

# Program History



Former Sun Devil diving coach Dick Smith, pictured here with Bernie Wrightson, coached the U.S. Olympic Diving Squad at the '64 and '68 Olympic Games. Wrightson, the '66 NCAA 1-meter champion, won the 3-meter gold at the '68 Games. (ASU file photo)

*"It's a tough pill to swallow when coaches have to admit their team won't be strong, but such will be the case with Arizona State's first varsity swimming team."*

Perhaps a little harsh, but this prognosis from ASU's 1963 Spring Sports Guide wasn't far off. The first Sun Devil swimming squad was not that impressive. Neither was the second. But if you dig a little deeper into that guide, you'll find a prediction that countered the initial gloomy verdict.

"I feel in the years to come ASU can have one of the finest intercollegiate diving and swimming programs in the nation."

Those words were uttered by Dick Smith, one of the first legendary figures in Sun Devil aquatic lore. And it didn't take long for the Sun Devils to live up to those expectations. After a few lean years, Arizona State claimed its rightful place among the elite on the intercollegiate and international swimming and diving scene. It hasn't looked back since.

Swimming coach Walt Schlueter and

diving coach Smith faced the task of building the ASU program from the ground up. Both brought impressive credentials to Tempe. Schlueter was the U.S. National swimming coach for the 1950 Pan-American Games and the women's diving coach for the 1952 U.S. Olympic squad. Smith had just been named head diving coach for the '64 Olympic team before taking the ASU post.

Within three years, the Sun Devils had a national champion. Bernie Wrightson captured the '66 NCAA 3-meter title en route to a spot on the '68 U.S. Olympic Team, again coached by Smith. Wrightson took home a gold medal in Mexico City in the 3-meter. Keith Russell followed Wrightson's lead at ASU by winning the '68 national championship in the 3-meter dive. He joined

Wrightson on the Olympic team and placed fourth in the 10-meter and fifth in the 3-meter. The Sun Devil men's team placed 13th at the NCAA Championships.

Not to be outdone, Sun Devil Ann Peterson Scheer captured the 3-meter and indoor title in 1967. The two-time All-America placed third in the platform diving competition in Mexico City.

Former Olympian Mark Bradshaw succeeds ASU diving coach Ward O'Connell, who has coached the program the past 23 years. Bradshaw inherits a team that returns All-American Katrina Pfeuffer.

Ron Johnson assumed the men's swimming helm in 1975 and led ASU to three straight second-place finishes in the Western Athletic Conference. Johnson tutored ASU's first

men's swimming All-America, Blake Johnson, who finished third in the 400 IM and ninth in the 200 IM in '77 as a freshman.

The Sun Devils joined the Pac-10, arguably the best swimming league in the country, in the 1978-79 season and finished fourth. Five ASU swimmers earned All-America honors. At the '82 NCAA Championships, Sun Devil sophomore Andy Astbury captured the program's first national title, winning the 500 freestyle in school-record time. Astbury would later anchor his native Great Britain's 4x200-meter free relay team to a bronze medal at the '84 Olympic Games in Los Angeles.

At the '83 NCAAs, Mike Orn won the NCAA crown in the 200 free, leading Arizona State to a seventh-place finish — its best showing in history. The Sun Devils duplicated that finish the following year.

Ernie Maglischo took over for Johnson in '93 and led ASU to two consecutive 14th-place finishes at the NCAAs. In '95, the Sun Devils placed second at the Pac-10



Cheryl Gibson won six national titles from 1978 to 1981 (ASU file photo)