



# ROWDY GAINES

**3-TIME OLYMPIC GOLD MEDALIST  
NBC'S OLYMPIC SWIMMING  
COMMENTATOR  
USA SWIMMING'S GREATEST AMBASSADOR**

**On Monday, April 4th at 4:30 pm Rowdy  
will interview Olympic Gold Medalist**

## **Cullen Jones**

**at the Greensboro Aquatic Center.  
Rowdy and Cullen will talk about their  
Olympic experiences and the 2016 Rio  
Olympic Games in August**

**Rowdy Gaines** didn't start swimming until the age of 17. After two years of rapid improvement as a high school swimmer, he was offered a scholarship to swim for Auburn University and under legendary coach Richard Quick.

Rowdy was favored to win 4 Olympic Gold Medals at the 1980 Olympic Games having previously broken 11 World Records. The USA boycotted the Moscow Olympics and Rowdy retired from swimming not long after his graduation from Auburn in 1981.

Professional swimming didn't exist at that time. He left the water for nearly a year, worked in his dad's gas station, and went through post-collegiate depression thinking he'd missed his dream to swim in the Olympics. "If you are not a swimmer, you have to understand the Olympics are swimming's Super Bowl. Four years is a very long time in a sport where the biological clock is always ticking." He father told him to "stop feeling sorry for yourself" and that had a lot to do with his return to the pool.

Rowdy entered the 1984 Olympic trials as an after-thought, others considered him a dinosaur at the age 25. Rowdy hadn't swam a best time in nearly three years. But it was part of the strategy for Quick was for Rowdy to peak at the right time.

Rowdy made the U.S. Olympic team in three events; the 100 meter freestyle, 400 meter freestyle relay, and 400 medley relay. Few gave Gaines a chance to medal; his times from the trials were good but not even his best. He went into the 1984 Los Angeles Olympics an underdog, but a role that he relished.

Waiting behind lane three for the finals of the 100 meter freestyle, Rowdy recalled that he had dedicated 10 years of his life for the next fifty seconds in the pool. He had endured a roller coaster emotional ride. Stepping onto the block, he replayed his entire swimming career in his mind. History and others would judge Rowdy Gaines by the number of Olympic gold medals he would win, but he didn't care about history at that point. He was at peace with all he had accomplished. He didn't need a gold medal to make his career a success. It was in that fifty second moment that he was set free to swim his perfect race.

Rowdy won individual Olympic gold in the 100 meter freestyle and anchored both U.S.A. relays to Olympic Gold medals. He finally lived his dream on the sports greatest stage. He finally had closure and felt he could officially retire from the sport of swimming.

In August of 1991, at the age of 31, Rowdy was afflicted with Guillain-Bare Syndrome. It is a neurological disorder that paralyzes the entire nervous system. There is no known cure for the syndrome that affects 1 in 100,000 Americans. Gaines was hospitalized for 2 ½ months but miraculously made a full recovery from the life-threatening syndrome. His doctors say if he hadn't been for his physical condition he might not be alive--or at best be paralyzed for life.

Within a year, Rowdy Gaines had relearned all the basics we take for granted; tying a shoe, eating with a fork, and brushing our teeth-- and even began to swim again. He swam a few meets and like most great athletes in their sport, he even contemplated another comeback. He was ranked top 10 in the world in several freestyle events and was the oldest swimmer to qualify for the 1996 Olympic Trials, at the age of 35.

But when you are a committed family man like Rowdy, your priorities change. He chose not to race but enter the broadcast booth as NBC's Olympic Games Swimming commentator for the 1996 Atlanta Olympic Games. Rowdy will be in Rio for his 6th Olympic Games with NBC. He continues to be the voice and the face of USA Swimming national events broadcast on NBC and of ESPN's annual broadcasts of the NCAA Swimming & Diving Championships.

Rowdy was inducted into the International Swimming Hall of Fame and for several years he served as the Executive Director of the USA Swimming Foundation. He is often referred to as "Swimming's Greatest Ambassador." and is a champion of USA Swimming's Make A Splash program.

In 2014 Rowdy was appointed the Vice President of Aquatic for the YMCA of Central Florida, an expansive organization that has 30 competition pools throughout Orange County. "I'm a third-generation Central Floridian," Gaines told Swimming World magazine. "It pains me to see these pools go unused year-round. There's no excuse for these pools to not be used all year, with the great weather we have here."

Although he leads a busy schedule he is a family man first. He and his wife Judy are parents to four daughters. He travels the world passionately sharing his love for the sport of swimming with youth, parents, and coaches and is a sought after motivational speaker by many companies world-wide.

And, yes, Rowdy still finds time every day to swim for fitness and to compete in Masters Swimming. After all once, you have the love for a sport in your system, it's awfully hard to get out