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HIGH-SCHOOL

Longtime Fort Collins-area swimming coach leaving for new role with USA Swimming



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Gone, but certainly not forgotten.

And hardly gone, at that.



Fort Collins Area Swim Team (FAST) coaching staple Mike Novell is leaving to take on a new role with USA Swimming.

Novell has played an instrumental role in guiding over 100 local swimmers from youth competition to the college ranks through FAST over the past dozen years.

"The families in Fort Collins are amazing and it really is a whole community working together for the same goals at FAST," Novell said. "This club is near and dear to my heart."

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His new gig won't be taking him far. In fact, he'll still be somewhat involved with FAST despite no longer being the head coach/CEO.

Novell's will be a senior advisor in USA Swimming's Team Services department, responsible for helping local swimming clubs like FAST in the western "zone" of the U.S.

"This position was a way to be more of a coach to the coaches. I know I can make a positive impact like others at USA Swimming have done with us over the years," Novell said.

"I want to help them build what we've built at FAST."

His impact on Northern Colorado swimming is undeniable.

He started as an age group coach in 2013 and ascended to the head coaching role by 2017 during arguably the most successful period for youth swimming in the Fort Collins-area.

There have been dozens of high school state champions, a triple-digit tally of collegiate swimmers and several national team qualifiers. USA Swimming even named Novell its Coach of the Year in 2018.

Some of the most storied names and champions in recent local swimming history trained under Novell with FAST. Just to name a few:

- Coleen Gillilan and Bayley Stewart (Attended Notre Dame)
- Lucy Bell and Zoe Bartel (Stanford)
- Danny and CJ Kovac (Missouri)
- Bailey Nero (Auburn)
- Jake Eccleston (Louisville)

It's not just the success in the pool, though. Novell is a popular figure among fellow coaches, parents and swimmers alike, sporting a gregarious personality and infectious love for the sport.

"Mike's energy, discipline and passion for swimming pushed so many swimmers to exceed their limits and achieve their dreams," said fellow FAST coach and Fort Collins High School coach Kirk Witulski.

"It's going to take a long time before it feels normal without him there every day."

Novell will still be around sometimes, though. How could he not? After all, the Novells are an essential part of the Fort Collins swimming community at this point.

He doesn't have to move for this USA Swimming job and his wife, MacKenzie (a former CSU swimmer and assistant coach) is the longest-tenured teacher at FAST. She plans to remain as the Under-8 age group coach, only fitting since the couple has four young children under the age of 8.

It will still be a bittersweet change for Novell, a swimming lifer who has coached the sport in Arizona and Colorado for over 25 years.

So Novell took a trip down memory lane, sharing some of his favorite memories with the club.

There was Max Holter (Fort Collins) going to the University of Texas after a stunning performance in the 200-yard butterfly at junior nationals.

A 2018 Speedo Sectionals race in Washington when Gillilan, CJ Kovac, Caraline Baker and Renee Gillilan had four of the top eight in the 400 individual medley.

Or [Lucy Bell winning an NCAA Championship in the 200-yard breaststroke with a new Stanford school-record time in March 2025.](#)

Even this past December, FAST brought its largest-ever group of boys to the Speedo Winter Junior Championships (West) and current high school standouts

Pierce Bickerton, Jake Barela, Brennen O'Neil (Fossil Ridge) plus Micah Moore (Poudre) set a new club record in the 800 free relay.

"I love coaching and seeing the kids every day. It's so satisfying when you get a swimmer breaking a record or even just see them have fun at practice," Novell said.

"They'll be in great hands with everybody at FAST, but I'm going to miss it."

Chris Abshire covers high school and community sports for the Coloradoan.



Longtime local coach Mike Novell (middle left) with Fort Collins Area Swim Team poses with Jake Eccleston (left), Ella Gaca-Thiele (center right) and Lucy Bell (right), all FAST swimmers and former Colorado state champions. *Provided By MacKenzie Novell*