

= Davis Tarwater =

Davis Edward Tarwater (born March 24 , 1984) is an American swimmer and Olympic gold medalist . He grew up in Knoxville , Tennessee and began competitive swimming at age seven . During high school , he set three state swimming records and led Webb School of Knoxville to the state title . In 2002 , he was named High School Swimmer of the Year .

Tarwater attended the University of Michigan , where he shifted his focus from the freestyle to the butterfly . He was a three @-@ time NCAA national champion and thirteen @-@ time All @-@ American . At Michigan , Tarwater set three Big Ten conference and six school records en route to six Big Ten titles . In his senior season , he won a Big Ten Medal of Honor for being the school 's top student @-@ athlete .

Tarwater has represented the United States in the World Championships three times , winning a gold medal as part of the 4 x 200 @-@ meter freestyle relay team in 2009 . He has won three individual and five relay national titles , and has finished in the top three more than fifteen times . In 2011 , he set an American record in the 200 @-@ meter butterfly , and as of 2012 jointly holds two additional national records in relay events . He qualified for the U.S. Olympic Trials in 2000 , 2004 , 2008 and 2012 . In 2004 , 2008 and 2012 , he narrowly missed making the Olympic team in the 200 @-@ meter butterfly . In 2012 , he finished seventh in the 200 @-@ meter freestyle and missed qualifying for the U.S. 4 x 200 @-@ meter freestyle relay team by one spot . Michael Phelps elected to scratch the 200 @-@ meter freestyle from his Olympic schedule , however , allowing Tarwater to make the team . At the 2012 Summer Olympics in London , Tarwater won a gold medal for his contributions in the heats of the 4 x 200 @-@ meter freestyle relay .

= = Early life = =

Tarwater was born March 24 , 1984 to Dwight and Mary Tarwater in Knoxville , Tennessee . He grew up in Knoxville , where his father worked as a lawyer . He is the oldest of three children . His grandfather , Richmond Flowers , Sr. , was Attorney General of Alabama from 1963 to 1967 . Tarwater 's uncle , Richmond Flowers , Jr . , was a world champion at the 110 @-@ meter hurdles and a safety in the National Football League from 1969 to 1973 .

Tarwater had his first swimming lesson at age four . He was reluctant to put his face underwater at first , but after 15 minutes he was swimming freely . By age seven , he was entering swimming competitions . As a young child , he was diagnosed with epilepsy . The family 's doctor encouraged Tarwater to keep swimming , and he eventually outgrew the condition . At age 10 , he won the Knoxville City Meet title in the 25 @-@ yard butterfly for his age group . In 1993 , Tarwater won the 10 @-@ year @-@ old and younger 50 @-@ meter butterfly at the AAU Junior Olympic Games . As a congratulations , he got a personal letter from Olympic gold medalist Melvin Stewart . His father later said the [letter] got Davis really excited about swimming . The next year , Tarwater joined the Pilot Aquatic Club and began to compete on the national stage .

Tarwater played baseball and basketball , and ran track before deciding the concentrate on swimming during seventh grade . In 1999 , he won both the 800- and 1500 @-@ meter freestyle events at the Junior Nationals , beating Michael Phelps in the latter . He qualified for his first U.S. Olympic Trials in 2000 at age 16 . At the Trials , Tarwater finished 32nd in the 400 @-@ meter freestyle and 30th in the 1500 @-@ meter freestyle .

In 2001 , Tarwater finished third at the Summer Nationals in the 1500 @-@ meter freestyle . He represented the United States at the 2001 Goodwill Games and was named " Athlete of the Year " by Southeastern Swimming Local Swimming Committee . The United States placed third at the Games , earning Tarwater a team bronze medal .

The following year , Tarwater led his high school ? Webb School of Knoxville ? to its first (and only) state swimming title before graduating in the spring . At the state finals , he broke the Tennessee 500 @-@ yard freestyle record by five seconds and also captured the 100 @-@ yard butterfly state record . At the U.S. Spring National Championships , Tarwater made the finals in four events . He placed third in the 200 @-@ meter butterfly , sixth in the 1500 @-@ meter freestyle , and eighth in

both the 400- and the 800 @-@ meter freestyle events .

Tarwater was a nine @-@ time high school All @-@ American and was the 2002 High School Swimmer of the Year . In addition to the 100 @-@ yard butterfly and 500 @-@ yard freestyle , he also set the 200 @-@ yard freestyle state record during high school . After graduation , he was inducted into the school 's hall of fame .

