



# CAPITOL CITY SPEAKERS BUREAU

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## Rowdy Gaines

*Travels from:* Florida

*Fee Range:* \$7,501 - \$10,000

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Rowdy Gaines' life is one of inspiration and courage. Born in Winter Haven, Florida, Rowdy didn't start swimming until the age of 17. He tried other sports as a youngster but was either too short, too slow or not coordinated enough.

A shy boy growing up, Gaines found the solitude of swimming laps to be just what the doctor ordered. After two years of rapid improvement as a high school swimmer, he was offered a scholarship to swim for Auburn

University under legendary coach, Richard Quick.

If it hadn't been for the 1980 Olympic boycott, Gaines might very well be one of America's most famous Olympians. He had broken 11 World Records and was favored to win 4 Olympic Gold Medals in the 1980 games. While disappointed by the decision to boycott, he supported President Carter and the U.S.A 100%.

With every set back in his life, Gaines has persevered. When he graduated from Auburn in 1981, he thought his swimming career to be over as professional swimming didn't exist at the time. He left the water for nearly a year thinking he'd missed his dream to swim in the Olympics. At his father's coaxing, returned to swimming in late 1981.

Although many believed him to be "washed-up" and "over-the-hill," Gaines entered the 1984 Olympic trials at the age of 25. He made the U.S. team in three events: the 100 meter freestyle, the 400 meter freestyle relay and the 400 medley relay. His times from the trials were good but not his best, and he went into the 1984 Los Angeles Olympics as an underdog. Gaines won individual Olympic gold in the 100 meter freestyle and anchored both U.S.A. relays to Gold medals. He finally lived his dream on sports' greatest stage and officially retired from the sport of swimming.

In August of 1991, at the age of 31, Gaines was diagnosed with Guillan-Bare Syndrome, a rare neurological disorder that paralyzes the entire nervous system. Gaines was hospitalized for two and a half months and miraculously made a full recovery from the life-threatening syndrome. His doctors believed that had he not been in the physical condition he acquired from swimming, he might not be alive, or at best be paralyzed for life. Within a year, Rowdy had relearned the basic functions of day-to-day life and even began to swim again. A year following his recovery, he won two World Master's Titles and broke two World Master's Records.



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## Rowdy Gaines continued

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Like most great athletes, Rowdy contemplated a comeback. He still had a top-10 world ranking in several freestyle events when he qualified for the 1996 Olympic Trials at the age of 35. A committed family man, Gaines decided not to compete in the games but instead chose to enter the broadcast booth as NBC's Olympic Games Swimming commentator. It's a role that has suited him well. NBC and USA Swimming were both excited to have his knowledge of swimming and asked him to commentate the 2000 Atlanta Olympics and the 2004 games in Athens.

Today, Gaines is often referred to as "Swimming's Greatest Ambassador." He manages a busy schedule as the Director of Outreach for the Alabama Sports Hall of Fame and as a devoted father of four daughters. He travels the world passionately sharing his love for the sport of swimming with youth, parents and coaches. He serves as a national spokesperson for the Children's Miracle Network, HealthSouth, Disney, Ray Ban, Speedo and John Hancock. He was inducted into the International Swimming Hall of Fame in 1995 and is a much sought-after motivational speaker. He is a frequent television commentator for swimming and sporting events.