



The Blazer Newsletter

KANSAS CITY BLAZERS SWIM TEAM

COMMITMENT TO EXCELLENCE



Eternal Loyalty

Passion Education

Discipline Dedication

Commitment Leadership

Excellence

March 2009 Edition

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2009 Mid-American League Championship Meet

The Kansas City Blazers got their championship season off to a blazing start with a meet that almost didn't happen. The original location was suppose to be at Central High, but a broken pump and some badly needed repairs temporarily had the Eastside Blazers scrambling to find a suitable location and fast. Luckily for us and through some good negotiations they secured the Henley Aquatic Center at Bridger middle school. It was a good thing too because as things worked out the Blazers would have missed out on an excellent opportunity to win lots of gold and more importantly secured many new DI's standards which indicates a new and growing strength within our team.

Countless new DI times were established and 33 new DI standards were set at the pool. Excellent meet performances were highlighted by Blazer age group high point winners Yousef Eldakak (10), Riyle Fries (12), Shale Morris (12), Jessie Musser (14), Tiffany Liu (12) Senior girls, Nate Ladner (20) Senior division who combined for over 337 team points.

New DI time standards we established by Colten Becker (10) 50 fly, 100 IM; Lexi Bergeron (15) 200 back; Jung Bin Choi (Chinese for 9 year old stud) 200 IM, 50 back, 100 IM; Morgan Clausen (11) 200 IM, 100 fly; Bobby Faulkenberry(16) 50 free, 100 fly, 200 breast; Isabelle Finzen (10) 50 breast; Speedy Foster (7) 200 fly; Jeremy Grenell (12) 100 breast; Beth Houghton (14) 1650 free; Alec Jackson (16) 200 breast, 400 IM; Ben Koeller (13) 50 free (relay lead off), 1650 free; Kyle Kopecky(12) 50 free; Ian Lee (12) 100 IM; Heath Maginn (13) 100 fly; PJ Musser (11) 200 IM, 50 free, 100 IM; Jt Nelson (14) 500 free; Jeanne O'Flaherty (10) 100 IM; Nathaniel Savage (17) 100 fly; Chance Smith (14) 50 free; Ryan Smith (16) 1650 free; Hannah Spoolstra 100 breast, 100 IM.

Individual winners included Lexi Bergeron (15) 500 free; Yousef (the man) Eldakak (10) 200 IM, 50 fly, 100 free, 50 back, 50breast, 200 free, 100 IM; Speedy Foster (7) 500 free, Marston Fries (15) 50 free; Rilye Fries(12) 200 IM, 100 free, 100 back, 50 free, 100 breast, 200 free, 100 IM; Peyton Gajan 200 free; Zack Holbrook (12) 500 free; Kyle Kopecky (12) 100 free; Nate Ladner (20) Sectional Times 100 free, 200 IM, 100 breast, 50 free, 100 fly, 200 breast, 200 free; Tiffany Liu (12) senior division 100 free, 200 fly, 200 back, 1650 free; Alex Lombardo (14) 50 free; Zach McDonald (10) 50 free; Hannah Musser (12) 100 back; Jesse Musser (14) 100 free, 100 fly, 100 back, 200 free, 100 breast, 200 IM; Mackenzie Neeley (13) 100 fly, 200 IM; Jack Pluenneke 200 IM, 100 free, 200 free, 50 free; Mackenna Rife (15) 200 IM, 200 free, Kaela Ropson (14)100 breast; Nathaniel Savage (17) 200 fly, 200 back, 400 IM; Caroline Woody (17) 200 breast, 400 IM.

It was an excellent start to the championship season with not only so many new DI times established, but there was a plethora of personal best that will soon lead to even greater successes.

GO YOU BLAZERS GO!!!!!!!

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A Speedo Sponsored Team



Division 2 Championship Swim Meet

D-II's was more successful than most of the people involved with the meet could have expected. Having to move the D-II's to Bridger Middle School from Central High School was met with great success; considering what we had to work with on the size of the pool. Oh, and what about the snow flurries on late Friday night into the early morning on Saturday? Those flurries turned into 3" of snow and a driving night mare for many to get to the pool on Saturday morning, but we also overcame that obstacle! The finals for the top 8 qualifiers were a great experience for those who made them. Just among the top 3 finishers in the meet the Blazers had 80% best times that were swum in the finals. The list below is Gold, Silver and Bronze medal winners at D-II's.

