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# Competition Pools on Campus

## WHAT TO KNOW BEFORE TAKING THE PLUNGE

BY JOSHUA ALBERTSON

While leisure pools, lazy rivers, and other aquatic amenities on university and college campuses have been getting a lot of attention lately—and arousing envy in those of us old enough to wish our own alma maters had offered such luxuries back in the day—there’s another solid area of growth quietly taking center stage: state-of-the-art competition pools.

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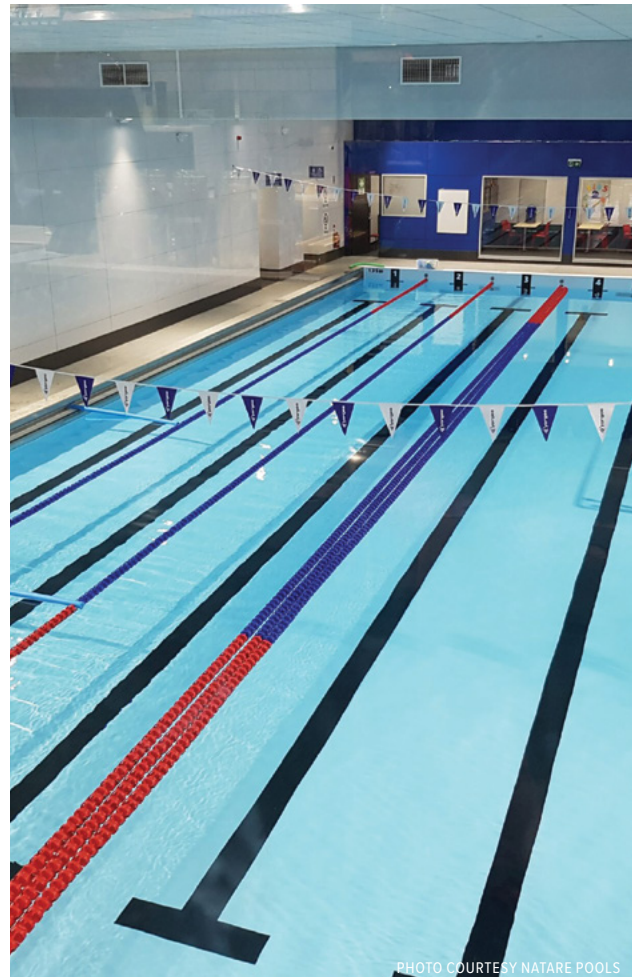
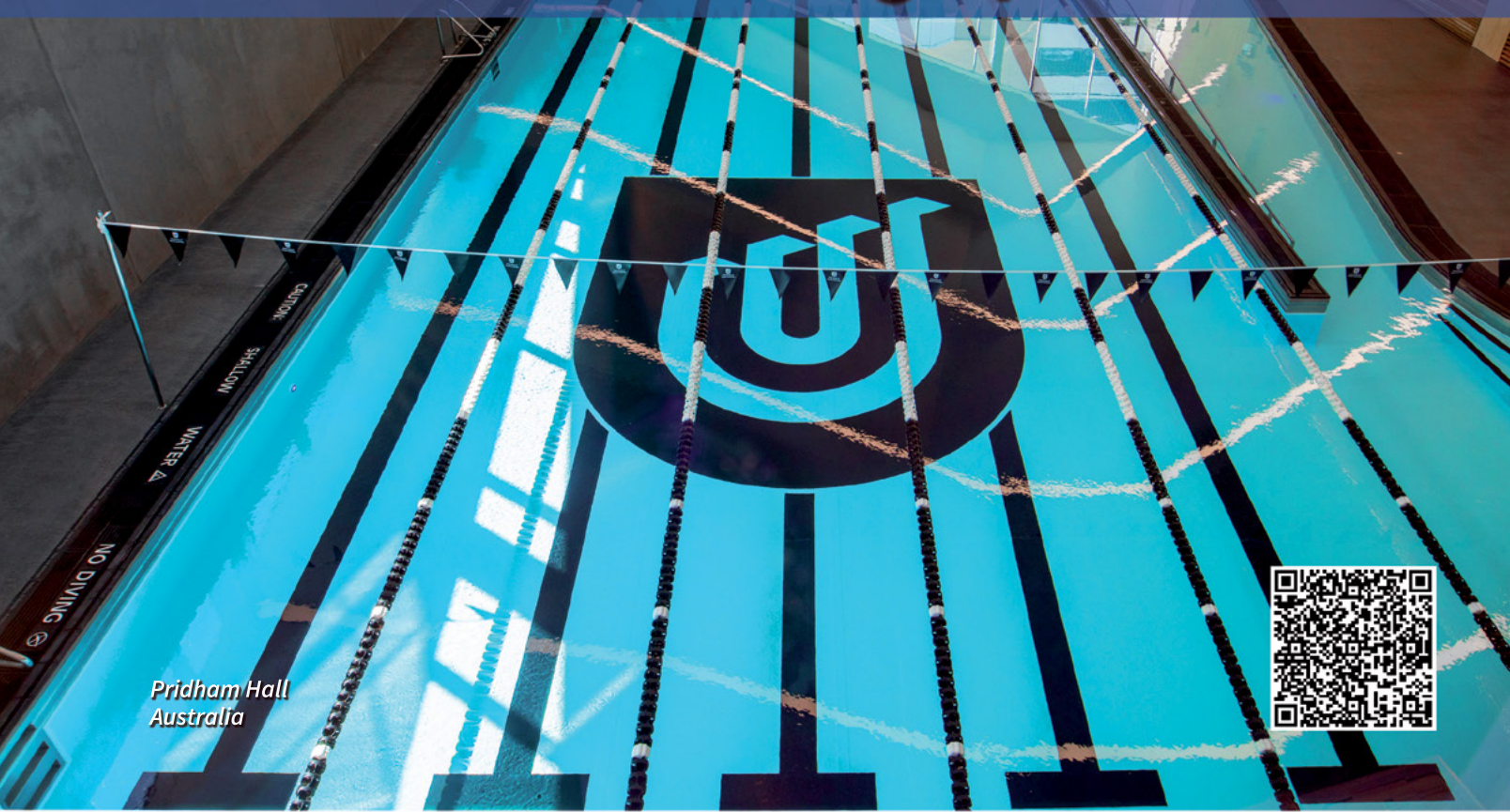


