

THE DAY THE PRESIDENT VISITED ISHOF

February 24th, 1977 was the day swimming enthusiast and former President of the United States, Gerald R. Ford, came to Fort Lauderdale to thank Buck Dawson and the swimming community for helping to raise money to build an outdoor swimming pool at the White House. You see, Ford's predecessor, Richard Nixon, didn't like to swim, filled in the pool that was built for Franklin Roosevelt and turned it into a press room.

Like President Ford, Dawson was a well-known and well-connected University of Michigan alum. In arranging the visit, Buck asked "Jerry" if there was anything special he would like to see at the Hall.

"I'd like to see Rick White dive," replied Ford.

"We'll see what we can do," said Buck.

Rick White was the world professional high diving champion, Captain of the USA's High Dive team and held the World High Dive record from a height of 152 feet. Rick was also something of an international sports celebrity from

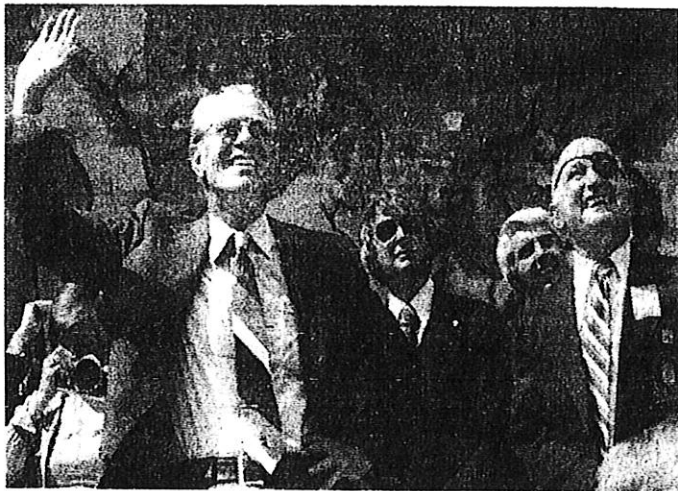


Buck Dawson and President Ford watch Rick White climb up a specially constructed ladder for a high dive demonstration.

When White reached the 100 foot perch and stood ready to dive, he looked down at the crowd. Seeing the President he shouted, "We love you, Gerry!"

President Ford raised his arm and waved to White, who took this as his cue to dive. White leaped off the perch and gracefully sailed into the water below, executing a perfect full gainer. Moments later, with cameras clicking away, Ford greeted White with a handshake and an embrace. "Tremendous, I'm impressed," Ford said. "I'd have been scared to death."

White was just as impressed. "Imagine!" Rick recalled during a recent visit to ISHOF. "The President of the United States asking to see me -- a Black diver named White -- and then him greeting me with a 'soul brother' handshake at the International Swimming Hall of Fame."



Former President Gerald R. Ford waves to diver Rick White after becoming the first honorary member of the International Swimming Hall of Fame. With Ford is Buck Dawson, right, Hall of Fame director.

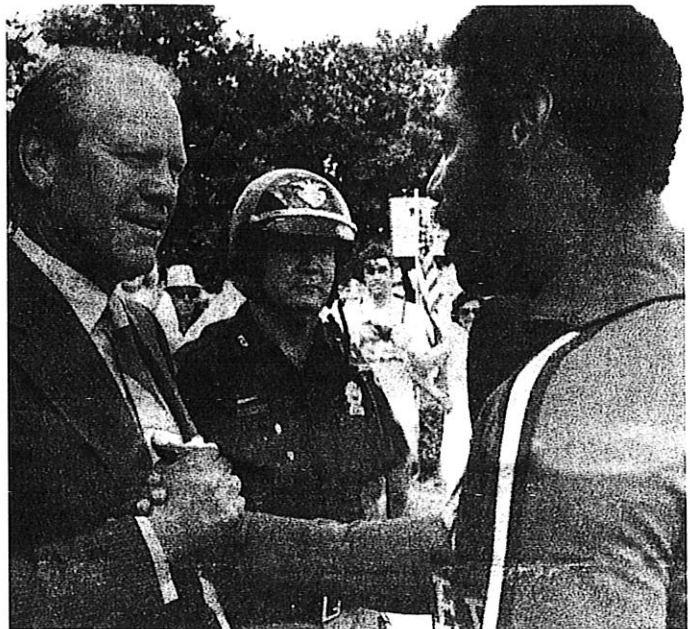
Staff Photo by PETER MORRIS

his many appearances on ABC's Wide World of Sports.

As luck would have it, and Buck always had luck, Rick was performing in Miami in one of Bob and Norma Dean Maxwell's water shows. Buck called Bob and quick as a flash a 100 foot tall ladder was erected at the Hall of Fame pool for the Presidential visit.

In brief ceremonies, President Ford thanked Buck and the swimming community for helping to raise the funds to "bring back swimming" to The White House. Ford told the crowd assembled in the Hall that he swam "virtually every day" during his time at The White House. "I really enjoy swimming," he said. "It's been a great source of pleasure and good health."

After the pictures and formalities inside the museum were completed, Buck led the President out the side door, onto what is now known as the William E. Simon Veranda. From there, they observed Rick White climbing up the ladder.



President Ford meets World High Dive Champion Rick White at the International Swimming Hall of Fame.