Gold

Madeline Mills
Logan Johnston
Hannah Spoolstra
Rosie Hutchison
Sidney Drew
Allison McCollum
Ellie Senneff
Katie Kruse
Mardi Buchanan
Beth Houghton
Rachel Staudenmeyer
Abby Klover
Felicia Walker
Allison Boyd
Katherine Miller
Jack Zink
Shyam Narayanan
Ryan sweat
Collin Strickland
Jack Synder
Max Bennett
Jared Johnstone
Sida He
Heath Maginn
Ben Koeller
Sasha Stadnik
Joseph Lytle
Matt Spangler
Sihan Liu
Brent Crosby
Brian Hering

Silver

Logan Johnston
Madison Januszewski
Madison Moore
Abigail Johnstone
Maggie Allen
Beth Houghton
Maria Macaluso
Karlee Benefial
Allsion Boyd
Katie Kruse
Alyson Raymond
Michelle Towner
Abby Klover
Taylor Burkhead
Rachel Staudenmeyer
Mardi Buchanan
Bridget Peterson
Jack Zink
Collin Strickland
Jack Snyder
Sam Boyd
Jamie Cohen
Thomas Faulkenberry
Chance Smith
David Martinez
Sida He
Jared Johnstone
Joseph Lytle
Brent Crosby
Andrew Swetnam
Sasha Stadnik
Joshua Grenell
Kyle McDonald
Sihan Liu

Bronze

Madeline Mills
Maggie Allen
Hannah Spoolstra
Morgan Clausen
Beth Houghton
Karlee Benefial
Alex O'Hearne
Georgia Gettys
Allison McCollum
Sidney Drew
Maria Macaluso
Alyson Raymond
Rachel Staudenmeyer
Taylor Burkhead
Michelle Towner
Mardi Buchanan
Hallie Dusselier
Allison Boyd
Felicia Walker
Anderson Maginn
Jack Zink
Jamie Cohen
Ryan McMonigle
Sam Boyd
Joshua Littell
Jeffery O'Larte
Ben Koeller
Isaac Powell
Sida He
Jack Pluenneke
Sihan Liu
Matt Martin
Brian Hering
Ryan Smith
Sasha Stadnik
Joseph Lytle
Brent Crosby

There were a lot of Blazer swimmers that came to the meet and swam their hearts out. Some that made it back to the finals, other that just had many personal best times. We wish we could mention all those great swims but then the News Letter would become a Novel. **GREAT JOB BLAZERS!** KEEP UP THE GOOD WORK AND WE WILL SEE YOU AT THE POOL.

2009 Spring Sectional Meet

This was the first Sectional Championships in this four year plan leading to the Olympic Trials and Games in 2012. The main focus of Sectional meets is to have geographic Elite/Senior championship meets all over the country. These are held twice per year, and magnify the development of high school swimming that leads to national as well as international competition.

The KC Blazers had 47 swimmers attending this spring's meet. Six swimmers represented the Blazers East Senior program, 3 represented the West Senior program, and 38 came from the Elite group.

The Blazers were crowned overall team champion. The men's team also took home their team title. The women scored a relatively thin 450 points, placing third behind Parkway Swim Club and women's champion Lawrence Aquahawks.

Highlights of the meet included Shannon Vreeland setting a Sectional record in the 200 freestyle. This performance was a team record, as was her performance in the 200 IM. Nate Ladner also set a Sectional record in the 100 yard breaststroke and qualified for his first National Championship. The women 400 and 800 freestyle relays of Brooke Brull, Kat Sickle, Haley Smith and Shannon Vreeland qualified for short course Junior Nationals, as did the men's 400 medley relay, composed of Ben Scheffer, Luke Musser, Joe Knight and Nathan Welchlin.

