

2009 NATIONAL SENIOR GAMES

Champion cyclist a fitness guru

Platero travels to beat of different drummer

BY JOHN REID
Daily News Staff Writer

Not many have lived the life of John Platero Jr., the 20k and 40k cycling road race winner in the 50-to-54-year-old class at the National Senior Games the past two days at Canada College. Platero, a fitness trainer, recently released his first book entitled "Yes, You Can — Fitness After 40 — A New Beginning."

That's not all. After finishing up at Santa Monica Junior College, Platero played drums professionally as a studio musician for the likes of Cher, Bo Diddley, Woody Harrelson and Richard Gere.

"I played with a lot of blues artists," said Platero, who lives in Thousand Oaks. "I played with a lot of rhythm and blues groups because that's what paid."

Platero headed to New York, where he posed for covers of romance novels and calendars.

"I used to have really long hair," Platero said. "I'm not tall enough to be a real model, but I had a good face and physique."

About 15 years ago, Platero expanded his personal training business, becoming the Director of Personal Training for L.A. Fitness. He created a company

that provides fitness education and certifies people to become personal trainers. Owner of The National Council for Certified Personal Trainers, Platero has produced 30 exercise videos.

"I have more personal training videos on YouTube than any man alive," Platero said.

Platero has trained Hollywood producers and actors. His high point may have been when he was hired as personal trainer for a prince in Qatar.

"I trained the prince four different times," Platero said. "He's the heir apparent. He can't go out in public."

Platero's win in the 20k was close, to say the least. His time of 31:44.0 nipped Don Stimson of Newcastle, who clocked 31:44.2.

"I think I won by about two meters," Platero said. "The guy in front of me had to be tastin' the win. I was a ways away. I thought I had lost it. They went too hard at the bottom of the climb."

The 5-foot-7 Platero said the same thing occurred in the climax of the 40k, which he won in 1 hour, 10 minutes, 36 seconds.

"When we got to the bottom of the climb, there must have been eight guys in front of me, then I picked them off," Platero said. "The second-to-the-last turn there were four guys in front of me.

I thought I might be able to medal. They just petered out."

Last week, Platero hid away at the Ponderosa Hotel in Sequoia National Park, training in the altitude around 7,200 feet.

"I think that training helped me that last 20 meters," he said. "You have to time it."

Platero said the wind was a major factor in Friday's 40k.

"Today was windier, tougher and more dangerous than Thursday," he said. "There was a crash in the first mile that I got caught behind. I almost fell down. I ended up running over someone's wheel."

Platero has been racing bikes the past 23 years. A son of a journalist for the Associated Press, Platero attended three high schools. Two of them were outside of the U.S. — in Mexico and in Brazil. At last year's Huntsman Senior World Games in St. George, Utah, Platero won four golds, a silver (despite crashing) and two bronze medals. At the California Games in Long Beach in June, Platero won three golds and a silver. He divulged the secret to his success.

"In a road race, it's not always the strongest guy that wins," Platero said. "It's the craftiest guy. I'm kind of crafty. I don't think I was the strongest guy in the race. I've been racing for 23 years. I know when to come out."

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swimming or racing."

In the pool next to former Olympic athletes and a Pacific Masters legend, John won two ribbons by making the finals in the 200- and 500-yard freestyle. He also competed in the 50 and 100 sprints.

"There are really elite athletes here," said John, whose final event was Thursday's 200 free swim. "When I hit that wall and turned to the last lap, I just poured everything I had into it."

Cheering from the first row with a video camera on hand was Beth.

The pair met in 1995 and got married in 2000.

"I wouldn't say love at first sight, but it was on my part," Beth said.

Self-proclaimed amateur cultural anthropologists, they visit various tribes around the world, from Borneo to Namibia to Zimbabwe. Beth studies the contrast between traditional healing versus Western providers, while John is interested in tribal dances and art.

They were the perfect pick for another traditional ceremony — the lighting of the cauldron. The Guislins were the final stop for the solar-powered torch used in these Senior Games.

"When I first held the torch, it was quite special," Beth said. "It's not only a techni-

cal wonder, it's really a work of art."

Fireworks went off Saturday night in front of City Hall in Palo Alto after the torch lit the cauldron, which also is solar-powered and was later moved to Stanford. Everyone was excited, and in the middle of it all were the Guislins, representing the amateur spirit as well as healthy aging.

"I couldn't stop smiling," John said. "That's why my face hurt, I think."

John will be a volunteer and a fan the rest of the way until the Senior Games end a week from today. Beth's turn to compete begins Sunday.

"There aren't many sports I haven't tried," said Beth, who was diagnosed with non-Hodgkin's Lymphoma in 2004 and is currently in remission. "I've given up rock climbing. I'm going to give away my roller blades. I've done snowboarding. I biked from L.A. to San Luis Obispo. I've done water skiing and slalom courses."

Most of all, though, Beth is a recreational distance runner. She has participated in the Los Angeles marathon and several road races, but with little cartilage left in her knees the choices for the Senior Games were the 100- and 200-meter dashes.

"I feel as ready as I can be," said Beth, who wears ear plugs during the races because she dislikes the starter

gun. "But for me a lot of it is going to be mental preparation and not being nervous."

All of that anticipation will turn into joy when she crosses the finish line.

"I was telling Beth, 'When I'm in the pool, that guy next to me is my biggest competitor,'" John said. "'Ten minutes later in the locker room, he's my best friend.'"

The Guislins look forward to "aging up" for the 2011 Senior Games in Houston, when they'll be the young ones in the 60-64 age division.

"I think particularly Baby Boomers, we're going to age in a new way," Beth said. "It's not going to be like my grandparents did. We're going to be active for a long time."

Ideally long enough to inspire other competitors to dive into the pool or lace up their track shoes.

"There was an 84-year-old man who was on the deck and his daughter was with him. And she said, 'I have to come near because he's hard of hearing so he doesn't know when it's his time to go out and he's a little bit unsteady on the dry land. But put him in the water, and he goes,'" John recalled.

"The superstars are these 80- and 90-year-olds that are still competing and winning."

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