



**The comeback episode
(with Olympic gold
medallist Michael Klim)**

Podcast 6

The Effortless Swimming Podcast



Welcome to the Effortless Swimming podcast, thanks for joining me. Today's episode features one of Australia's most well known and most well liked swimmers. He has been around the sport for a number of years and has recently made a comeback in an effort to qualify for the London 2012 Olympic Games. He has won multiple medals at the world championships and Olympic Games and is also a former world record holder

of the 100m freestyle. We are of course talking about Michael Klim. I have managed to pry Michael away from his training, business and family for an interview where I ask him to share some insight into some of the things that he has learnt with his training, racing and preparation and share an insight into what motivated him to make a comeback from the sport after he retired four years ago.



Mike is also very successful outside the pool where he started his own business MILK Skincare. He gives us an insight as to how that started, how it is going at the moment and how he manages to juggle that with a family and kids and full time training. So he gives us a good insight into time management if you are training at an elite level.

So let's cut straight to the interview with Michael Klim.

So how did you get started as a swimmer? You have obviously been to multiple Olympics and world championships and Commonwealth Games so where did it all start?

My journey in swimming actually started at a pretty random, well I wouldn't say random, I would say unusual place because I actually grew up as a kid in India. I spent about five years in India living with my family there between the age of 2 and 5 ½ and 6, so I learnt to swim when I lived in India of all places. So my parents used to go to work, or my dad used to drop us off at like a country club where we would pretty much spend all day swimming until he came to pick us up. So that's where I learnt to swim.



Being eastern European decent my parents are Polish, I grew up there, I spent the early few years of my career learning to swim or in squad training in Poland, then we moved to Germany. So I continued there, then when I was 11 we came to Australia and I pretty much joined the local swimming club at the time was Melbourne Vic Centre Swimming Club at **Batman Ave, the old swimming pool there which doesn't exist anymore its Fed Square, but that's** how my transition happened. I learnt to swim in a place that is probably not renowned for its swimmers.

No not too much. Not so much Cricket anymore either.

Yeah exactly.

So you had a lot of success in your career and retired in 2007 and you decided to get back into in 2011. So what was it that motivated you to get back into the sport?

There are a few motivating factors for me to come back into the sport. **The way I finished up, I wasn't happy with the way things finished up for a number of reasons;**

1. I had quite a number of injuries that were re-occurring and were **holding me back in terms of wanting... I always strive for fairly high results and good times and I wanted to compete against the best and I was getting to a level that I just wasn't competitive** enough even nationally. There was a lot, there was the fact that I was injured, I was missing out on meets and teams I sort of felt like it was making me feel very sort of... well I was quite bitter and frustrated with the situation and I wasn't doing myself any favours. **So I decided just to call it quits at the time. But it's funny how a few years off from the sport and starting my other career and just my approach to the sport has changed a little bit and my expectations are different. I am really enjoying this whole journey and I guess the challenge is even greater now to try and reach that highest level but probably my expectations aren't. If I kind of feel even if I go through this journey and maybe don't make it to the Olympic Games, I am already exceeding my expectations by getting at a competitive level nationally. So there is obviously doing it for different reasons, having different expectations. For me I have always been a very active person, so if I didn't swim I used to run and cycle a fair bit and my kids hadn't really seen me swim or train properly so I wanted to lead by example and show them what sort**



of dedication is required to reach that level of sport. So that was that.

2. Also the lure of a London Games, I think it is going to be a very memorable Olympic Games purely from the tradition of the UK, them having had the games before but I think this is the new era of the Olympic Games and I think it is going to be a pretty sensational Olympics.

Yeah I think it's going to be a pretty special Olympics just talking to people in the swimming community, everyone is really excited about it. A lot of people are getting back into the sport and wanting to even just qualify to go to the Olympic trials because there is a lot of excitement about this year I think, so it is going to be great Olympic trials and a great Olympic games.

Definitely, I think obviously the fact that they have finally changed the venue for the Olympic trials. Obviously the nationals being in Sydney for so long and I think the fact that they are now in Adelaide will add a little bit. I think it's a good change and a bit of excitement to it as well, the atmosphere will be I think a little bit better. Just because the pool is a little bit tighter, the audience will be right on top of you. I think the Olympic trials always carry some sort of... it's a different level of pressure. It's not a Pan Pacific Trials it's not Comm. Games trials, there is a lot more at stake so think people are really starting to get excited.

Yeah it's going to be really good. When you had your shoulder and your back trouble what kind of rehabilitation have you done now to able to get yourself to a point where you can train full time again?

