“Julia is one of our best kickers, so if we have a fast kick set, she is usually in the low-1:20s long course for a 100, or close to 1:10 short course. For fast 50s fly, it’s the same as Andy: Keep an eye on strokes to make sure it doesn’t get above 7-8 per 25 and still push 28-29-second 50s on a repeat,” says Verhoef. «

Michael J. Stott is an ASCA Level 5 coach, golf and swimming writer. His critically acclaimed coming-of-age golf novel, “Too Much Loft,” is in its third printing, and is available from store. Bookbaby.com, Amazon, B&N and distributors worldwide.

CHAMPIONS TRAIN HERE



Bolles students know how to make a splash in academics, the arts and community service – and certainly in athletics. The School has totaled 156 team state titles since its founding. Bolles Swimming and Diving has provided opportunities for countless student-athletes to develop excellence in themselves and in the pool. Some have competed for Olympic medals and many, many more have gone on to be successful in colleges, jobs and communities around the world. As Bolles Swimming and Diving moves forward we are dedicated to growing a program and a place to develop people of excellence and elite performances.



Scan QR for more
information about
our swim program



Pre-K through Grade 12. Day and Boarding School.
Bolles.org