

# Tracy Clarkson at the US Spring Nationals

What an achievement by Brisbane Northside's (MSQ) very own Tracy Clarkson who competed in US Masters Swimming Spring Nationals (short course) in San Antonio, Texas.

Tracy is now a US Masters National Champion (twice) with amazing results:

- GOLD - 400yd IM
- GOLD - 50yd Backstroke
- SILVER - 100yd Backstroke
- SILVER - 200yd Backstroke
- SILVER - 500yd Freestyle
- BRONZE - 200yd Butterfly
- 3x Top10 Finishes in Relays.

## A Tale of Two Nationals

The following is the meet report by Tracy

This year, I was fortunate enough to be able to tick off a bucket list kind-of-a-thing and attend a US short course yards Nationals. The 25yd pool is unique to the US and the short course season runs over the winter. I had not swum short course yards for almost 50 years. I was in a new age group and our Nationals in Hobart were short course and only two weeks before the US Spring Nationals in San Antonio, Texas. The week after Hobart, I flew off to the US. I spent a few days in Coronado, California to visit a friend from high school and I managed a few swims as well. Then it was off to San Antonio.



Wow, what a ride! They say in America, they do things big in Texas and the Spring Nationals were certainly big! The meet was over four days, the 23rd to the 26th of April, but I did not enter the 1000yds or 1650yds on the first day. (Some people did both!) There were almost 2000 competitors in the meet.

The facilities were amazing. They were part of the sports facilities of a large school district, and had two 50m pools, one indoor and one outdoor. The indoor pool (20+ sc yard lanes) and the diving pool (6 sc yard lanes) were used for warm ups and swim downs and there was a 25yard three lane pool that only over 65s could use. (It was handy when the others got very busy!) For the races, we swam across the outdoor 50m pool in two different 10 lane courses, ODD and EVEN, depending on your heat number.

As this was an odd numbered year, the men's events were run first for the whole meet (by age group and times, so you always swam with your age group) followed by the women. (For example, all 20 lanes would be used for the men's 50 fly until they were all completed, then the women would do their 50 fly in the 20 lanes, and so on). Next year, it will reverse.

I joined USMS in January and swam for the Colonials 1776 team, out of Philadelphia with a friend I had swum with as a teenager on the Vesper Boat Club swim team in the 60's. So, I also did 4 relays in addition to my 6 events.



Because they have such big Nationals, they have qualifying times. Anyone can swim any three events in the meet, but to swim the other three, they must meet the qualifying times. (If the meet gets too big, you must nominate your least favourite event to not swim, in case they need to remove it – this did not happen at this meet).

Organisation is a bit different, too. Online entry is like ours and plenty of information comes out before the meet. Here, any event 200yds and over must be pre-entered (online or at the pool) by set times stated, usually up to an hour before the day's events start. (You can do them all when you arrive – it took less than a minute, or online the week of the meet). This allows those not coming not to be included, or if you change your mind – there are almost no empty lanes in the long events. The heat sheets are posted for these events (and any relay event, which also have cut off times) all over the venue after the cut-off time. Again, you are always swimming with your age group.

After the obligatory waiver signing (one for liability and the other stating that you will follow the rules like going in feet first and looking out for others in the warm up pools and not shaving in any of the locker rooms!), you collect your goodie bag and head in to a shady spot. (They have very Brisbane like summer weather at this time in San Antonio). Some teams rented shade tents for the duration.

It is your responsibility to get to your correct heat and lane before the swim. There is no marshaling here! (Most USMS swimmers are appalled by that thought, as it reminds them of their age-group swimming, when they were kids. They are adults now!)

You swim your swim and have to jump out of the pool very quickly – no time to catch your breath! (This pool had flush edges, so it was not too bad. If you were in an outside lane, you could exit on the steps and they let the older swimmers take time to get to the steps.) There were no over the top starts at all. Also, you did not need permission to exit – you just finish and get out. [On this note, they had an automatic timing system run through the blocks and touch pads; the back up system was with the automatic start and red plungers we use in Australia, and the timekeepers also used stopwatches. The results were available amazingly quickly on Meet Mobile – as soon as your age group heat/s finished, it was there, with splits and all.] Also, the meet was live streamed in video while the meet was going. Also, to keep track of which heat was on, you could use an app called MeetBop on your phone. It was refreshed about every 30 seconds. (I do think there were a large number of people working the computers, and any missed times (if people didn't touch hard enough or in the right place) were sorted very quickly.)

The days' events would proceed at a frenetic pace and the announcer never stopped. He would give out information and alert you to record attempts and ex-Olympians, etc. He was very enthusiastic!



Having participated in our Nationals in Hobart two weeks prior, it was interesting to compare. I did like the 25yd pool (it was nice and short) but in a mixed relay I was in, I felt like I was surfing at each end of the pool, with the waves the “big boys” created. I managed to do well in my age group, picking up gold in the 400yd IM and 50yd back, silver in the 100yd and 200yd back and 500yd freestyle and bronze in the 200yd fly. I also picked up 3 top 10 medals in three of the four relays I was in. So, I got a full set. They give out top 10 medals for all events and judging from how serious many (most!) of the swimmers are, it is hard to get one of those in the younger age groups, mainly under 60, when the Title IX law was passed allowing women to get the same swimming scholarships as the men, at the universities and colleges, post high school, which also have amazing swim programmes. A lot of the younger masters swimmers have never stopped.

To ensure our safety, lifeguards are posted on the edge of the pool with a flexible buoy, and more than once I was asked if I was OK while I was catching my breath before hopping out! They are really on the job!

If you win a medal, you go up to a wall and unpeel the sticker with your name, event, time and place on it, take it to the award table and they put the sticker on your wrapped medal. You always know what event you got your medal for.

My friend from Philadelphia, Steph, encouraged me to sign up for the “Gold Medal Sponsor” VIP area. We paid \$90, and during the meet, we could go to a designated area where drinks and meals were provided all during the meet. It was shady and turned out to be a good place to meet and talk to people. Top items were the BBQ brisket, coffee, ice-cold water bottles, and fresh fruit. Some of the sweets were nice too. Each day had a menu with a different theme.



It was a great experience to attend a short course yards Nationals in the US and it was interesting to see how things are done in other countries. Have a go if you get the chance.

A few QBN members are planning to go to South Africa to swim in their Nationals next year in March. It will be interesting to see how they do things.

**Tracy Clarkson**