= = College career = =

Tarwater attended the University of Michigan from 2002 to 2006 , where he earned a bachelor 's degree in political science . During his first year , coach Jon Urbanek began entering Tarwater in butterfly events . " I was a distance freestyler in high school , so ... at first it was a difficult adjustment " , Tarwater said of the move . " But it was what the team needed , and it let me contribute as a freshman . " During the summer , he was selected to represent the United States at the 2003 Pan American Games where he placed sixth in the 400 @-@ meter freestyle .

Urbanek 's decision and Tarwater 's training started to pay dividends in 2004 . That year , Tarwater set his first conference record by swimming the 200 @-@ yard butterfly in 1 : 43 @.@ 46 en route to the Big Ten title . He was part of the university 's 4 x 200 @-@ meter freestyle team that took first place at the NCAA Championships . The group 's time of 7 : 01 @.@ 42 set a new U.S. Open record . In individual events , Tarwater took fourth place in the 200 @-@ meter butterfly and eighth in the 100 @-@ meter butterfly .

Tarwater qualified for the 2004 U.S. Olympic Trials and finished fourth in the 200 @-@ meter butterfly , missing the Olympics by less than half a second . He also made the final in the 100 @-@ meter butterfly , finishing seventh .

Bob Bowman took over as head coach of Michigan for the 2004 ? 05 season . He put Tarwater on a new training program , with a greater focus on speed training and less on distance . " We 've also put him through weight training , and I think it 's been improving his speed " , Bowman said . " He has a very strong work ethic and always wants to improve . Instead of just getting in the pool and doing what we tell him to do , he actually thinks about it and asks questions . He wants to know the theory behind what he 's doing . " Tarwater won the 2005 NCAA championship in the 200 @-@ yard butterfly . His time of 1 : 42 @.@ 30 was a Michigan and Big Ten record , and the third fastest time in NCAA history . In the 100 @-@ meter butterfly , he placed fourth .

In the spring , Tarwater won the US National Championship in the 200 @-@ meter butterfly with a time of 1 : 51 @.@ 78 , and placed fourth in the 100 @-@ meter butterfly . At Summer Nationals , Tarwater placed second in the 100 @-@ meter butterfly and was part of the National Championship winning 4 x 100 @-@ meter freestyle relay team . At the 2005 World Championships , he narrowly missed out on the medals , finishing fourth in the 200 @-@ meter butterfly . At the 2005 Duel in the Pool , Tarwater won the silver medal in both the 100 @-@ meter and 200 @-@ meter butterfly events . At the end of the season , he was ranked eighth in the world at the 200 @-@ meter butterfly and 20th at the 100 @-@ meter butterfly .

In 2006 , Tarwater repeated as NCAA champion in the 200 @-@ yard butterfly , swimming the race in 1 : 41 @.@ 84 and improving his own Big Ten record . He narrowly missed the NCAA record , coming up six @-@ hundredths of a second short . He also finished fourth in the 100 @-@ yard butterfly , and was part of the second place 4 x 200 @-@ yard freestyle relay team . At the end of the season , the Detroit Athletic Club named Tarwater as the " Michigan Male College Athlete of the Year " for his combined achievements in sport , academics , and community service .

During his college career , Tarwater was a 13 @-@ time All @-@ America selection . He was a first team All @-@ Big Ten member all four years of college , and received Academic All @-@ Big Ten honors in 2004 , 2005 , and 2006 . For his 2006 senior year , he was awarded the Big Ten Medal of Honor for being the top student @-@ athlete at Michigan . He finished his college career with three Big Ten individual titles , three conference relay titles , and three conference records : the 100 @-@ yard butterfly (46 @.@ 16) , the 200 @-@ yard butterfly (1 : 41 @.@ 84) , and the 4 x 200 @-@ yard freestyle relay (6 : 18 @.@ 11) . He was part of three additional school records for relay performances (4 x 100 @-@ yard freestyle , 4 x 50 @-@ yard medley , and 4 x 100 @-@ yard

medley) .

= = Post @-@ college swimming career = =

After graduation , Tarwater continued to train at the Michigan facilities with one goal in mind : qualifying for the 2008 Olympics . " I hadn 't intended to swim professionally after college , " he later said , " but I had continued to improve , " and it " made sense " financially to continue swimming . In August 2006 , he placed second in the 200 @-@ meter butterfly at the U.S. National Championships with a time of 1 : 57 @.@ 00 , qualifying him for the 2007 World Championships . He also teamed up with Klete Keller , Matthew Patton , and Alex Vanderkaay to win the 4 x 200 @-@ meter freestyle trophy , winning by more than six seconds . At the end of the season , Tarwater was ranked 13th in the world at the 200 @-@ meter butterfly and 34th at the 100 @-@ meter butterfly .

