

Barry Darke

NSW and Australian freestyle champion

When I was swimming well I was single-minded – there was nothing else except me, the water and the way I was moving. At times I felt like I could almost breathe under water – it was euphoric.

Barry Darke (born 1935) grew up on Blaxcell Street, Granville, and from a young age came across to the pool to play. Here Barry was noticed by local amateur coach Tom Penny, who offered to teach Barry to swim, and later became his coach, continuing in that role until Barry stopped competitive swimming. Within a month of learning to swim aged seven, Barry was swimming a mile. Barry 'simply loved to swim', and with Tom Penny's help, he became an extraordinarily successful swimmer at a young age.

In 1949 Barry won the State 440 yards Junior championship, and swam the best time ever recorded by an Australian under 14 years. In the 1949/50 season, Barry won one Australian, two NSW and eight club championships, and became the youngest swimmer ever to win the NSW 880 yards Senior freestyle championship. Several State titles and records followed.

Barry was the first Australian Junior swimmer to swim 110 yards in less than one minute. In one sensational 1650 yards swim at the 1951 State championships, Barry broke seven Australian records. Former Olympian Fanny Durack called it 'the greatest swim Australia has ever seen.' In the 1951 Australian championships in Melbourne, Barry won the 1650 yards and 880 yards Senior and 440yd Junior titles. In 1952 many considered Darke a world-class swimmer in his age group, but unfortunately Barry, then aged only 15, did not attend the 1952 Helsinki Olympic Games on advice that he should wait until 1956.



Above: Barry Darke shakes hands with coach Tom Penny, 1951
Courtesy of Bruce Horlyck

Below: Telegram from the Marshall family, congratulating Barry Darke on smashing John Marshall's 800m and 1500m records at the State championships, January 1951
Courtesy of Barry Darke



Right: Barry Darke's winning stroke, *The Australian Amateur*, June 1951
Courtesy of Bruce Horlyck

Left: Barry Darke and the NSW team on their way to the Australian championships in Melbourne, 1951
Courtesy of Barry Darke

Below left: Barry diving at a Legacy Swimming Carnival at North Sydney, watched by coach Tom Penny (on right)
Courtesy of Barry Darke

