



## Fort Lauderdale couple makes huge splash at YMCA swim nationals



YMCA of South Florida's Debbie Cavanaugh, of Fort Lauderdale, powers through her lane en route to finishing in third place in the women's 50-yard backstroke event during the annual YMCA Masters National Championship events at the Fort Lauderdale Aquatic Complex. (emmett hall/correspondent)

By **Emmett Hall**  
Special correspondent

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**F**ort Lauderdale residents Debbie Cavanaugh and her husband Cav are lifelong swimmers who enjoy not only the competitive side of the sport but also its health benefits.

They were among the participants in the annual YMCA Masters National Championship events at the Fort Lauderdale Aquatic Complex. This showcase of talent was hosted by the City of Fort Lauderdale.

The meet attracted approximately 425 swimmers on 47 YMCA teams from across the United States. Participants ranged in age from 19 to over 90. At the diving platforms, young athletes under the age of 18 had an opportunity to compete in the one-, three- and 10-meter challenges.

Young and old displayed their skills from the starting block to the diving board.

Debbie, age 60, entered 11 masters races and placed either second or third in all of them, while 82-year-old Cav entered five races and finished in first place in every one.

The couple have some impressive swimming pedigrees. Debbie swam for the University of Miami and won two national team championships (1975-76 and 1977-78 seasons). Her forte is the backstroke. Cav, meanwhile, is a tremendous freestyler who has held world records.

The couple naturally met in the pool during a master's swim competition.

Debbie, the longtime swim and water polo coach at Ransom Everglades and Fort Lauderdale High School, recently retired but continues to be passionate about swimming.

"This is a fun meet that definitely has some quality swimming and you get to renew a lot of old acquaintances that you normally don't see," Debbie said of the YMCA nationals. "We're a lot more relaxed than we use to be about swimming and it's all about enjoying life now."

The YMCA of South Florida, of which the Cavanaugh's are members, benefited from the 'home field advantage' and captured the overall team championship as well as the men's championship. Under the direction of Team Coordinator Barbara Protzman, the squad consisted of 69 members including athletes from **Broward County Special Olympics**.

"This is all about fun and the social aspect is very enjoyable," Protzman said. "I know people from all over the country from masters swimming. For many swimmers coming down here, this is a swimming vacation. There are plenty of smiles before and after the race, but when the horn sounds and the swimmers dive off the starting blocks, the competitive juices kick in."

There were 152 divers from 10 diving clubs who came to compete in the springboard and platform categories. Gary Cox served as the YMCA's event director for the diving portion of the meet.

"This is a great competition with top level USA divers," Cox said. "South Florida diving is getting stronger and this event is just getting better and better."

[Futurevest@aol.com](mailto:Futurevest@aol.com)

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