

UFA 2 [see also FOP 2]  
Interviewee: Tracy Caulkins  
Interviewer: Paula Welch  
Date: August 26, 1996

W: I saw [the] 1980 and 1984 [Olympic Games]. What I would like to do is ask you just a few things about [the] 1980 [Games] and your reaction and opinion of the boycott. What was that?

C: I remember when I first heard that there was a possibility of a boycott. I was concerned, but I never really thought that it would happen. I remember hearing the announcement and was very disappointed. At seventeen I did not really understand what it was all about. I felt fortunate that I was young enough to where [as] I knew I could try again, where a lot of people were not. I did not feel like I was in a position to do anything about it. It was frustrating for my swimming. A lot of the motivation was lost because I had trained so long for the Olympics, and I thought that in 1980 I would have the opportunity to fulfill that dream of going to the Olympics, but I did not. That was disappointing and I think it hurt my motivation a little bit, but I felt fortunate to be able to continue to swim. I wanted to swim in college and so I was able to do that. [The] 1984 [Games], brought back a lot of memories of the 1980 boycott because many of my teammates on the Honorary Olympic Team in 1980 tried in 1984. Quite a few made it, but a lot did not. A lot [of them] made a lot of sacrifices. It was real emotional because going to [the] 1984 [Games] was so great and a really neat experience. I finally realized what we missed out on in 1980. At the same time I thought, well, if I had gone in 1980 and I had done very well, I do not know if I would have been as motivated as I was [swimming] for the University of Florida. I think I would have been, but you never know what might have happened. In a way I feel real fortunate that one, I was able to continue to train and had the opportunities here at the University that I did, and two, that I was able to make the team and realize that dream when a lot of [other] people did not.

W: When you think about Los Angeles, what comes to mind immediately [about] the Olympic Games in 1984?

C: I think the spirit of our swim team and of the fans-- the energy that was there. It was unlike anything that I had experienced before. I think when you grow up watching the Olympics on TV you sense that energy and that atmosphere, but you really do not know what it is like until you are right there in the middle of it. I think of the colors and the flags and the people. I think probably my most memorable swim was my first race. I was very nervous. I remember before I went to report to the ready room, which is where the eight finalists reported about fifteen minutes before they swam, I remember Randy Reese [Randolph Reese, Head Swimming Coach, University of Florida, 1976-1990] was there. He said, I want you to come and talk to me before you go to the ready room. I was pretty

nervous and I was expecting this big pep talk from Randy. I had trained for so long for this and I was expecting him to say, well, here it is, it is coming down to these last minutes and this is your chance. I walked up to him and he gave me a kiss on the cheek and said, well, have fun "Trace". I was [thinking], wait a minute. That was probably the best advice that anyone could have given me because I realized that I was as prepared as I was going to be. I could not do anything else except enjoy it and celebrate all of the training and all of the work that we had put into it. I think that was probably the most exciting race for me. I think the most memorable time was after that race. What I had done did not really sink in at first. When they marched the athletes around the pool area up to the victory platform, I remember seeing a lot of real special people. I saw my high school P.E. teacher, friends and teammates, and my family. When I was up on the victory platform I really felt that I was not only there for myself and for my country, but there representing all of the people who had helped me and supported me. I was really glad that Randy was there and that my family was there. I remember being pretty proud when I stood up there and that I was pretty well composed and did not break down and cry too badly. Then when the national anthem came to a close and the flag came down, I turned around and the first person I saw was my sister. **Amy** was bawling, and I just lost it right then. I think that was real special to be able to share that with my family, several Florida teammates, Randy and with a lot of [other] people. You would look up into the stands and you would see somebody you know and you might see **Tiger Holmes** or somebody. I would wave and about 10,000 people would wave back. You are kind of like, no, no, the guy in the orange and blue. I think I remember that because I felt a lot of pressure in the first event. I was putting a lot of pressure on myself just because I expected a lot out of myself and I had trained for a long time. I did not know what it was going to be like being in the Olympics. You really do not know until you are right there. It was hard to contain that energy. You would dive in and you would just want to go. Swimming my first event, which was the 400 IM [Individual Medley], was pretty long, and I had to keep that high under control.

W: One other question. What was it like living in Olympic Village? Did you get to meet a lot of the other athletes?

C: Yes, I think that was really fun. You got to meet not only U.S. athletes in different sports and learn about other sports, but you also got to meet people from other countries. Some you could not understand, and they could not understand you, but there was enough non-verbal communication. Everybody was so happy. The volunteers were very pleasant. It was real fun. They had these trolleys that went around [the Village]. We were trying to save our legs and not get too tired--**Teresa Andrews**, who went to school here, **Cynthia Woodhead**, **Jill Sterkel** and I. I remember riding around on those trolleys and

looking at all of the different people. You would have a gymnast, then you would have a weight lifter and you would have the basketball players. [We would] try to guess what sport everybody did or what country they were from. Until they opened their mouths or you got close enough to see what their warm-up [suits] said or you saw on their badge what sport they played, you really did not know. That was kind of fun to determine what the story was with every individual that was there. That is what I think about. I think about the people and the celebration and the atmosphere of the whole thing. So that in the village was fun. Really, it was hard. I think part of the Olympic experience is to just meet people from other cultures. You really find out that they are a lot like you are, and they have the same desires, dreams, doubts and feelings that you have. It is kind of hard to not get caught up in that because you wanted to go around and see everything. I had felt like I was there to swim and to do [my] best. I had prepared a long time for that, but at the same time I wanted to enjoy the atmosphere. When we were finished with swimming, I think I probably enjoyed it a little bit more--the pin trading and things like that. I got business done with swimming. I was really glad swimming was early because I got to go watch a lot of the different sports. I got almost as excited, or more excited, during some of the other competitions as I did when I swam myself. I think I got more excited for some of my other teammates than I did for myself, which was a lot of fun.