At the World Championships in March 2007 , Tarwater turned in the second @-@ fastest time in the opening round of the 200 @-@ meter butterfly . In the semi @-@ finals , he placed tenth , missing the finals by 0 @.@ 11 seconds . Later in 2007 , Tarwater won his second National Championship in the 200 @-@ meter butterfly . He led the race from start to finish , beating Gil Stovall by 1 @.@ 1 seconds . " It was a good race , " he said . " I felt really in control . I felt a lot stronger and a lot better . " At the same event , Tarwater joined Michael Phelps and two other Wolverine Aquatics teammates to win the 4 x 100 @-@ meter freestyle relay with a time of 3 : 17 @.@ 96 . Tarwater swam the team 's second @-@ fastest leg , behind Phelps . He also placed third in the 100 @-@ meter butterfly .

Tarwater won the 200 @-@ meter butterfly at the 2007 Duel in the Pool with a time of 1 : 57 @.@ 12 , and placed second in the 100 @-@ meter butterfly with a time of 52 @.@ 76 at the same event . At the Short Course National Championships , Tarwater teamed up with Michael Phelps , Peter Vanderkaay , and Chris DeJong to capture the 4 x 200 @-@ yard freestyle relay title . The quartet 's time of 6 : 12 @.@ 43 broke the American record by more than five seconds . Tarwater captured the silver medal in 100 @-@ meter butterfly at the event , and won the 200 @-@ yard butterfly title with a time of 1 : 41 @.@ 94 . He was also part of the second = place 4 x 100 @-@ medley relay . He finished the year ranked 11th in the 200 @-@ meter butterfly and 22nd in the 100 @-@ meter .

= = = 2008 Olympic Trials = = =

In preparation for the 2008 U.S. Olympic Trials , Tarwater trained at Michigan with Phelps , Peter Vanderkaay , and Erik Vendt , coached by Bowman and Urbanchekf . Shortly before the trials , he went the Olympic Training Center in Colorado Springs , Colorado to train at altitude . " I 'm better mentally than I 've ever been , " Tarwater said of his preparation . " Physically I 'm stronger than four years ago . " He entered the Trials as the number two seed in the 200 @-@ meter butterfly and was widely expected to make the U.S. Olympic team as the second qualifier behind Phelps . " For the last two years I have completely put everything in my life aside to try to make [my Olympic] dream come true , " he told a reporter . He also entered the trials as the fourth seed in the 100 @-@ meter butterfly and qualified for the 100- and 200 @-@ meter freestyle .

In the preliminary round of the 200 @-@ meter butterfly , Tarwater turned in the fastest time , acknowledging that nerves played a role in his fast swim . In the semi @-@ finals , he achieved a new personal best of 1 : 54 @.@ 72 and finished with the second @-@ fastest time , just seven @-@ tenths of a second slower than Phelps . " It felt great , but there 's still no celebrating for me , " he said about the swim . In the finals , Tarwater was exactly tied with Phelps and on world @-@ record pace through the first 50 meters . He stayed near Phelps for 150 meters before fading on the last 50 . In the last 25 meters , he was passed by Gil Stovall , who beat his personal best by a second and a half , to finish third . Tarwater also swam a new personal best ? 1 : 54 @.@ 46 ? but it was not good enough to make the Olympic team , missing out by six @-@ tenths of a second . After the race , he briefly considered retiring before deciding to finish the meet . " I don 't know what the future is going to bring , but I didn 't want to go out knowing I didn 't get back up , " he said . He finished eighth in the 100 @-@ meter butterfly ; earlier , he failed to make the finals in the freestyle

events .

Tarwater was devastated by the trial results , later saying , " It was the most empty feeling in the world . " He went home to Knoxville to reflect on swimming and life in general . He told his parents that he could not stand hearing coverage of the Olympics , so his father quickly organized a vacation to Costa Rica . After returning home , Tarwater 's uncle , Richmond Flowers Jr . , was able to help him through the experience . In 1968 , Flowers had been a gold medal favorite in the hurdles before suffering a hamstring injury two months before the Olympic Trials . " I think he knew the pain I was feeling and the disappointment I was feeling , because he felt same thing , " Tarwater recalled . Flowers offered perspective , instead of comfort : " I believe there is a God who created this , and it ain 't no accident . He 's got a plan ... maybe it just wasn 't the right thing for you . " Soon after , Tarwater met pastor Doug Banister of All Souls Church in Knoxville . After several " really tough conversions " with Banister , Tarwater decided to " [dedicate his] life to Christ and basically relinquished control . "

Tarwater took Flowers ' advice to heart and started to look into other possibilities for his future . He applied to graduate school to study public policy , and on a friend 's advice sent some of his undergraduate work to Oxford University . He was accepted into St Antony 's College , Oxford for the 2009 ? 2010 school year .

