

Scottsdale swimmer overcoming injury for Olympics shot

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South
Scottsdale

Giles Smith isn't about to let an elbow injury sink his chances of swimming in the 2020 Summer Olympics.

A transplant from Baltimore – home of mega-medaling swimmer Michael Phelps – the 27-year-old southern Scottsdale resident hopes to travel to Tokyo for the 2020 Summer Olympics, and participate in the 100-meter butterfly and the 4x100-meter medley.

While training in the Valley, the bursa ruptured in his left elbow, leaving him unable to pull on the arm at full force for several weeks.

“It was an unfortunate injury because I had been swimming well up to that point,” said Giles, who moved to Scottsdale in 2014 to compete for a slot on the 2016 Olympic team in Rio de Janeiro.

Despite his injury, he competed while recovering.

In 2015, he won gold in the 100-meter butterfly at the Pan-American Games in Toronto, and the following March posted times in the world top five in the 100-meter and 50-meter butterfly events. That year he also participated in the FINA World Cup Swim meets in China, Japan and Dubai – winning a total four medals, one of them gold.

And, during the Omaha Olympic trials last June, he competed and advanced through the Olympic prelims, semi-finals and into the final top eight, placing eighth in the 100-meter butterfly. Four years earlier, he had also competed in the Olympic trials final in that event.

“The injury was very hard, but like all things, you pick yourself up and keep going,” Smith said.

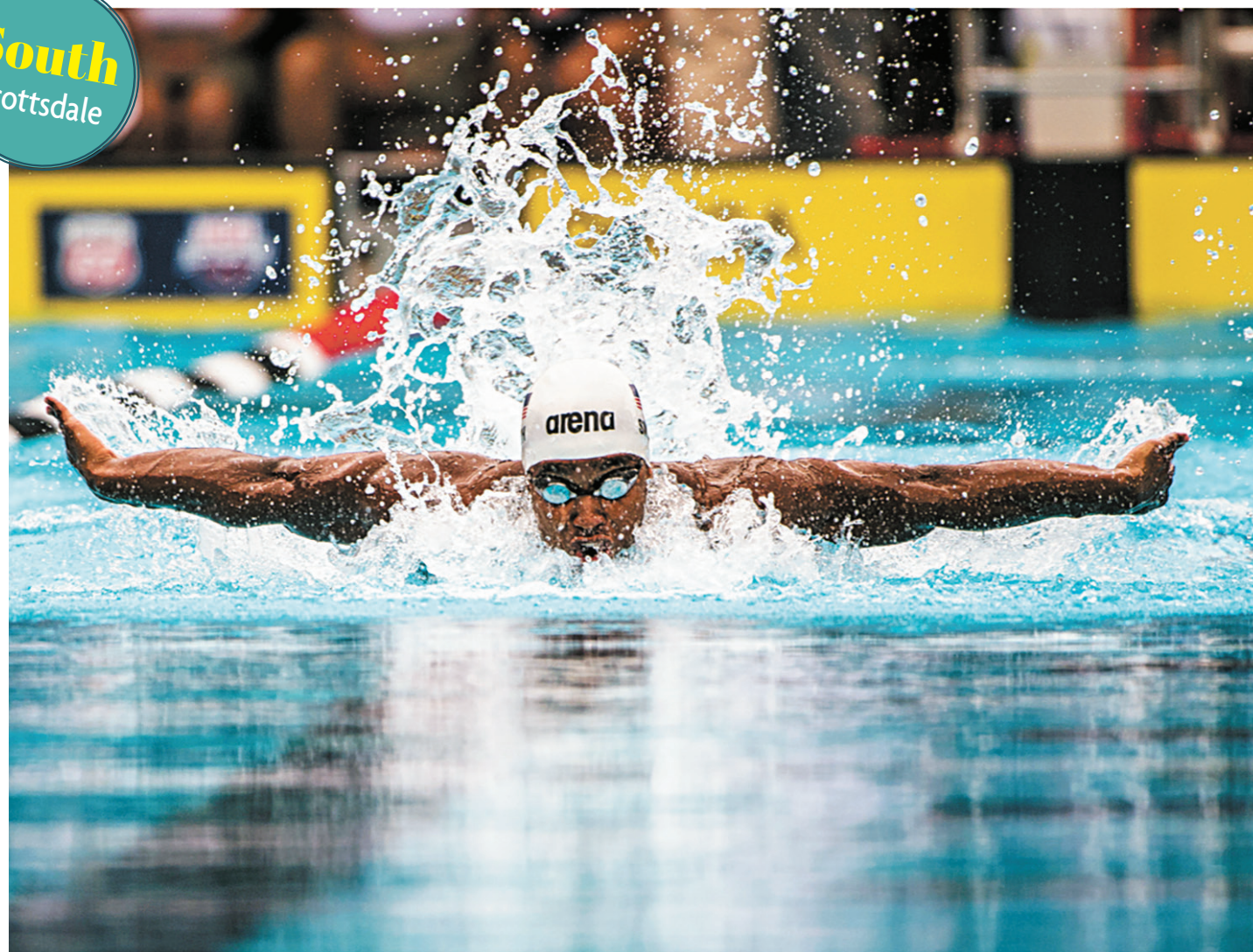
Getting him going in Baltimore were parents Harold and Marcia Smith, who encouraged him when they noticed his attraction to the water and his skills in it even as a toddler.

