

# FAIRFIELD COUNTY SWIMMING LEAGUE

## APPENDIX II

### BRIEF HISTORY OF THE FCSL

Enthusiasm for athletics is akin to “Mom” and “apple pie” in Fairfield County. Thus it is not surprising that, in the spring of 1949, several swimming and diving enthusiasts gathered to discuss the formation of a league that would sponsor fun, friendly swimming and diving competitions to be held during the summer season.

Bill Campbell, then head swim coach of the Stamford Yacht Club, and Rocky Point member Bill Smith spearheaded the effort by inviting representatives from Fairfield County clubs to a meeting that was held at the Stamford Yacht Club. Eight clubs were represented at the meeting: Stamford Yacht Club, Brooklawn Country Club, Fairfield Beach Club, Riverside Yacht Club, Rocky Point Beach Club, Shore & Country Club, Tokeneke Club, and the Wee Burn Beach Club. The end result was the formation of the “Fairfield County Swimming League” (a.k.a. “FCSL”) and the election of Bill Campbell as its first president. The first dual meet schedule was set for the summer of 1949, with the first County Championship meet scheduled to be held that August.

At that time, Stamford Yacht Club was the only club with a facility that would be appropriate for a championship meet: a real swimming pool with six lanes (100 feet in length) and a one-meter diving board. Rocky Point had a pool of sorts -- with a rock and seaweed bottom -- but, the other founding clubs had no pools at all and held their dual meets in Long Island Sound. Milbrook held meets in a pond until their first pool was built in 1959.

For years the “Counties” meet was the highlight of the summer season for swimming and diving competitors and fans. It was not at all unusual for families to plan their summer vacations around the meet schedule, often cheering on the deck with engines running and bicycles strapped atop the family station wagon in the parking lot or along the neighboring roadside of the host club. “Off to catch the ferry!” was often offered as the reason a child was being shuffled into the rear seat of a packed station wagon, with towels wrapped snugly around the dripping, but happy, little swimmer ... after all, he had “made it to Counties”!

Stamford Yacht Club won the championship in the inaugural year of the championship meet, with Rocky Point claiming second place and Wee Burn Beach Club taking third place. Stamford Yacht Club kept the title for the next five years, allowing Rocky Point a moment of glory in 1955, but SYC reclaimed the title the next year until Rocky Point snatched it back in 1958. The New Canaan Field Club held the trophy once in 1959. But, since then, several power houses have emerged, with amazingly long runs at holding on tightly to the FCSL championship title. The Milbrook Club, who hosted its home meets in a pond until their pool was completed in 1959, was the keeper of the trophy for most of the 1960’s (1960-68, to be exact), after which it was The Lake Club’s responsibility to polish the trophy for the 1969 through 1971 seasons. Newfield Swim Club was the team to beat from 1972 through 1979. But, The Lake Club did just that and housed the coveted prize for the entire decade of the 1980’s and into the 1990’s, unsuspecting that Roxbury Swim Club had forged a special niche for it to call home ... and it resided there comfortably from 1991 until 2003. The 2003 County Championship meet was a “nail biter” to say the least. At the end of the freestyle relay, the crowd looked to body language for the answer: who won? ... Rocky? ... Roxbury, again? ... then, all of a sudden, Terry Lowe was in the pool! There was no doubt! Rocky Point ended its 35-year hiatus and captured the County Championship crown! The glory was short-lived though, as Roxbury regained the title in 2004.

League membership grew slowly at first, reaching eleven clubs on the roster by 1955. In the 1950’s, when membership was still small, the FCSL enhanced its schedule with outside meets, including championship challenge-matches against the Westchester Swimming League (won 2, lost 2) and “telephone meets” against leagues in places like Columbus, Ohio (won it easily), Detroit (lost by 2 points), Philadelphia (lost by 20), and Los Angeles (“They creamed us!”). These telephone meets featured simultaneous starts (three swimmers per league) by firing a gun over an open telephone circuit, comparing times, and awarding matched sets of special ribbons at both locations. The ribbons were printed in Jackson Smith’s basement, and a good time was had by all!

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## BRIEF HISTORY OF THE FCSL cont'd

Membership expanded to 26 clubs by 1960, as a result of the great club and pool building boom of the late 1950's. When the League began, all events were 25's except for the 16 & Under 50 freestyle. IM's were not a part of the original format, and there were 6 & Under events across the pool, as well as at the beginning of the meet before the lane ropes (not lane lines!) were put up in the pool. As the League grew, so did the program: competitive divisions were formed; new events were added; consolation heats were added to the championship meet (1970); diving age groups were increased from two to three, and then to four in 1977. Three-meter diving was added as an official event in the Championships in 1974. In 1985, Water Polo was introduced to the FCSL team offerings, with the first age-group championship series held in 1988. In that year the Mini Championship went to Rocky Point Club; the Junior Championship was won by the Tokeneke Club; and, the Senior Championship was awarded to the team from Burning Tree.

In 2020 the Covid pandemic required new procedures for social distancing and sanitizing to enable FCSL to run virtual meets. A new app, *Swimmingly*, was introduced on our cell phones to time swim races without needing to use paper timers' slips, with the times sent to and collated by iPad then transmitted to the app database. By 2023, while many of the larger clubs had returned to using stopwatches and paper, the FCSL Board still meets virtually by Zoom, but the June Kickoff & August Annual League meetings are back to in-person attendance.

In 1997, the Fairfield County Swimming League was incorporated in the State of Connecticut as a non-stock, non-profit corporation. League dues, which started out as \$50 per club in 1949, have increased over the years to accommodate the level of sophistication necessary to adapt to the technology and reality of our world in the 21<sup>st</sup> century. And, it is widely believed, League members are still having fun!

And, "fun" is a key word here. "Fun," rather than competition, has been the objective of the League from its inception. Fun for the children, fun for their families, and even fun for the coaches and staff of the member clubs. Each dual meet has traditionally been a social event between clubs, often ending with a cook-out or social gathering of some sort. The competition is meant to be the means to the end: fun. But the League's objectives also include providing an opportunity to encourage the development of skills, and a sense of self-worth and pride, coupled with life lessons in the importance of team work and the ability to win and to lose with grace and dignity.

"Rules don't make things right; people make things right." But, rules are a "necessary evil" and the League has adapted as its base the rules and safety standards established by the U.S.A. Swimming, U.S.A. Diving and U.S. Water Polo organizations and the Department of Health and Public Safety of the State of Connecticut. The FCSL is fortunate to have the *right* people on board as well. Training opportunities for FCSL coaches and referees have been established to enable them to perform their roles with a level of professionalism that has served the members well over the years. The League has enjoyed the support of parents on the deck as volunteers and as positive role models for our children. The Fairfield County Swimming League has, and always has had, every reason to be proud of its family of competitors, their fans, and their coaches.

*Originally written by Susan Guthrie Ceresa*

*FCSL President*

*June 2002 - August 2004*

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As 31 FCSL clubs approach the starting blocks for the next season,  
we are still endeavoring to support aquatics fun.

The FCSL Board of Governors expresses our appreciation to all FCSL supporters for their  
extraordinary efforts on behalf of our children.