It's funny you should ask me that because I haven't really had to do too much rehab this time around. I was speaking to my physio this morning about it and we were trying to work out this preparation I have been fairly injury free. I have had maybe one or two flare ups with my shoulder where a little bit of rest and just modifying some of my sessions and I kind of got back into it. I think there are a few factors, I obviously gave my body a good rest and tendons a good rest over the three or four years I didn't swim. I think the training is a lot different now so for me I am swimming at the most 30km a week. Which I don't actually even count I have the eight sessions that I want to do and each session I have a goal that I want to achieve and what volume I swim in that session is irrelevant so it's not volume focused my program and its more instead of



rehab we call it prehab. So a lot it is all preventional exercises or strength and making sure I have enough bulk in certain areas of my body that prevents either shoulder instability or whatever. So it is really about training a little bit smarter than harder.

What kind of weight training are you doing for the 100m freestyle? Because that's your main focus at the moment. What sort of stuff are you focussing on in the gym?

Well my training sort of varies; there are probably three components to it where we work on the start and the turns so that is explosiveness off the blocks and the walls. So right now we are doing some heavy squats to explosive jumps to deep squats so really trying to get the power and



explosiveness so we can off the wall and the blocks quickly. We do a lot of core, so not just core stability but core strength and core power because a lot of people tend to make the mistake and just do endurance exercises for your core, but just as any other muscle it needs to be powerful and explosive. Then we do some other ones that are more maybe stroke specific, for example the catch or the first phase of the pull through where we really load it up with heavy weights and do two or three sort of reps of that. Obviously different periods of the preparation we work on different reps and loads but right now most of it is a combination of a little bit of strength so 6 reps down to about 2. So it is

quite heavy loading but we get enough strength endurance by what we do in the pool. Then we also do some traditional Olympic lifting, so we do dead lifts and cleans and those sorts of things as well so it is quite a complex program. When we were really hammering it in the gym we were doing 5 gym sessions a week with three of them were strength and power and two were core, now we have cut it right back to three in the lead up to trials.

Yeah good to know. I think with sprinting it's important to have a solid weight training program to help you with it because with speed you need that kind of power and strength to be able to get through the water so quickly.



I think this new mentality, I think swimmers have become a lot more in tune with what they need and the force application it's not about how strong you are really because you need to be able to apply that force really quickly and be efficient at it. So I think swimmers are realising there is a lot more, there is no point in going in and doing as many chin-ups as you can it's got to be more specific than that, but I think people are a lot more clued on now.

Yeah definitely. You have your own skincare business MILK and that obviously takes up a lot of your time. Have you had to take a step back from that to fit in your training?

Look it's definitely taken a lot of my time in the lead up. We had the range for about three years now, bit over three years, it's been going quite well. We keep sort of expanding, we have a baby range as well, and we are expanding the men's products. We just started some baby apparel that has been quite exciting too. I am definitely still involved on a daily basis, probably a bit more top line these days not from when I was in swimming or even up to a couple of months ago I was across everything but now I am very fortunate that I have built a really good team around me where everyone knows their roles and I am definitely still involved but probably at a more top line level. So we are pretty excited that we have a product that is in all the majors of Australia, Coles and Woolworth and Myer and a lot of pharmacy's and we are exporting to places like Euphoria and Boots in the UK. So we have had some really good uptake and we have just got try to make it stick and we keep innovative with new products and understanding our customers. Dynamics are always changing and the drivers are changing why people buy products. The loyalty factor is always there so you have to produce something that is good and functional so people almost need to fall in love with the product straight away so they re-purchase it again.

Did it start out with making skincare products for swimmers for the harsh conditions of chlorine and being around a pool all day?

Yeah pretty much that was initially the inspiration for me but I obviously had to make it more appealing to the broader community. But I think Australia has a very harsh climate so on a day like today where its 34 degrees and you go for a swim in your local pool or even your beach, you need a good moisturiser with an SPF, you need some sunscreen you need a good body wash to get either the chlorine or the salt off you. Even with my face wash and scrub it's not to regimented it more of relaxed approach to skincare. I think naturally men and women look after the skin



or they know they have to. It's just making products functional and affordable as well. Definitely the swimming was an inspiration. I grew up, well as swimmers you know we always try different products, washes and oils and what have you to make sure that we could cover that chlorine smell. When I got married I tended to use to steal all the products from my wife but I wasn't too popular in that, so I had to make my own.

Yeah I can relate to the smelling like chlorine. I think that was my reputation on the school bus for many years.

Yeah especially when it gets hot and you have been for a swim in the morning it starts to permeate through everything. Its funny when you're a swimmer you don't realise you smell like a pool, but everyone else does.

It becomes the normal doesn't it? What about racing, what are the things that you focus on in a race? Is it technique or pacing or your competitors? What sort of thing do you focus on?

Look I think when it comes to racing I think, well for me the key has been to always be clear minded. So the less I have in my mind or the fewer things I have to focus on the better I perform. So for example I would try and be quite jovial and relaxed and really only focus on the last little... probably only when we march out. Even then I try to really enjoy the atmosphere and probably from the point that you are introduced to when you get up on the blocks that's where we sort of switch on. All the rehearsal stuff needs to be done in the training pool. For us, when I race I probably have 3-4 different cues that I try and focus on so for me it's that breakout stroke that sets up the first 20m of my race and trying not to over swim that first 20-30 then getting into a good rhythm and building into the wall that's another cue. I try to use my underwater as a sort of almost a breather from that and trying to set up for another break out and then attacking the wall. So really it comes down to effort and control, I think too many people try to have too many things that they think about. It happens so quickly in 48/49 seconds you can't really focus on too many things unless you have practiced them in training.