At 7, Smith began competitive swimming for the Baltimore City Swim Club and, when he was 11, with the Eagle Swim Team, also in Maryland.

“I started to see major improvements, and because of great coaching, I progressed into one of the better high school swimmers in the country,” he said.

As he succeeded, his parents realized that swimming could take him to new locations, a new life.

“I have been blessed to travel the world to places like Dubai, Japan, China,



Giles Smith of southern Scottsdale trains vigorously for his chance at a spot on the 2020 Summer Olympics swim team. He overcame an elbow injury and has been racking up medals in other competitions as he prepares for Olympic tryouts. (Special to the Progress)

Russia, Singapore, Canada and Russia,” he said.

He even once bested the great Phelps in the 100-meter butterfly.

“Michael has beaten me probably thousands of times head to head, but, growing up in Baltimore, Michael has always been someone I have looked up to and idolized, so that day was pretty cool,” Smith said, adding:

“He is the greatest of all time, and the sport of swimming is lucky to have such a great ambassador who has had such a high level of success over nearly two decades.”

While completing a four-year athletic scholarship at the University of Arizona, Smith graduated magna cum laude as a journalism major with a business minor.

At U of A from 2012–2014, he was a 15-time NCAA All-American, two-time NCAA Champion, 2012–2013, and, in his 2014 senior year as team captain, he was three-time Pac-12 Champion and the conference’s scholar-athlete in men’s swimming.

“My time at U of A was something I will never forget,” he said, “and I am thankful to have had many great teammates and coaches over the years during my time in Tucson.”

After months of physical rehabilitation, he’s training 6-8 hours daily, building speed, strength and endurance through dryland and pool work coordinated with recovery modalities such as cryotherapy, infrared sauna and massage therapy. In this regimen, he has been guided by Seetha DeMarco, who is assisting with diet and conditioning.

From 6:30 to 9:30 a.m., he lifts weights and does cardio and land training at a Scottsdale gym, then refuels with quality food and rest until about 12:30 p.m.

From there, he goes to the Phoenix Country Day School, where he swims with the Phoenix Swim Club under coach Doug Djang until about 3 p.m. Here, time permitting, he helps out with swim clinics and offers private lessons.

“On the weekends, I try and help young

swimmers from the area improve their swimming techniques,” he said, noting that he stresses performance both in the pool and the classroom.

Looking forward to the Omaha Olympic Trials in June 2020, he plans to be one of the 52 men and women who become 2020 Olympians. In order to qualify, he’ll have to place first or second in an event, in his case, the 100-meter butterfly.

With the help of professionals and friends such as Paradise Valley friend Patrick Murphy, Phoenix resident Theo Hall, his social media manager, DeMarco and Djang, he’s competing and winning in the 100-meter butterfly at world-class levels.

“What a great person he is, a humble, talented individual,” said Hall, who met Smith in 2014. “There’s no funding from the government, so it’s very difficult to train full-time and still compete at the highest level – a significant challenge for Giles as he prepares to represent all of us in 2020.”