Individual event winners included Austin Acheson (1650 free), Nate Ladner (100 breast) and Shannon Vreeland (200 free, 500 free, 1000 free, 200 IM, 400 IM). Shannon also picked up the women's high point title. Nate Ladner stood on the podium after placing third on the men's side.

Swimmers making top eight were Brooke Brull, Monica Dudley, Natalie Morris, Haley Smith, Chelsey Weatherford, Jon Benson, Matt Benson, Vito Cammisano, Nathan Hoisington, Joe Knight, Luke Musser, Seth Musser, Griffin Peavey, Ben Scheffer, Cris Smith and Nathan Welchlin.

Top 16 performers were Amy Davis, Bryce Hinde, Jean Madison, Mackenna Rife, Kat Sickle, Heather Snyder, Caroline Woody, Kyle Adams, Ben Bravence, Bobby Faulkenberry, Jesse Musser, Nathaniel Savage and Steve Sharp.

The men's team had over 70% best times, and the women had 60% -- very good for this type of meet. There were some major disqualifications that cost the team valuable points throughout the meet and erased some good performances. This brings to light the importance of proper preparation and attention to detail.

The future is bright when we look at the development of some of our young up and coming swimmers. It also shows that some of the more experienced Elite swimmers are preparing for the next step in their swimming careers.

Special thanks to Tracy Hoisington for being our head chaperone, and was assisted by Liz Kent, Jo Anne Knight, Carmen Dudley and Dan Savage. We cannot say enough how fabulous it is to have such dedicated volunteers to assist the athletes and coaches at this competition. We also had the Weatherfords coordinating the daily lunches for the swimmers. We cannot be a special program and team without an equally dedicated group of parent volunteers. Thank you! Tracy shared that the swimmers were fabulous to work with. The bus driver and the hotel went out of their way to compliment our team. Well done!

A new scoring system will be implemented at the Summer 2009 meet to go with the traditional team scoring. This will be consistent with the international system of medal counts. Teams will win plaques based on teams with the most gold medals, as well as total gold, silver and bronze medals. Even though this does not start until this summer, we kept unofficial medal counts to see where we stacked up. The gold medal champion was Clayton Shaw Park with 12, and Blazers took second with 10. Blazers won the overall medal count with 23.

Congratulations to all for what we have done... But the future is based on the lessons learned, and applying them from here forward.

Missouri Grand Prix Meet

The quest for the 2012 and USA dominance in the London Olympics and for this summer's World Championships is on its way. We saw new faces emerging as well as some of the 2008 Olympians. It is easy to say that the sport is on the right track with many veterans preparing for bigger and better things. Also, new swimmers are accepting the challenge to reach up and add to the USA Olympic and World Championship dominance. There were swimmers from all over the USA, Mexico and Europe.

The Blazers had 17 swimmers competing in the meet. Swimmers who placed in the Top 24 were: Seth Musser and Vito Cammisano for the male squad. Monica Dudley, Brooke Brull, Haley Smith and Amy Davis all placed top 24 for the women's squad. Swimmers who placed top 16 were: Jean Madison, Caroline Woody, Bryce Hinde, Katt Sickle. Shannon Vreeland played a dominate role in the meet placing top 24 in all of her races. She finished 2nd in the 400IM, 5th in the 200IM, 9th in the 400FR, 7th in the 100FR, 8th in the 200BK, 6th in the 800FR, and 16th in the 200FR. They were her highest events and were very impressive at this stage of the year and for being a junior in high school.

Congratulations to the Blazer swimmers and Parents. I hope we all identify what excellence is and develop the attitude and commitment to reach that potential.

2008 Fall Semester GPA Report Update

This is the update for the GPA report, congratulations boys and girls for all your hard work outside of the pool! Please see last month's KCB Newsletter for the original report. Again, congrats to each and every one of you! Keep up the good work!

Students with 4.0 GPA

Michelle Chen, Reeva Date, Elexyss, Sihen Liu, Andrew Lombardo, Claire McClelland, Kate Snyder, Michael Wang.

