

HANA HOU

By Ed Ching

“And the winner of the high point individual trophy for the men’s, 12 years and under group, is Chris Duenas of Guam!” With that announcement, Team Guam stood a little taller at the 56th Annual Keo Nakama Invitational Swim Meet in Hawai`i, held on July 2-4 2004. His capture of 5 golds, 1 silver and 4 bronze medals, and the 3rd, 4th and 6th place medals by Sophina Taitano, led this small team of four swimmers to an 11th place ranking out of 27 teams from Hawai`i, California, New Jersey, Illinois, Colorado, Guam and Japan. Mutterings of disbelief poured out from the crowd. . .”How can a swimmer from Guam do so well?”

Guam is just a small island in the Western Pacific with a population of about 125,000. It has only one public swimming pool which is used simultaneously by three private swim clubs, with a total of about 75 to 100 competitive swimmers. Guam’s schools lack a swimming program, and every time a typhoon hits (Guam is in an area known as “typhoon alley” to weather buffs) the pool is shut down for months and the kids must practice in the ocean. Also, due to a lack of training facilities, the coach of this Guam team (me) makes them do crazy things, like run up and down the stairs in office buildings, carry logs, push his truck, and climb coconut trees.

Does this scenario familiar? Like the sugar cane ditch kids from Maui who trained in a sugar cane ditch under Coach Soichi Sakamoto (see NW Hawai`i Times, July) did strange work-outs because they lacked fancy facilities - - yet they became champions?

Perhaps Guam and Hawai`i’s swimming development are similar. I am the Guam coach, and I swam under Coach Sakamoto at UH in the 60’s. One important thing I learned from “Coach” is to use your adversities to your benefit. The lack of facilities forced him to be creative and his ideas are the foundations of many swimming principals and concepts today. A few of his contributions to swimming (which began as problems) include:

1. Weight lifting and tough land exercises - unheard of in the 1940’s and 1950’s for swimmers. (Coach’s swimmers grew up on a plantation or farm. Lifting, etc. was a way of life. Coach simply made his kids stretch before swimming. It worked so he stayed with it.)
2. Swimming technique - many of today’s swimming techniques were used by the Maui sugar cane ditch kids. (Swimming against the current in the ditch forced Coach to develop new techniques. Today, in various Olympic facilities, a water “flume” is used to study and develop swimming techniques.)
3. Interval training - a repetitive series of short hard swims with short rest periods. (Training in the sugar cane ditch required Coach’s kids to swim against the current, float back, then repeat).

This is my tribute to Coach Sakamoto. Chris Duenas’ win of 5 gold, 1 silver and 4 bronze medals is Coach’s win. It is not me coaching; it is Coach Sakamoto. I pass on his legacy.

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