

Nomination for Coach Edward Nessel for Come Back from Adversity Award – 2016

Coach Edward Nessel Receives the 2016 Florida LMSC Overcoming Adversity Award

by Dorothy Greenberg

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I've been swimming with the Space Coast Aquanauts since July, 2012. Coach Nessel has been my coach and swim mate the entire time. He has taught me a tremendous amount about swimming, health and physical conditioning. His knowledge and leadership has helped to improve my swimming efficiency in every way. He's coached and helped hundreds of swimmers before me. That Coach Nessel is a very knowledgeable and effective coach, swimmer and health professional is not a secret. What is less well known is how Coach has battled back from adversity, in more ways and for more times than most people are ever challenged. This included the death of two young children, followed by his wife, after a long and debilitating illness. However, on Saturday, March 23, 2016, unbeknownst to all of us, the Coach was about to experience his most personal critical challenge that no one, including the Coach, saw coming.

The day began much like other Saturdays. It was a beautiful, sunny Florida morning. Our team was swimming long course and about 10 minutes into the warm up, as I approached the wall at the end of a set, I could see, out of the corner of my eye, Coach trying to exit the pool from the side, rather than finishing the lap at the wall. Why was he doing that? In a matter of seconds I watched Coach attempt to climb out, wobble and then fall back into the water and go under. He was also making a terrible heaving sound. My first thought was that he was having a stroke.

Immediately, Coach Mitzi Kremer, who very fortunately decided to join our Team for the swim that day, was already directing the lifeguards to get Coach Nessel out of the water. As everyone was running towards Coach, I ran into the YMCA to call 911. By the time I returned to the pool, Coach was unconscious on deck. He wasn't breathing and was clearly in cardiac distress. Under the direction of Coach Kremer, the AED was located and put into service with three electric shocks while several teammates rotated doing chest compressions. By the time the Paramedics finally showed up and took over, the situation looked dire. As the ambulance rushed to the hospital, the Team, still wet from the pool, followed. It all seemed surreal. This couldn't be happening.

We were later to find out that Coach Nessel did not have a heart attack. He had an unexplainable cardiac arrest; the type that about 95% of people don't survive. Coach went through a lot while in intensive care and two weeks in the hospital, including having a defibrillator implanted in his chest. Even when it was clear that he was "out of the woods," we were all worried about lingering effects, including serious impairment of his short-term memory due to oxygen deprivation.

Almost beyond belief, Coach Nessel battled back in a big way. In exactly one month, on April 23, he returned to the pool; the site of his instant death and resuscitation. And he got in the water and swam. Within two weeks of this return, Coach was up to doing the full work out. Despite cracked cartilage in his ribcage, overcoming pneumonia, recovering from the defibrillator implantation and numerous other procedures and the overall trauma, he was back. I can't imagine how much courage it took to do that!

Several of us played a part in the Coach's survival on that beautiful spring morning in March. And there is no doubt that prompt and appropriate medical attention, and the Coach's excellent physical conditioning, healthy living practices, and use of nutritional supplements, all played a part in his recovery. However, I can't help but believe that his indomitable spirit and "must-do" attitude was what really got him back in the pool and working out again so quickly. Eventually, the Coach's memory improved; we can no longer make him believe that we had already finished a set which we hadn't even started. His survival and recovery has been miraculous. Our Coach, Ed Nessel, has not only overcome the odds and survived great adversity, but truly is a testament to living life full throttle and thriving...no matter what.