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Tonic's Really Good Sports Q&A: Eric Shanteau

BY MARC HERTZ | MONDAY, AUGUST 2, 2010 7:30 AM ET

This swimmer made the 2008 Olympic team even after being diagnosed with cancer, and he continues to compete, swimming in the US Nationals this week.

Eric Shanteau was diagnosed with cancer a few weeks before the Olympic Trials. Instead of seeking treatment and missing out on something he'd been working for his entire life, Shanteau went with the US team to **Beijing** and, in the 200-meter breaststroke, posted his personal best time. Since then, he's battled cancer, a disease that's currently in remission. Shanteau continues to swim, his sights set on the **2012 Games in London**. This week, he'll compete in the **2010 ConocoPhillips National Championships** in Irvine, Calif. Then, on Sept. 18-19, he'll host his first annual open water event at Lake Lanier Islands near **Atlanta**. The event is called the **Swim For Your Life Challenge**, and it includes an Olympian-led clinic and two open water races, and will benefit **LIVESTRONG**. For more information or to register, go to **ShanteauOpenWater.com**.



1. What cause is near and dear to your heart (and why)?

The fight against cancer is definitely at the top of this list, and obviously testicular cancer in particular. Most people have a very small degree of separation with cancer. I am not only a survivor myself, but several of my family members have been through cancer as well. The past few years have really opened my eyes to the world of cancer, and just how devastating it really is. Simply being an advocate and raising awareness is the easiest and biggest way to have an impact in the global fight against cancer. I am proud to call myself a cancer survivor and act as a **LIVESTRONG** Envoy on behalf of the Lance Armstrong Foundation (LAF).

2. What was your most recent random act of kindness?

I recently heard about a young swimmer who was diagnosed with brain cancer. I sent them a small care package that included one of the swim caps I used at the **2008 Olympic Games**. After I was diagnosed I received a huge amount of support from people I didn't know. It was great to get that kind of outreach, and now I want to give a little of that back.

3. Where (or from whom) did you first learn about "giving back"?

I learned about giving back from the family of people over at the Lance Armstrong Foundation. From the very beginning they were instrumental in helping me navigate my way through cancer. They did this without hesitation and gave me unconditional support. **Doug Ulman**, the CEO of the foundation, is one of the most incredible cancer fighters I have ever met. There is nothing about the fight against cancer that is too big or too small for him and he brings that mentality to the entire foundation. I have teamed up with the LAF to put on the Swim For Your Life Challenge. This will be an open water swimming event with the theme of taking control of one's own life and decisions.

4. What activist/philanthropist most inspires you?

Lance Armstrong is one of the most inspirational athletes and activists. He essentially made the fight against cancer a "cool" thing to be a part of. The fact that millions of people around the world wear **LIVESTRONG** bracelets is a testimony to the impact he has had on raising cancer awareness. I believe that awareness is one of the biggest weapons we have in the fight against cancer, and Lance has helped make people more aware of their health and bodies. Cancer can be very treatable; the trick is catching it early, and that's where awareness comes in to play.

5. What are you hopeful for?

I am hopeful that one day doctors will sit around and talk about how they can't believe they used to give people chemo and radiation as treatments for cancer. I hope that we not only find a cure for cancer, but that we find a vaccine as well so future generations will not be plagued with this disease. On a more personal and selfish note, I hope that I continue to remain cancer free.

6. What athlete/mentor most inspired you?

The person who has had the biggest impact throughout my career is my club coach Chris Davis. Chris has been a major influence on my swimming career since before I swam in high school. He prepared me for the transitions into college and then pro swimming and I trust him completely. Chris not only has an incredible ability to build young swimmers, but he also grooms them for life outside the pool. Chris built the foundation for my career as it is today.

7. What was your most memorable game/competition or sports moment and why?

My most memorable sports moment was making the 2008 Olympic swim team. Making the Olympic team had been a dream of mine since I was 9 years old. When I missed the team in 2004 by just tenths of a

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second, it left a very bitter taste in my mouth. However, it just made qualifying in 2008 that much sweeter. I will also never forget that moment because of the fear that I was experiencing with my cancer diagnosis. I had just achieved my lifelong dream but now I wasn't even sure if I could compete in the Games. I knew I would face some difficult and potentially life changing decisions in the coming weeks. Making the Olympic team was a whirlwind of emotions and ended up being an experience that has molded me into the person I am today.

8. What's the one thing you want to do before you die?

It sounds simple but I really want to go skydiving. I just want to experience that feeling of moving so fast that you are totally weightless in the air.

9. What's the best good advice you ever received?

The night before media day at the Olympic team training camp, my dad told me, "Eric, either you have cancer or it has you." At the time my dad had already spent a year battling lung cancer, so those words had an immediate impact on my train of thought. I realized I had a simple choice to make. I can either let cancer run my life or I can go on living the way I want to. Since that time I have applied that saying to my swimming career and life outside the pool. I have been able to realize that good things can come out of bad situations simply by making the right choice. This advice is where the inspiration came from for the Swim For Your Life Challenge.

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Photo by Brown Beard courtesy of LIVESTRONG.

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