

A victory lap for ASU's swim coach

Herbie Behm has gone from sleeping in a bathtub for swim meets as a student to coaching the men's and women's teams to the NCAA championships

By Scott Bordow, ASU News
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Herbie Behm will never forget the night he slept in a hotel bathtub.

It was 2010, and Behm was a sophomore on Arizona State University's men's swimming team. Just two years earlier, the program had been discontinued because of budget constraints, and then reinstated thanks to a massive grassroots fundraising campaign.

Still, money was tight.

Actually, tight isn't the right word. Every penny saved was precious. So, when the Sun Devils traveled to Southern California for a dual meet, the 18 swimmers stayed six to a room.

The room was packed and noisy, so Behm grabbed a few couch cushions and walked slowly into the bathroom.

"I took the cushions because they were the best option to make the bathtub into a bed," Behm said. "I remember coach saying, 'Anybody who has an air mattress, bring it.' We were all piled in the room."

As he laid down in the tub and tried to fall asleep, Behm thought about his race the next day against USC's Vladimir Morozov, a Pac-12 champion and eventual Olympic bronze medalist.

"I was like, 'This guy didn't have to sleep in a tub. He's going to destroy me,'" Behm recalled.

Fast-forward 16 years.

Behm is now the head coach for ASU's men's and women's swimming and diving programs, which just won their [second consecutive Big 12 conference titles](#), respectively, and will compete in the NCAA championships the next two weeks in Atlanta.

The student-athletes no longer have to sleep on air mattresses or in bathtubs. They don't sell \$20 raffle tickets during winter break to help raise money, as Behm and his teammates did.

And when Behm tells them about the not-so-good-old days, they smile, and he thinks he sounds like the grandfather who tells his grandchildren how he used to walk four miles through snow every day to school.

Behm, however, looks back on those experiences with fondness — “it was really, really fun” — and an appreciation for how they bonded him to his teammates, the program and ASU.

“I think having the personal attachment,” he said, “makes things so much better.”

Learning from the best

Most athletes can't pinpoint the exact moment they knew they would become a coach.

Behm can.

It was 2013, the spring semester of his senior year. ASU's sprint coach left the team to coach in Brazil, and the sprinters were given an option: They could practice with the distance swimmers or coach themselves.

The sprinters decided to go at it on their own. Behm wrote down the workouts, bought a stopwatch for timing and became the de facto coach.

The result: The sprint team broke two school records, and Behm had the best season of his collegiate career.

“For me, that was a huge confidence boost,” Behm said. “I always knew I wanted to be a coach but, honestly, we never really swam fast until we kind of (did it ourselves).”

“So that was when I thought, ‘I can coach.’”

Following college, Behm coached at the Phoenix Swim Club and the University of Utah before returning to ASU as an assistant in 2018 under head coach Bob Bowman, who, of course, was the longtime coach of 23-time Olympic gold medalist Michael Phelps.

It was like learning how to paint from Pablo Picasso.

“I'm super grateful for that whole experience,” Behm said. “I definitely learned a lot about professionalism, how to kind of organize things and run practices, and the attention to detail that's so important with those things.

“It was really cool to be able to view ... how he does things. I learned more than I could have really expected.”

On March 30, 2024, ASU's men's swimming and diving team won its first national championship. The team returned home the next day — a Sunday — and an exhausted Behm decided he was going to stay home Monday and take the day off.

But sometime around 8 a.m. he received a call from Bowman.

“Hey, can you come in?” Bowman asked.

“I was like, ‘What? I’m still hungover,’” Behm said.

Behm threw on a T-shirt and a pair of basketball shorts, thinking he would talk to Bowman about whatever Bowman wanted to talk about and then head back home.

But when he got to the Mona Plummer Aquatic Complex, Bowman told him he was leaving to become the swim coach at the University of Texas, and that Jim Rund, ASU’s senior vice president for Educational Outreach and Student Services, wanted to talk to him.

Rund offered Behm the head coaching job. Behm, dressed in, as he put it, “the equivalent of pajamas,” accepted.

Less than four hours had passed.

“It was a dramatically different day than I expected,” Behm said.

Coaching fraternity

Behm is one of nine head coaches who earned degrees at ASU, the others being men’s golf coach Matt Thurmond, water polo coach Petra Pardi, football coach Kenny Dillingham, diving coach Marc Briggs, baseball coach Willie Bloomquist, hockey coach Greg Powers, women’s golf coach Missy Farr Kaye and wrestling coach Zeke Jones.

Each coach’s journey back to ASU has been different. Behm’s story arc is just a bit wider.

“There have unfortunately been a lot of teams that have been cut, and there’s been a similar rally to keep them going, but this was the only one where it really caught wind,” Behm said.

“That history, and all of the people who were here when I swam and are still here for the program, there’s a special connection. Coming back here and being a part of this is just a really cool thing.”

This story originally appeared on [ASU News](#).

Main image



ASU coach Herbie Behm is interviewed for ESPN after the swim and dive team took home the Big 12 conference title in February. Photo courtesy of ASU Athletics

Text image(s)



ASU alum Herbie Behm has led the swimming and diving teams to the 2026 NCAA championships. Photo courtesy of ASU Athletics