

# A Champion Gains Attention Out of the Pool

## Cullen Jones Strives to Expose More Children to World of Swimming

By Jeff Glor



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At the world swimming championships, the spotlight will not only be on Michael Phelps, but also Cullen Jones, who is getting attention for the examples he sets outside of the pool. Jeff Glor reports.



Cullen Jones helps teach a girl how to swim. (CBS)

(CBS) Stepping up for a swim-off with a berth at the World Championships at stake, Cullen Jones was a picture of cool confidence.

Given his success, you might never guess where Jones was 20 years ago - unconscious and nearly drowning at the bottom of an amusement park waterslide, reports **CBS News correspondent Jeff Glor**.

"I vividly remember what the slide looked like and I vividly remember how drowning feels," Jones said.

Resuscitated by a lifeguard but still terrified, 5-year-old Cullen might have never jumped in a pool again. His dad wouldn't let that happen.

"He felt, also along with my mom, that it was important for me to learn, as opposed to retreating from it," Jones said.

His parents insisted on swim lessons - they clearly paid off. He became the fastest American ever in the 50 meters. Record holder, gold medalist - and lately, role model.

Jones is using his fame to bring a disturbing issue to

the surface.

Nearly 60 percent of African American and Hispanic children can't swim. And studies show that black children are nearly three times more likely to drown than whites. Even among the 300,000 registered members of USA Swimming, less than 2 percent are minorities.

Jones is diving in to the "Make a Splash" swimming education campaign, giving personal lessons in a half dozen cities this summer.

But he says getting minority swimmers into the water isn't easy - not when you're fighting decades of history, indifference and silly stereotypes.

"Like the one where black people can't swim because their bodies are genetically different?" Jones asked. "I float probably better than anyone out here."

Make a Splash supports programs like the Oakland California Undercurrents, which gives free or low cost lessons to young kids and fields a competition team for older ones.

"I can be there. I can do that," said Nia Assata, a swimmer. "It seems cool to go and swim at these big meets, see Michael Phelps and Cullen Jones."

"It teaches you life skills on how to be great in whatever aspect of your life you choose," said Dominic Cathey, the Oakland Undercurrents coach.

And these boys now have a new hero.

"I didn't like swimming, until now," said Taylor Sanders, one boy in the program.

"You never thought of it before?"

"Never thought of it before," Sanders said.

Jones knows the numbers won't change overnight - he intends to keep working with kids long after his competitive career is over.

"What's more important for you, winning gold medals or helping kids?" Glor asked.

"Definitely helping kids," Jones said. "I mean, I've seen so many kids that have come to me and

say 'You know I love being in the pool, I love being in the water.'

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