

Pat Spinola



It is almost impossible to talk about swimming in the city of Norwalk without mentioning the name **Pat Spinola**, who left his imprint on the sport as both an athlete and later as a coach.

A Norwalker his entire life, the 58-year-old Spinola grew up in the Whistleville and Strawberry Hill sections of the city and it wasn't long before he made a name for himself in local pools. Spinola was a standout diver on the Norwalk YMCA swim team, which won the 1954 state championship, and in 1953 and '54 he was the state YMCA and AAU diving champion for 16 and under. Also in '54, Spinola, only 15, placed third at the New England AAU Men's Diving Championships at Yale competing against high school and even college divers.

When Spinola got to Norwalk High School swimming wasn't offered, but by his senior year in 1957 he became co-captain of the first ever NHS swim team. He was also a three-year starter and senior captain on the soccer team, which won the county championship and reached the state finals.

Spinola later enjoyed equal success on the coaching level. He returned to his alma mater to coach the Norwalk High boys' swim team from 1965-'87, compiling a glossy 143-93-2 record while being named Coach of the Year by the Connecticut High School Coaches Association in 1986. He also coached the NHS girls' swim team from 1981-'85, going 32-8.

Recognizing the need for a successful feeder program, Spinola also coached the Norwalk YMCA boys' swim team from 1968-'70. In his seven years as coach, Spinola's swimmers also won eight state and New England divisional titles. Then in 1975, Spinola co-founded the Norwalk Aquatic Club with Betty Philcox and was co-head coach with her for 10 years.

But Spinola's involvement in local sports doesn't end with swimming. From 1961-'63, he managed the Strawberry Hill AC baseball team, winning the city championship with a club that featured Bobby Schaeffer, Ralph DiMeglio, Don Mendence, and former UConn All-American Bill Steven. Also in the early '60s, Spinola coached the Laurels in the YMCA Bidy Basketball League, and was an assistant on the all-star team, which won the state and New England championships.

A teacher the last 32 years, Spinola currently teaches physical education and is the boys' athletic director at Norwalk High. From 1992-'96, he also coached the NHS boys' soccer and boys' outdoor track teams, going 51-28 in track and leading the Bears to two FCIAC runner-up finishes.

But Spinola's contribution in athletics is exceeded only by his active involvement in a number of community organizations. He was Oyster Festival director from 1986-'91, and from 1981-'95 he was on the Norwalk Seaport Association board of directors, serving as president the last two years. Spinola was also named the Italian-American Man of the Year in 1988, and in 1990 received the Red Cross Volunteer of the Year award for his work as lifeguard trainer.

In addition, he's been a member of the FCIAC board of directors since 1992, and is on the executive board of the Connecticut Association of Athletic Directors. And in his latest project, Spinola is currently president of the Norwalk High School Alumni Association.

Spinola and his wife, the former Ada Sandall, have four children.