

ORCA Awards Weekend



Sponsored by ISCA & Swimming World
Hilton Bayfront, St. Petersburg, FL
April 17–18, 2026



What are the ORCAs?

The ORCA Awards are a first-of-its-kind, national celebration for the swimming community—similar in spirit to the ESPYs, but tailored specifically to the people who make our sport great. Held over a long weekend at the Hilton Bayfront in beautiful downtown St. Petersburg, Florida, this event will honor athletes, coaches, officials, and families who exemplify excellence, leadership, and commitment to the sport.

Designed to be both meaningful and memorable, the weekend features a blend of open water and pool swims, educational clinics, social events, and two nights of inspiring awards ceremonies. From age group standouts to Hall of Fame legends, we aim to shine a spotlight on individuals and teams from every level of swimming.

We're inviting Local Swim Committees (LSCs), clubs, and families to play a vital role in making this weekend a true representation of the depth and heart of the swimming community.

Venue

<https://www.hilton.com/en/hotels/sptshhf-hilton-st-petersburg-bayfront/>

We're excited to host the ORCA Awards at the **Hilton St. Petersburg Bayfront**, ideally located in the heart of downtown. This venue was selected for its walkable access and proximity to both top-tier pool facilities and the beach, making it perfect for both competition and relaxation. With scenic waterfront views, spacious meeting areas, and a welcoming atmosphere for families, coaches, and athletes alike, it's the ideal setting to celebrate the spirit of the swimming community.

Weekend Schedule – Tentative

Friday, April 17 – Arrival & Welcome

- Guest check-in
- Informal dinner & Speaker

Saturday, April 18 – ISCA Hall of Fame Induction Ceremony & The ORCAs

- Breakfast
- Workshops & Interactive Clinics for Athletes, Parents, and Coaches
- Lunch for Parents and Guests at Hotel or Local Spots
- Pool/ Open Water Swim
- Pre-Awards Social Hour
- **ISCA Hall of Fame Induction Ceremony & The ORCAs**

Sunday, April 19 – Departure

- Breakfast at hotel
- Guest departures

ISCA Hall of Fame Induction & The ORCAs

NCAA Coach of the Year (Divisions I, II, III, NAIA, Junior College)

Description: Honors the most outstanding coach in each NCAA division (D1, D2, D3) for their exceptional leadership, success, and impact on their team throughout the season. This award recognizes coaches who have demonstrated excellence in developing athletes, leading teams, and achieving competitive success at the NCAA level.

Criteria: Leadership, coaching effectiveness, athlete development, team success, and overall impact on the program.

- Awarded for each division:
 - NCAA D1 Coach of the Year
 - NCAA D2 Coach of the Year
 - NCAA D3 Coach of the Year
 - NAIA
 - Junior College

Brent Rutenmiller Award

Description: Honors a coach who has faced significant challenges (such as injury, illness, or personal hardships) and has shown extraordinary resilience in returning to coaching with dedication and effectiveness.

Criteria: Overcoming adversity, mental and emotional strength, ability to lead and inspire athletes through challenges, and continued commitment to coaching excellence and athlete development.

ISCA Coach of the Year Award (Similar to NFL Man of the Year Award)

Description: Honors a swimmer who has exemplified excellence both in and out of the pool, demonstrating outstanding athletic achievement, leadership, and community involvement. This award recognizes an individual who has used their platform to inspire others, positively impact the sport, and give back to their community.

Criteria: Athletic performance, leadership, community service, positive impact on the swimming world, and embodying the core values of the sport.

ISCA Hall of Fame Induction

Celebrates individuals who have made enduring contributions to the sport of swimming, honoring a lifetime of influence, service, and excellence.

Swimmer of the Year (by Age)

Description: Awarded to the male and female swimmer who has demonstrated exceptional performance in their respective age groups throughout the season, including local, state, and national levels.

Criteria: Competitive achievements, improvement, and sportsmanship.

- Awarded for each age group: Starting at 9, 10, 11, 12, 13, 14, 15 & 16, Senior
 - Male Swimmer of the Year
 - Female Swimmer of the Year

18 & Under Male/ Female Open Water Swimmer of the Year

Description: The 18 & Under Male/ Female Open Water Swimmer of the Year Award recognizes an exceptional young male and female athlete who have excelled in open water swimming throughout the past year. This award honors a swimmer who demonstrates competitive success while embracing the unique challenges of open water racing, including endurance, adaptability, and strategic decision-making. The recipient represents the future of open water swimming through her performance, character, and commitment to the sport.