= = = Retirement and return to swimming = = =

At the 2009 National Championships , Tarwater qualified to represent the United States team in the World Championships for the third time in his career by placing sixth in the 200 @-@ meter freestyle . He also placed fourth in the 100 @-@ meter butterfly , and fifth in the 200 @-@ meter butterfly . In the preliminary round of the 4 x 200 @-@ meter freestyle , he helped the United States turn in the top qualifying time . The United States later won the event , earning Tarwater a gold medal . After the 2009 season , Tarwater decided to retire from competitive swimming and concentrate on his academic work at Oxford .

At Oxford , Tarwater found a new perspective on life : " I used to be in the sport for Davis Tarwater . Going to Oxford and seeing the selflessness and ambition of the students transitioned me to being in the sport as a mechanism to do good . " The Oxford swim team encouraged him to join its ranks , and he subsequently earned most valuable player honors and a Blue jacket , the British equivalent of a varsity letter . On his newfound perspective , Tarwater said , " Missing the Olympics in 2008 was the best thing that 's ever happened in my whole life ... [otherwise] I would not have gone to Oxford ; I would not have invested in my own personhood ... being able to chase an Olympic dream is a gift ... I made it a misery . It doesn 't have to be a misery . " He graduated from Oxford in 2010 with a master 's degree in Latin American studies . He described the year at Oxford as the best time of his life .

In October 2010 , responding to what he describes as a clear call from God , Tarwater returned to swimming full @-@ time . Back in the United States , he contacted David Marsh at his swimming club , SwimMAC Carolina . After talking with Marsh , Tarwater was convinced there was enough time before the 2012 Summer Olympics to make a comeback possible . " I realized that not only is there life left for me in swimming , there 's also a desire to come back [to the Olympic Trials] and do it the right way " , Tarwater remarked . Marsh introduced Tarwater to a new style of training which focused more on creating power rather than relying on aerobic endurance . Initially , he shifted his focus to the 200 @-@ meter freestyle , abandoning the butterfly for a while .

At his first major meet after his return , the May 2011 Charlotte UltraSwim , Tarwater placed third in the 200 @-@ meter butterfly behind China 's Wu Peng and Phelps . He also joined with three other SwimMAC Carolina members to win the 4 x 100 @-@ meter medley relay . At the National Championships in August , Tarwater placed third in the 100 @-@ meter and 200 @-@ meter butterfly . He anchored the national title @-@ winning 4 x 100 @-@ meter medley relay team for SwimMAC , and led off the club 's national title winning 4 x 200 @-@ meter freestyle relay . The medley relay time of 3 : 37 @.@ 70 set a new U.S. Open Record , more than six seconds ahead of the second @-@ place team . Tarwater also placed eighth in the 100 @-@ meter freestyle during

the meet .

At the 2011 Duel in the Pool in December , Tarwater broke the American record in the 200 @-@ meter butterfly (short course) , completing the race in 1 : 51 @.@ 90 . The record was previously held by Michael Phelps with a time of 1 : 52 @.@ 26 . Tarwater finished second in the event , behind world record @-@ holder László Cseh , and also tied for third in the 100 @-@ meter butterfly during the meet .

= = = 2012 Olympic Trials = = =

Tarwater entered the June 2012 U.S. Olympic Trials with a new perspective : " I want to swim as fast as I can , be the best man I can be , and let the chips fall where they may " , he said . " If I make the team ... that would be unbelievable . If I don ' t make this team , I plan to still be a champion . " He entered the competition ranked fourth in the 100 @-@ meter butterfly , fifth in the 200 @-@ meter butterfly , and also qualified in the 100 @-@ meter and 200 @-@ meter freestyle . He chose to scratch the 100 @-@ meter freestyle to concentrate on the 200 @-@ meter butterfly and freestyle . Tarwater made the 200 @-@ meter freestyle finals ; the top six finishers qualified for the Olympic 4 x 200 relay team , but Tarwater finished seventh . He missed making the Olympic team by fourteen one @-@ hundredths (0 @.@ 14) of a second .