Students with 3.5-3.9 GPA

Kara Barnett, Cade Blackburn, Ben Bravence, Rduy Date, Kaitlin Grover, Karne Hairichandana, Abigail Johnstone, Zoya Khan, Benjamin Koeller, Carsten Leimer, Joshua Lin, Kristi Lin, Carla McDonald, JT Nelson, Jeanne O'Flaherty, Sophie Paulk, Suruchi Ramanujan, Haley Sieban, Grace Yialouris and Noah Atta.

February Volunteer of the Month

Troy Laflin, Blazer Meet Director has been selected as our Volunteer of the month for February 2009. Troy makes hosting a meet seem effortless, which it is anything but. Troy's expertise is in the fact that he is an excellent planner and anticipates any problem that could arise. He creates a calm atmosphere and an environment where our swimmers can excel. His main area of focus is the opportunity for our children to have a safe and enjoyable experience. Troy orchestrates up to one hundred volunteers at each session and has a knack of recruiting talented individuals for each position. Troy has the ability to maintain calmness in the "line of fire". We appreciate all of his hard work and many long hours that he volunteers!

MOST INSPIRATIONAL SWIMMER OF THE MONTH
ELITE PROGRAM
February 2009
Seth Musser
Home School



CRITERIA:

- | | |
|------------------------|-------------------------|
| A. Attendance | D. Growth as a Person |
| B. Attitude | E. Inspiration to Staff |
| C. Growth as a Swimmer | & to Team Members |

Seth has just finished Phase II of this swim year. Since joining the elite group in spring 2008, Seth has been fun to watch and coach. He loves to race and he accepts challenge with a sparkle in his eye. Seth has been on a steady climb to excellence over this last year, but I will say this January/February 2009 he has been the #1 male in all the meets ; Polar Bear, Plano, Grand Prix, and has dominated these meets with best times. This is a reflection of his coach ability, his desire to be better, his daily work focus, and his work ethic. He has a passion for excellence that is demonstrated daily.

Congratulations on your hard work and dedication to being excellent. The brightest days are yet ahead.

Elite Coaches: Pete Malone, Scott Bliss, Kate Zabler

MOST INSPIRATIONAL SWIMMER OF THE MONTH
BLUE VALLEY WEST – ADVANCED BLUE GROUP
February 2009
Himadri Narasimhamurthy



February is nearly the end of Phase II of our swim year. With most of the Advanced Blue group competing in the Division II Championships as their last meet in Phase II, it was also the best month for the Advanced Blue group all year. While it was a month that stood out for the group, the one in the group who stood out the most was Himadri Narasimhamurthy.

In February, Himadri accomplished a lot – in and out of the pool. While she was at every swim practice in February, she was also busy with math and spelling competitions at school. These limited her meet opportunities, but not her results. In the events she swam at Division IIs, she achieved all best times. She finished her Sunday evening by swimming the 100 Breast and 100 Fly – both with best times – and dropping 5 seconds in the 100 fly!

At practice each day, she has also been diligent about reminding Coach Derek to bring his box cutter to cut her fins (he removed the box cutter from his briefcase when traveling and keeps forgetting to put it back in). Diligent, but in a good way. In March, she should swim even better (and have shorter fins). ☺

Coaches Derek, Jenny, & Pat

**MOST INSPIRATIONAL SWIMMER OF THE MONTH
BLUE VALLEY WEST – SENIOR GROUP**

February 2009

Margaux Kent



February is a short month, but one that is packed with energy in the Senior group. It is a month that begins with a trip to Plano, ends with a championship meet (Division II) and one where we begin to bring back swimmers from their winter high school season and send off those getting ready for the spring season. With all that going on, it is tough to stay on a steady course toward the Championships in March...you'd almost have to be a legend to do so. One who did this was Margaux Kent.

February was Margaux's second month in a row of 100% attendance – very steady. In meets, she was just as steady. She got best times in the 200 Free and 200 I.M. and picked up another sectional cut in her 100 Breast at the Greater Southwest Invitational in Plano – all unshaved and unrested.

While the senior group saw many great individual performances at the Division II meet, Margaux came to the meet to support her team by taking splits. Although she didn't have to be there, she came to swim warm-up and took splits for about six hours and ensuring that her teammates were received by a much less frazzled coach after their swims.