Criteria:

Nominees should meet several of the following criteria during the award year:

- Achieved notable results in open water competitions at the local, regional, national, or international level
- Demonstrated consistent performance across varying distances, courses, and environmental conditions
- Displayed strong mental toughness, race awareness, and physical endurance
- Exhibited sportsmanship, integrity, and respect for competitors and officials
- Positively represented the open water swimming community through leadership, attitude, or community involvement

Tom Himes Award - Age Group Coach of the Year (14 & Under)

Description: Honors a coach who has shown outstanding leadership, dedication, and

effectiveness in coaching young swimmers (ages 14 & under), fostering both athletic and personal growth.

Criteria: Proven success, leadership, mentoring of swimmers, and overall impact on the team.

Mark Schubert Award — Senior Club Coach of the Year (15 & Over)

Description: Honors a coach who has shown outstanding leadership, dedication, and effectiveness in coaching swimmers aged 15 & over, fostering both athletic and personal growth.

Criteria: Proven success, leadership, mentoring of swimmers, and overall impact on the team.

Mike Leonard Award - YMCA Coach of the Year

Description: Recognizes a YMCA swim coach who exemplifies the core values of the YMCA—caring, honesty, respect, and responsibility—while demonstrating outstanding coaching ability, leadership, and dedication to the development of swimmers both in and out of the pool.

Criteria: The recipient of this award will have demonstrated measurable success in athlete development, fostered a positive and inclusive team culture, emphasized personal growth and sportsmanship, shown leadership within the YMCA swimming community, and consistently upheld the mission and values of the YMCA through their coaching.

Official of the Year

Description: Recognizes an official who has gone above and beyond in supporting their swimming community.

Criteria: Supportiveness, dedication, and positive involvement in the swimming community.

Heart of Sport Award

Description: Recognizes a swimmer who has made a significant impact on their local community through volunteer work, charitable efforts, or leadership and service.

Criteria: Community involvement, leadership, and positive influence outside of swimming.

Comeback of the Year

Description: Awarded to a swimmer who has faced adversity (such as injury, tough race, or other personal challenges) and showed outstanding mental toughness and perseverance.

Criteria: Mental strength, consistent effort, and overcoming setbacks.

Family Dedication Award

Description: Honors a family who has actively supported the team through volunteering, positive participation, and creating a welcoming and encouraging environment for swimmers and families.

Criteria: Active involvement, positive attitude, and team spirit.

Lifetime Giving Award

Description: The Lifetime Giving Award honors an individual whose lifelong commitment to swimming has made a profound and lasting impact on the sport. This award recognizes extraordinary service, generosity, and dedication—celebrating those who have given their time, energy, resources, and leadership to enrich the lives of athletes and strengthen the swimming community over decades.

Criteria:

- Demonstrated long-term commitment and service to the sport of swimming
- Significant and sustained contributions beyond professional obligations
- Impact felt at the local, regional, or national level
- Recognized as a mentor, leader, or advocate within the swimming community
- Embodies the core values of integrity, selflessness, and passion for the sport

Best Swimming Book Award

Description: This award honors an outstanding book that meaningfully contributes to the sport of swimming. This award recognizes authors whose work educates, inspires, and elevates the swimming community—whether through storytelling, coaching insight, athlete development, leadership, history, or personal growth. The winning book should leave a lasting impression on swimmers, coaches, parents, or fans of the sport.

Criteria:

- The book must be primarily focused on swimming or the swimming community

- Demonstrates a positive and impactful message aligned with athlete development, education, or inspiration
- Shows originality, clarity, and quality of writing
- Has relevance to age group swimmers, coaches, parents, or the broader swimming ecosystem

Best Team Social Media Presence

Description: The Best Team Social Media Presence Award recognizes a swim team that effectively uses social media to build community, celebrate athletes, promote team values, and positively represent the sport. This award highlights teams that go beyond results—using digital platforms to tell stories, educate, engage families, and showcase the joy and impact of swimming.

Criteria:

- Consistent, creative, and engaging social media content across platforms
- Positive representation of athletes, coaches, and team culture
- Highlights athlete development, sportsmanship, and community involvement
- Demonstrates authenticity, inclusivity, and responsible digital leadership
- Uses social media as a tool to grow and strengthen the swimming community