

Nancye's last lap brings swimming career full circle



Nancye and her NSW team-mates at Sandy Bay in 1939. The girls are, from left, Pat Norton, Gwen Millard, Nancye, Joan Thomas and Margaret Dovey.

By EVE LAMB

THE heated water of Hobart's aquatic centre is a stark contrast to the icy, tidal Sandy Bay Baths way back in 1939.

But to Nancye Mitchell, 75, and competing in the AUSSI Masters National Swim Championships in Hobart, both are scenes of personal milestones.

As a 16-year-old the 1939 National Championships at Sandy Bay were Nancye's first major swim meet.

Now, 59 years later, the masters championships are the Sydneysider's swansong in competitive swimming.

It was apt that she should end her competitive swimming career in the same city where it began, Nancye said.

At the 1939 meet she swam for NSW alongside Margaret Dovey, who later became wife of former Australian prime minister Gough Whitlam.

Back then Nancye won gold in the 100m freestyle despite being accused of breaking and being made to swim the entire race again.

"They suggested I got a flying start so we had to get out and do it again, but I still won," Nancye said.

"I can remember that vividly. It was very cold and it was a night time swim.

"I started competing and then the war came and I went into the airforce, then got married and had a family.

"I didn't compete again until 1980 and for 18 years I've been competing with masters."

In 1995, at the age of 72,

she was one of a world record-setting team of four senior swimmers at the Homebush Olympic Centre.

"It was the 280 plus, the accumulation of our ages, freestyle relay and medley," she said.

"We broke the first world record for four grannies and it was a great achievement.

"That has since been broken by a Swedish team but we were very excited to think

that we four elderly ladies were the first to break that first world record."

These days Nancye trains by swimming about 1200m three times a week.

The championships, which continue tomorrow, are the first ever held in Hobart.

The event has attracted 435 competitive swimmers aged 20 to 91 from around Australia, America and New Zealand.

This time around Nancye, now a grandmother of four, is competing in individual freestyle and relay events as a member of NSW's Cronulla Sutherland club.

"After this I'll still swim with masters but I just feel that I've reached an age where the sitting around and the waiting and the going to and from for big events is just a bit much," she said.



Fifty nine years on: Nancye at her last masters competition, again in Hobart, but in the warmer waters of the aquatic centre.