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Joshua Albertson is sales manager for Natare Pools, an international leader in stainless-steel pool manufacturing as well as a top supplier of custom equipment for not only pools but water parks and aquatic centers. Albertson says the demand for new competition pools on campuses is on the rise, with a lot of

options available for schools focused on flex use, sustainability, operational savings, and racecourse measurements fine-tuned to governing body standards.

We asked Albertson for his advice on what college and university administrators should

consider before taking the plunge.

**Flex-Use**

Albertson advises clients to consider what uses they envision for the pool. “It’s similar to when you talk to an architect about building a house,” he says. “They’re going to ask you about how you live. Similarly, we ask the right questions for a pool. What are some of the ways you envision using this pool? Are you just doing lap swimming for your swim teams, or do you also have free swim? Are you planning to offer swimming lessons, water aerobics, or class instruction for kayaking or scuba diving?”

Flexibility helps universities and colleges get a maximum return on their investment—and possibly generate revenue if they make their pool available to the larger community. Local swim teams may jump at the chance to rent the pool for practice during off-hours, for instance, or pool space can be rented out for swim or scuba lessons or even parties.

Meanwhile, the availability of areas of the pool for leisure swim creates a new recreational and social venue for students, which can be a plus for student recruitment and retention.

**Bulkheads**

Albertson speaks to the advantages of installing bulkheads in campus pools. In short, a bulkhead is a platform that divides a pool into separate sections. They can be fixed or adjustable; the latter can be repositioned to change the pool’s layout to suit different needs at different times.


“For example, if you have a bulkhead installed in a 50-meter pool, it can almost act like two different pools,” Albertson says. “On one side you can have 25 meters of practice swimming; on the other side you can have free swim or swim lessons. A bulkhead allows so much functionality, and that’s really something we like to recommend when our clients are talking to us. They start to understand that oh my gosh, we can do so many more things at one time with the ability to divide the pool.” In some cases, clients opt for two bulkheads for even more flexibility.