Its steady performance like this, keeping focus during a difficult month that will produce the best results in March and beyond. Great job, Margaux!

Coach Derek

**MOST INSPIRATIONAL SWIMMER OF THE MONTH
BLUE VALLEY NORTH – BLUE GROUP**

February 2009

Collin Strickland



To attain swimmer of the month a swimmer has to excel in the following three areas: attitude, practice performance, and meet performance. In the month of February, Collin Strickland has excelled in all three areas. In the last few months, Collin has really come out of his shell. His attitude has changed immensely. With his positive outlook towards swimming and his determination to succeed, Collin has become a much improved swimmer.

Collin had a fantastic D-II meet at the end of February, which sealed the deal for winning swimmer of the month. Collin had his best month of training so far this short course season and it paid off at the D-II meet, where he made 4 qualifying times for D-I's. Collin has joined the list of swimmers from BVN site "A" team with getting "A" times in the 200 and 500 Free at D-II's. Collin also had great swims in the 200 IM and 100 Breast.

My hope for Collin in the future is to achieve better technique, learn the mental side of swimming, to swim smart in practice and continue his climb up the ladder of success. Congratulations on making D-I's and being our Blue swimmer of the month.

CONGRATULATIONS!

Coach Bob

**MOST INSPIRATIONAL SWIMMER OF THE MONTH
BLUE VALLEY NORTH – GOLD GROUP**

February 2009

Hannah Spoolstra



Wow! Has this young lady ever matured and learned to cope with her inner-self over the past 6 months. Hannah has gained physical strength, psychological strength and has been building her self-esteem every month. She is learning that self-worth is earned, not asked for, and that success comes with a price of commitment and believing in yourself. Hannah has had two fantastic meets in February earning her a spot on the "A" list of swimmers at BVN. Hannah has had to overcome struggles with me (her coach), her teammates and herself to make the month of February a reality. Hannah (12) has achieved "A" times in the 50-100 Back and 100 IM. She is very close in the 50-100-200 Free; 50-100 Breast and 200 IM.

My hope for Hannah, in the future, is to see that she does have talent in the sport of swimming, that she can learn and condition herself to train harder in practice and take on a leadership role. Congratulations on a great Short Course Season.

CONGRATULATIONS!

Coach Bob

**MOST INSPIRATIONAL SWIMMER OF THE MONTH
SHAWNEE MISSION NORTH/ROELAND PARK – BLUE GROUP**

March 2009

Chloe Stanford



This month's "Swimmer of the Month" Chloe Stanford is and has been a diligent and conscientious worker for a long time. Gradually over the last few years I have had the pleasure to watch Chloe start at the very beginning level of swimming to becoming the committed and successful swimmer of today with an even brighter future for tomorrow. When Chloe began swimming she was just a little wiggle worm that's legs would just drag through the water and whose arms would just flail away. She is now developing into a swimmer with a purpose and effectiveness to her strokes that has help to lead her to her recent successes. When she decides to swim her strokes correctly she can be as good as anyone.

The results of Chloe's work paid off recently at MAL and DII Championships where Chloe achieved not only all best times, but did it repeatedly at both meets. Chloe has been instrumental in helping to establish a higher standard of work ethics for the whole group and her attitude has been contagious for the others in her lane. I have very much enjoyed watching Chloe develop into the quality swimmer she is today and am very much looking forward to observing her progress for the next number of years. She is an inspiration to coach and certainly others could gain by following her example of excellence.

Sincerely,
Coach Henry

**MOST INSPIRATIONAL SWIMMER OF THE MONTH
SHAWNEE MISSION NORTH/ROELAND PARK – GOLD GROUP**

February 2009

Ben Koeller

Ben Koeller has been awesome this winter with so many aspects of his swimming it will be hard to identify them all, but we shall try. First Ben's attitude towards practice and his team mates has been extraordinarily good. Ben has shown true leadership not only by example in both dry land and water, but has also called out his team mates when they are in need of some direction.

