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## Olympic swimmer Eric Shanteau is living with his decisions

Eric Shanteau, a 2008 Olympian who hopes to compete in the breaststroke this summer in London, has taken some unconventional paths in life, most notably in his battle against testicular cancer.

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Swimmer Eric Shanteau skipped the chemotherapy after his surgery for testicular cancer, one of many unusual paths he has chosen in his life. (Gary Friedman / Los Angeles Times / May 3, 2012)

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By Diane Pucin  
May 6, 2012 | 6:55 p.m.

As an athlete, an Olympic swimmer with goals different from, say, someone who earns a living as a businessman or artist or construction worker, Eric Shanteau made decisions that might raise an eyebrow.

In 2008, less than a week before the U.S. Olympic trials, Shanteau learned he had testicular cancer. Surgery was recommended. Immediately if possible.

Shanteau chose to wait. He made the U.S. team and

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competed at the Beijing Olympics, where his father was able to watch and cheer for his son. Richard Shanteau had lung cancer in 2008, a disease that would kill him in 2010.

Four years after Beijing, Shanteau, a Georgia native, is at the USC pool as part of coach Dave Salo's pro group of potential 2012 Olympic swimmers,

Shanteau's head bobs for two hours as he works on his signature stroke, the breaststroke. He is a relatively new member of the Salo group. He arrived from Texas about 14 months ago. Shanteau has also trained in Atlanta and at Auburn, a process of experimentation Salo attributes to Shanteau's inquisitive mind and willingness to seek out unconventional paths to a goal.

Just like with his cancer.

After Beijing, Shanteau came home and had surgery. He had it after consulting with experts at the Lance Armstrong Foundation, where he met foundation Chairman Doug Ulman and where he learned about doctors and procedures and drug protocols.

He said that after he asked Ulman every question he could think of, Ulman asked him a question: "Is there anything else you need?"

Shanteau's response: "I said just one. I think he thought I was going to ask about a guarantee of a cure or something. But all I wanted was to meet Lance."

Shanteau got his meeting and then he got his surgery, an orchiectomy — removal of the testicles.

"My doctors probably would have preferred I had the surgery immediately," Shanteau said. "They are of the mind that the sooner you get cancer out of the body the better."

But Shanteau waited a month and then he took another unconventional path.

Instead of having a course of preventive chemotherapy, again recommended by doctors, Shanteau chose to skip the drug cocktail.

"If I didn't have the chemo, the chance of recurrence in the first year was 35-40%," Shanteau said. "If I did that chemo round, those numbers dropped to 1%. But the thing with the chemo cocktail is that even one round might sterilize you. I wanted to stay away from that. And it would have affected my swimming for a while."

So Shanteau has lived a gut-wrenching life for the last three years. For the first year after surgery he went to be tested for cancer every two months. In the second year, that became every four months. Now it's down to every six months where, for a day or two, his stomach does flip-flops and his nerves jangle.

"It was brutal the first year," he said. "Now, I almost don't think about it until the day of the test."

Jeri (Moss) Shanteau, who is from Riverside and who met her future husband when both were swimmers at Auburn, said that first year post-surgery was difficult.

"Really tough," she said, "the least fun part of the whole experience. It was hard and scary."

Shanteau originally found out about his cancer on June 19, 2008, less than a week before the U.S. trials. He made the team anyway, though he failed to make the eight-man final in his only event, the 200-meter breaststroke, despite swimming a career-best time.

After his surgery, Shanteau was back in the pool within three weeks. "Most people take long breaks after Olympics," Shanteau said. "I needed some normalcy back in my life, so I came back to the pool."

Salo coaches a stable of top international breaststrokers, including Japan's Kosuke Kitajima, who has won four Olympic gold medals.

"It's kind of like a cult of breaststrokers here," Salo said. "It was a bit of a surprise to me when Eric called, because he had success at Swim Atlanta and Auburn and Texas. But I see him and he takes from each of those experiences and it told me he's very adventurous. I think he saw our program and thought he could get something new from it."

Salo said he hasn't made major changes in Shanteau's stroke, just minor technical corrections.

And, Salo said, he could tell Shanteau has been energized by times Kitajima recently posted at Japan's Olympic trials. "Kosuke went :58.9 and 2:08 in Japan," Salo said, "and Eric has been training better times. Eric feels if he can go that fast, then the U.S. trials should be interesting."

Shanteau, 28, is among a group of five American breaststrokers — including Brendan Hansen, who has the second-fastest time in the world behind Kitajima, and Marcus Titus, who was born deaf and recently persuaded USA Swimming to use hand signals at the U.S. trials — who will contend for Olympic spots according to Salo.

"I'm in a great place," said Shanteau, who lives in Marina del Rey with Jeri. "I like the way I've been racing throughout the year. I like the level of my physical strength and most importantly I'm in a good place in life."

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