Albertson adds that even for campuses where the pool is used almost exclusively for

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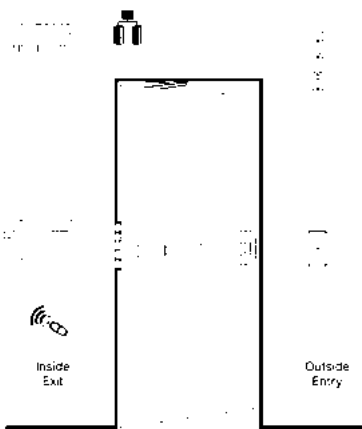



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Natare can manufacture a custom stainless-steel pool with greater efficiency, building the wall systems in sections in their shop in Indianapolis, Indiana and then delivering them directly to the job site.

the swim team and swim meets, movable bulkheads serve a valuable purpose, adjusting for either long-course or short-course events. They can create an extra course lane as needed. And with competition anchoring, finite adjustments can be made with high-precision anchoring to make sure the course length is exactly what it's meant to be.

"Sometimes the governing body of that swim meet wants the course verified," he says, "and the only way to absolutely get within the 10th of the mark is with the adjustability of our bulkheads. So that's another reason why they're very popular."

**Stainless vs. Concrete**

All Natare pools are stainless steel, which brings with it marked benefits over other materials, Albertson explains. For one, Natare can manufacture a custom stainless-steel pool with greater efficiency, building the wall systems in sections in their shop in

Indianapolis, Indiana and then delivering them directly to the job site.


"Within a matter of weeks those sections are in place and welded together," he says. "So what you find is that your time on site as a pool contractor has been greatly reduced versus the traditional methods of using concrete or gunite or other cementitious materials, which can take several months versus weeks on site in some cases to get the actual pool construction done. So there's an incredible amount of savings on site when it comes to stainless."

Albertson points to the other challenges overcome by using stainless steel. "Sometimes it's hard to get traditional material in a certain part of the country, because there isn't the manpower or the capability," he says. "Stainless can be shipped anywhere and welded in place. So that's a benefit, too."

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**Sustainability**

For most campuses today, water conservation and other sustainability factors also come into play not only to meet environmental goals but save money in the long run. “We ask, ‘Is water conservation important to you? Are electricity conservation and efficiency important to you?’ We need to know what’s driving their motivation as far as what they want.”

One sustainability factor goes back to the use of stainless steel. “A lot of people like that it’s a recyclable material,” Albertson says. “You can’t recycle concrete, but you can recycle stainless, so if by chance something needs to change 50 years from now, they’ll be able to take the stainless steel that’s used to build their swimming pool and recycle that.”

Albertson also advises clients to consider the efficiency of the filtration system they choose. “The filtration system we manufacture is really efficient in the way it operates,” he says. “Our system relies primarily on gravity, not suction, and uses compressed air in lieu

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of traditional backwashing to clean the sand bed. There is incredible efficiency in our design and operation, which can really impact the operating expense of the facility five, 10 or even 20 years down the line.” The company estimates a Natare MicroFlo filter system can reduce water consumption by up to 80 percent and save more than an hour of staff time each day.

Albertson compares it to investing in thicker-paned windows, which may represent a larger initial investment but make up for it with energy output and costs over time. “Sometimes people forget that not only does it cost a lot of money to build a facility, but you also have the operating costs to consider. You may build with a filter that’s a little more expensive on the front end, but after five years you’re saving money in your operating expenses by using less chemical, water, electricity, and maintenance.”

As these decisions are being made, Natare can provide a facility report using typical water,

electrical, and maintenance costs specific to the school to create a close estimate of what it will cost to operate a Natare filtration system compared to others. “We can provide that savings estimate over the course of one, two, five, 10, or 20 years,” Albertson says. “The numbers get pretty high, as you can imagine.”

Finally, Albertson encourages clients to consider adding an accessible ramp which goes directly into the water. This gives people with disabilities the ability to enter the water using an aquatic wheelchair instead of an external pool lift. “We can make an accessible ramp, also made from stainless steel, that allows someone who needs extra accessibility to enter and exit the pool in a very dignified way.”

### The Final Word

State-of-the-art competition pools in and of themselves add value to any campus that wants to attract top athletes and host prestigious swim competitions. Adding the ability to adjust course lengths and make room

for multi-use capabilities creates even more long-term value, helping to drive the demand for new competition pools across the country. Considering the size of the investment, Albertson urges clients to strongly consider additional options that will reduce operating and maintenance costs over the long term for a project that will serve the campus well for years to come.



**ABOUT THE AUTHOR:** Joshua Albertson is sales manager for Natare Pools, an international leader in stainless-steel pool manufacturing as well as a top supplier of custom equipment for not only pools but water parks and aquatic centers.

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