In the 200 @-@ meter butterfly semi @-@ finals , Tarwater turned in the second @-@ fastest time behind Bobby Bollier as Phelps conserved energy . In the finals the next day , Tarwater , knowing he was facing several strong finishers , decided to go out as hard as he could and try to build a big enough lead to hold on . Tarwater led the field for the first 100 meters . Phelps passed him in the third 50 @-@ meter stretch , but Tarwater held off the rest of the field until the final 25 meters when both Bollier and Tyler Clary surged ahead , dropping Tarwater to fourth . His split on the final 50 meters was three seconds slower than his third 50 , and two seconds slower than his final lap in 2008 . A couple days later , Tarwater advanced to the 100 @-@ meter butterfly final , but finished fifth . Afterwards , he called it " the last race I 'll ever swim . "

The next morning Tarwater boarded a plane and headed home . Later that day , Phelps , facing the prospect of competing in eight events at the Olympics , elected to drop the 200 @-@ meter freestyle from his program . Phelps ' decision allowed Tarwater to move up into the sixth spot in the 200 @-@ meter freestyle and be added to the relay team . Tarwater said he was " shocked " by the news and called it a " storybook ending " to his career . " I was really content in walking away last night . I was in peace and left with my faith intact . To have this extra bout of joy is ... surreal " , he said . He immediately boarded another plane and flew back to Omaha , where the Trials were held , for a team meeting and practice . He told Olympic swim coach Gregg Troy , " you won 't see anyone show up with more focus and fire I will do everything I can to bolster the U.S. team . "

= = = 2012 Olympics = = =

By coincidence , Olympic team training took place in Tarwater 's hometown of Knoxville . At the Olympics , Tarwater swam the third leg of the preliminary round of the men 's 4 x 200 @-@ meter relay . His time of 1 : 46 @.@ 33 was a personal best , and the second @-@ fastest leg for Team USA , which turned in the fastest preliminary swim , and third @-@ fastest among all 64 swimmers . He attributed his performance to concentrating exclusively on the freestyle during the two months between Trials and the Games . Of his Olympic experience , Tarwater said , " Even at 28 , with a lot of international experience , nothing matches the Olympics . My heart was pumping so intensely that I was just trying to calm myself down . Standing on the blocks , waiting to take the exchange , I was just saying , ' Breathe . Breathe . Breathe . ' ... It 's such a rush . " Typically , the relay team for the finals is composed of the top two qualifiers plus the two fastest swimmers in the preliminaries . In 2012 , however , the U.S. team had its top three swimmers in reserve , as Phelps would swim the relay final despite dropping the individual 200 @-@ meter freestyle from his program . After Tarwater 's fast preliminary swim , the U.S. coaches strongly considered replacing number three Olympic Trials qualifier Ricky Berens with Tarwater in the finals , before electing to go with Berens

due to Berens ' greater experience . In the finals , the U.S. relay team beat the second @-@ place French team by three seconds , winning Tarwater a gold medal .

Tarwater did not immediately announce whether he would retire again , saying , " I 'll make that decision when the meet is over . " He added , " I need a little bit of a vacation and I think during that time , I 'll decide what 's next for me and what 's best for my career and my life . "

= = Sponsorship and personal life = =

Tarwater is sponsored by Speedo and Mutual of Omaha . According to the Charlotte Observer , he was " known as one of the most versatile and gracious swimmers never to make an Olympic squad " before finally qualifying in 2012 . Webb School athletic director David Meske said he was " someone that has always been humble , has worked extremely hard and has always been so positive " . Tarwater says his biggest mentor is his father , remarking , " He taught me how to be a man , but more importantly , how to be a champion . "

Tarwater was raised in a Christian home , but growing up he " sort of went through the motions " and didn 't really hold strong beliefs . By college , he had abandoned any pretense of faith . He later said that " the Olympics had become an idol in my life . " After not making the Olympics in 2008 , he met Doug Banister who challenged Tarwater to re @-@ examine his worldview . " The ' A @-@ ha ' moments were many , " Tarwater later recalled . " [B] y the time I had the ability to prayerfully repent and rebuke the stuff in my life , I was finally at a good time in life I would say I recommitted my life because I grew up in a Christian home , but really it was the first time where I knew what I was doing and committed my life to Christ . " Tarwater credits his Christian faith for helping him get through the ups and downs of being a competitive swimmer . On his 2012 Olympic experience , he said " It was a real gift from God . I felt His presence so much the past few weeks . It was an unbelievable feeling . " Tarwater attends Hope Community Church in Charlotte .

Tarwater has engaged in fundraising for Mott Children 's Hospital in Michigan , and has donated his time visiting patients there . When his swimming career is finished , he is interested in working on third world economic development .

= = Records = =