Training is where you have to get it right and it should just sort of come together in the race in think.

Yeah definitely.



With goal setting is that part of your program? Do you set goals six months out, twelve months out or do you sit down with your coach? How do you go about setting goals?

This time around I don't have any goals as such in terms of where I am going to place in the race or what I am going to achieve. When we sat down for this comeback journey so to speak I obviously looked at a time I would like to achieve and we build a race model around that. So we are quite good with the VIS and some of the support for Australian Swimming and all the coaches. There are computer programs, where you can type in a certain time or you type in your best dive, your best turn, your best lead out 50m your best back end or what and it can produce a bit of a goal time for you. So I did that and from there we knew exactly what my best start had to be, what stroke rates with stroke lengths. So those are the types of goals that I work towards not really the type of goals of where I am going to finish **because they are the things that are out of my control. Yeah it's a little bit more scientific these days and it we can really work on those small increments that are really measurable rather than just the outcome.**



Would you like your kids to be swimmers? Do you think it is a sport that you would like them to get into or you just sort of let it happen?

Look I would definitely let it happen. I can already see that they are quite competitive as most kids are, and they like the water. My daughter she likes dancing and singing as most 6 years old do and they both know how to swim and water safety is a big thing in our house. But I guess going that next step is going to be quite interesting, but I would definitely give them the opportunity but I think to be a swimmer, to be a successful one as well, I think you need a certain type of temperament and think **obviously the dedication and persistence. It's a bit early to tell if they have got that as yet.** From a physical development I think swimming is a great sport because obviously from an endurance point of view from muscular skeletal they develop really well and they have good underlining fitness as teenagers. So yeah I would definitely give them the opportunity and if they go on they can. **I'm not sure if I am all that keen on getting up**



at 4:00/5:00 o'clock in the morning seeing I have done it for so many years.

Yeah that's right, it's almost more of a commitment for parents sometimes than the swimmers. They have to work and still get up early and do all the driving around.

Yeah definitely and that's the thing people forget that, in sport generally there is more than just one person that's involved. For me right now, even though people hear about how I am going and whatever, there is a pretty big team that's involved and a team that I have put together from my physiotherapist in Helen Walker to a sports psychologist in Lisa Stevens to my trainer Jeremy Oliver and my coach Rowan Taylor, my physiologist Danielle Stefano from the VIS to my masseur in Christine. I have got [people that really support me on a daily basis, my wife, my family so there is more than people realise. I definitely could not have done it without my family support and especially my wife because it is probably the most stress that we have been under for a while.

I can imagine you are very busy with everything that is going on. Although swimming is an individual sport it is a team sport in terms of putting your team together for what you said your physio, masseuse and your coach and everything so there is a lot that goes into it and more than a lot of people see I think.

Yeah definitely. It is definitely doable and it's enjoyable but there are a lot of pieces to the puzzle so to speak.

That's right, well thank-you so much for being on the call with me today and I wish you all the best for March for the trials and after that.

Thanks mate.

So if people want to get in touch with you or find out more about MILK how can they do that?

They can just jump online and go to our website which is milkskincare.com or they can even follow us on Facebook and Twitter. We have continual specials and sales and new launches so if they register with us we will keep them up to date with new things that are happening. But definitely check it out.



Sound good, thanks again Mike, I appreciate it and all the best.

Cheers buddy.

Mike talked about training smarter where he doesn't need to do the long kilometres anymore. He has done those when he was younger and now with his comeback he is all about training smarter so he doesn't count the kilometres that he does he goes to the number of sessions that he needs to and it's all about doing the right thing in each session. So working on quality work, speed, technique, stroke counts and a efficiency and all the things that are specific to what he is training for which is the [100m freestyle](#). He also mentioned that he does a lot of explosive exercises in the gym where he replicates his start, his turn and kicks off the wall so that each time he needs to go off the wall or off the start he has the power and the speed there to be able to do it as quickly as possible.

One of the most important things that I think Mike mentioned was building a great team around you. When he is up on the blocks and he is racing it is only him that you see but what you don't see is his support crew in the back ground from his physio to his masseuse to his coach to his family to his sports psychologist to his nutritionist. He has this big team around him who are experts in their field and he is able to draw on their expertise and that allows him to focus on what he needs to focus on and then he can just take their advice on their specific fields. It is really important to have a great team around you that you trust and that can help you get to where you want to get to.

That's the end of the sixth episode of the Effortless Swimming podcast. Thanks very much for joining me. I look forward to seeing you next episode.

