

Men's Swimming and Diving | 5/8/2020 1:00:00 PM

Indiana Swimming and Diving Mourns the Loss of David Tanner



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[PHOTO GALLERY](#)

BLOOMINGTON, Ind. – David Alun Tanner and his twin brother Joe were born on Jan. 21, 1950 in Danville, Ill. to the late Megan and Bill Tanner. He grew up with and is survived by his four brothers, Jim, Joe, Tom, and John in an idyllic, central Illinois rural setting surrounded by mature trees, ponds, fertile farm fields and close family. He graduated from Danville High School in 1968 where upon his academic promise and athletic potential received attention from legendary IU swim coach James "Doc" Counsilman. He was recruited to Doc's program at Indiana University and the rest as they say "is history." He physically left Danville for Bloomington though throughout his life he steadfastly stated that while he "lived in Bloomington, he was actually from Danville, Illinois." Thus, he never really left home and recently returned there to end his fight against lymphoma.

David, or Dave to many, quickly embraced Bloomington and the IU experience even though at the time, he recognized that he'd likely be a bench warmer with Olympians and multiple world record holders as teammates. But he reasoned that it gave him an advantage by being able to observe the very best do what they do. Despite sitting on the bench, over the next fifty years, his teammates universally perceived Dave as the glue that bound thirty-some years of the Counsilman-era swimmers together. He became the team archivist, the Counsilman historian, the event planner, and the perpetuator of all things Counsilman. Perhaps most importantly to him, he became a devoted friend, affectionate caregiver and valued confidante to both Doc, Marge and the Counsilman family.

Following his graduation from IU (Phi Beta Kappa), David began almost immediately to build and express his personal legacy and

lifetime. David became an embodiment of the National Park Service's "take only memories & pictures, leave only footprints." He rarely

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things to do, and valued that above the virtual reality offered by today's technology. Training anywhere in Bloomington with Dave became an exercise in patience as eight out of ten people passed not only knew him but admired him and the ideals by which he lived.

It is important to be mentioned that David earned his Eagle Scout rating from Troop 19 before leaving Danville. The Boy Scout manual states: "Eagle Scout" is not just an award; it is a state of being. Those who earned it as youth continue to earn it every day as adults. That is why an Eagle Scout IS an Eagle Scout—not was." David took this very seriously and it is evident that he lived his entire life as an eagle scout and a gentleman; someone whose conduct conforms to the highest standard of propriety and correct behavior. He didn't drink alcohol. He didn't smoke. But he frequently admitted that he had an "unhealthy crush on Wonder Woman."

There were clearly many facets to David's life, some well-known to all and some carefully and purposely hidden to all by him. Despite his own views on the matter, he was, in fact, by every measure, an elite, accomplished athlete. He held multiple state and national swim records (more than 100 Top Ten USMS Performances). Some of these records he held for decades. He completed some of the most ardent physical competitions ever arranged: the Western States 100, The Ironman at Kona, the Swim around Manhattan, and the Race Across America are just a few. He participated in trail runs, orienteering competitions, canoe races, open water competitions, kayak camping, river running and back country mountaineering. He never gave up. He never gave in. To quote his twin brother Joe, "David always was a very tough bird."

To really know David, you'd have to be aware of his academic accomplishments as well as his athletic ones. Over the years, he wasn't particularly forthcoming because he felt it made him appear "snooty." When someone who didn't know him well came looking for "Dr. Tanner" he would always respond in a private conspiratorial voice that "Dr Tanner is particularly busy today, but I'm Dave, how can I help you?" He held degrees from IU in Mathematics, Computer Science, Physics, Exercise Physiology, and Human Performance. In the truest sense of the word, he could honestly be described as a polymath. At IUB, David held various appointments and duties over the years. He was a computer programmer, data analyst, and statistical consultant. He was an outstanding instructor for multiple undergraduate courses in Exercise Science and Kinesiology. Perhaps most impressively, he mentored and was instrumental in assisting more than a dozen doctoral candidates complete their terminal degrees. Scholars from around the world recognized his expertise and his invaluable help in getting them through their difficult research projects. Some tried to hire him away from IU with no success. His loyalty to IU was boundless. A few interest areas in particular stand out: high altitude physiology, ventilatory mechanics, nutritional requirements of athletes, the physics of swimming, ventilatory motor performance are to name a few. He co-authored two books on the science of swimming and was an author and contributor to many, many peer reviewed research reports. He played an instrumental role in elevating the scholarship within the Kinesiology graduate program at IU from the late 1980s and onward.

David would tell you that the greatest reflection of his life efforts though, would be the Bloomington High School North Swim Program. David coached at North for more than two decades developing a program displaying characteristics in line with his personal beliefs. With David at the helm at North, winning really wasn't everything. To him, it was only ever a minor measure of success. David celebrated each and every athlete's progress regardless of the competitive outcomes of the races. He strove to build a "program legacy" whereby participation was most important element. His focus was centered on the lasting memories, the friendships formed and the unique traditions they embraced. Similar to what he observed and learned from Doc, his relationships with his swimmers had no expiration date. His focus was on the entire individual not specifically the athlete. David played the role of coach, mentor, teacher, role model, confidante, counselor and of course... friend. His time commitment was enormous, his commitment total. His coaching days began well before dawn and frequently he could be seen cycling home well after dark. According to his swimmers, his only fault, perhaps, was making them endure his daily "corny sense of humor." But in reality, they universally loved him for it.

David never married despite being frequently in love. If you were to conclude that he therefore didn't have a family, you'd be wrong. His family was Bloomington and his family eventually spanned the globe. His family consisted of all the swimmers who swam for him at North and all the swimmers who ever swam for IU. It included all the students he taught and all of the young scholars he helped. And, of course, his family included all of his brothers, their wives, children and grandchildren and his cousins in Wales.

David was a man of modest income and modest needs. Over his life he asked for so little and gave so much to so many. If you had to choose someone to save your life, no matter what ... David would be your guy. If you tied yourself to a rope and traversed a dangerous crevasse field, David would be your choice to be on the other end. He would never let up, never give in. He was a hidden giant among us who was never able to recognize the extent of esteem for him that was held by all who knew him well. Though much too short, his was a life well lived. David left us with great memories, many photographs and his many footprints on all of our lives. He will be greatly missed by his family, close friends and admirers within the Danville and Bloomington communities and around the world.

Indiana Head Swimming Coach *Ray Looze* on Dr. Tanner

"Dave Tanner was one of our most beloved swimming and diving alums. Indiana University swimmer, coach, professor, caretaker of

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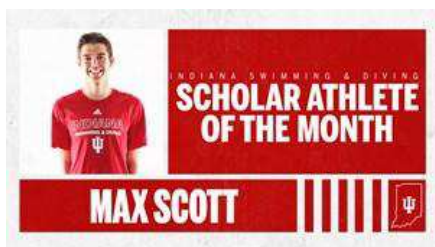
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