

It's time to build a bigger pool

Caymanian Compass Editorial by Guy Harrison

As the Cayman Islands Amateur Swimming Association continues its effort to build a 50-metre pool in Grand Cayman, it is worth noting the significant demand that exists for such a pool. Two weeks ago parents began lining up at 7am for a 10am swim class registration at the Lions Aquatic Centre. This year, like every other year in recent memory, children were turned away primarily because the pool at the Lions Aquatic Centre is too small (25 metres). There is also a clear need for more coaches. As a nation of islands, learn-to-swim and competitive swim programmes are obviously a valid pursuit. As many members of our population as possible should be competent swimmers. Furthermore, swimming is an activity with a strong fitness orientation. In a time when increasing numbers of our young people consume too much junk food and do little exercise, sports such as swimming should be promoted and supported. When there is a clear desire from hundreds, even thousands, to participate, both government and the private sector should seize the opportunity to contribute to society in this manner.

There are two valid reasons for the construction of a 50-meter pool in Grand Cayman. First, the doubling of space will allow for more classes with more swimmers at a given time. Swimmers, particularly young swimmers, will be less crowded and the learn-to-swim programme will be more productive. Second, Cayman's elite junior swimmers have proven themselves internationally. They have won boatloads of medals at CARIFTA, the region's premier age-group competition, and many of them have recorded times that rank alongside swimmers their age in the United States and United Kingdom. Our swimmers have achieved this level of success despite training in a 25 metre pool. Athletes are at a tremendous disadvantage when the training environment differs radically from the competitive environment. Imagine track and field athletes training exclusively on a 200 metre track and then showing up to compete for medals on a standard 400 metre track. A 50-metre pool undoubtedly boost an already thriving programme.

This year, Andrew Mackay, a Cayman Prep high school student, became the first Caymanian swimmer ever to qualify for the Olympic Games. He is expected to compete in Athens next summer and the moment he hits the water in Greece a new era in Cayman Islands swimming will be launched. We must ask, however, if that new era will see the rise of many Caymanian swimming Olympians. It likely could be if the grassroots success of the Cayman Islands Amateur Swimming Association is nurtured and allowed to blossom.