

## **Dennis Lugemwa, Head Swim Coach**

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Dennis Lugemwa’s office is a swimming pool.

That’s where you can find him most days: teaching children or teens or adults, some just learning, some wanting to fine tune their stroke, some working to get faster, stronger, more competitive.

“The biggest challenge is that in the water everybody’s different,” he says and, as is the case with all good teachers and coaches, his job is to have strategies to help each one. “They have different body types. Some people feel awkward in the water. They have some kind of hitch in their stroke. Some hold their breath instead of exhaling through their nose in the water. Some have had an injury and been told by their doctor that they need to swim. Some are swimmers and they want to get to the finer points.



“Some people will hear me say something and they do what they think I mean. Sometimes you can say too much. Sometimes I need to demonstrate. Sometimes I show them video of themselves swimming. When adults see themselves swim it really helps them know what to do to improve their stroke mechanics.”

During the summer he gives, on average, 40 30-minute lessons a week, double the number the rest of the year. Although he tries to find time for everyone, he usually has a waiting list during the summer. He also coaches The Landings swim team, with workouts beginning at the end of May and lasting eight weeks. The team competes with other private and neighborhood clubs.

“They call swimming a life sport but, from a competitive perspective, it’s a sport where you have to really put in the work to reap a little reward. I tell parents that they shouldn’t look for Olympic glory from club swimming. It’s really teaching you the life skill of consistent work. Swimmers go off and do different things but they realize that they used to work out eight times a week and they can use that to be consistent in all areas of their lives.”

Lugemwa, 38, has been swimming his whole life. He competed at Jenkins High School in Savannah, worked as a lifeguard, and then began teaching swimming. After high school he moved to Los Angeles and studied to become a recording engineer. But the pool beckoned and he returned to teaching. He worked as a swim instructor at Spring Island, a private community near Beaufort, SC, and at Sea Pines

Country Club on Hilton Head before coming to The Landings two years ago. He says the swimming facilities here are the best he's ever seen.

Outside the pool, he enjoys photography, entertaining at his home in the Windsor Park neighborhood, and cooking, particularly steak. He's recently begun dry aging his steaks. He says he's happy to be back in Savannah. "I'm around people I've known all my life. I like to travel but Savannah's home to me."

He also continues to work out in the pool three or four times a week, in addition to his coaching and teaching.

"I love to do it," he says. "The pool is my office. I see my co-workers walking by and they look at me and say, 'He's lucky. He gets to play with kids in the water.'"

*By Rick Colvin, a member whose career as a journalist included 12 years with the Los Angeles Times.*