Despite the fact that Ben has grown about 27" this year, he has chosen to work extensively on the technical aspects of his strokes. Ben has gone to "great lengths" to improve in both fly and flutter kicking. The flutter kick has improved dramatically while the fly is improving it still needs work. The point Ben is taking the time and making the effort to strengthen some of the weaker parts of his stroke. The end result will be to become a much better, well rounded swimmer.

In short Ben has been a true leader for the whole group showing them what it takes to get to the next level with greater commitment, attendance, and work ethic. This is going to be a big year for Ben if he continues to commit himself to the sport, to work and set ambitious goals. He will be doing some of his best swimming at the Zone meet this summer in North Dakota.

Best wishes,
Coach Henry

USED SWIM GEAR FOR SALE

KCB Parents & Swimmers,

From time to time ads to sell gently used items are submitted requesting that they be placed in the KCB Newsletter. Please submit any ad to sell items to Mrs. Denise Holm, KCB's Business Manager at dduncan600@aol.com for approval. Upon approval by Denise, your ad will be forwarded to me for publishing in the next newsletter.

Thanks! 😊
Dan Savage

Check out this deal!



FOR SALE: Used Blazer swim Parka. This is the highly sought after tri-color Blazer parka...gold, white, & navy with a gold fleece lining. This swim parka will keep you warm before and after your swims. It has a water resistant outer shell, polar fleece lining, polar fleece lined pockets and drawstring hood. It is lined with 19oz artic fleece. Oxford nylon shell, water repellent coating, reinforced seams and lined pockets. It has been repaired around the pockets, has "BLAZERS" on the back, and could be personalized with a name on the front. This parka sells for \$115 new after Blazer discount!!! Shows some wear, but is in overall good condition. Sold "as is" for \$65 OBO. Please call Margaret at 913-897-0922 with any questions, to see it, or make an offer. Thank you!

The Dakota Pool Shark

Dagny Knutson Is Taking the Really Long Way to the Top

By Amy Shipley
Washington Post Staff Writer
Wednesday, March 4, 2009; E01

MINOT, N.D. -- The fastest-rising, most jaw-dropping teenage swimmer in the United States trains virtually alone in this frigid, working-class city about 55 miles from the Canadian border, where snow banks as tall as SUVs line neighborhood streets, rim parking lots and force residents to dig out their mailboxes.

Under milky white skies that cloak the town's low-slung, cinderblock buildings, only a handful more than a few stories high, Dagny Knutson races from workout to workout in a grime-streaked 1998 Ford Expedition with 187,000 miles on it, faithfully following an unorthodox and multifaceted training regimen that involves a private swim coach and personal trainer.

Her emergence from a town swamped with 60 inches of snowfall since November and steeled to sub-zero temperatures has excited USA Swimming officials, two of whom traveled here recently to observe her training. Though they arrived skeptical that anyone so far from an elite swimming center could have the faintest idea how to build a swim champion, they left impressed with the sophistication and quality of Knutson's personal program and coaching, National Team Director Mark Schubert said. And they offered this piece of advice: Keep doing what you're doing.

"It's just so different than the typical path," Schubert said. "It kind of gives everybody hope." Knutson (pronounced Kah-NUTE-son), 17, won seven gold medals in January during the Junior Pan Pacific Championships in Guam, where she swam the 200-meter individual medley in a time (2 minutes 10.79 seconds) that would have earned her fifth place at the Beijing Olympics. Her times in the 200 freestyle (1:57.73) and 400 individual medley (4:40.10) would have ranked her seventh and eighth, respectively.

A month earlier at the U.S. national short-course championships in Atlanta, she beat Olympic star Katie Hoff's one-year-old American record in the 400-yard individual medley by .04 of a second with a time of 4:00.62. A month before that, Knutson, a junior at Minot High, broke three national high school records, including one set in 1988 by Janet Evans. "I didn't see this coming," Knutson said. "I've been really focused, really just working hard to reach the goals I have in mind."

In January, the U.S. Olympic Committee awarded Knutson funding it usually reserves for members of national teams. "She doesn't seem to be afraid to race anybody or intimidated by anybody," Schubert said. "Those are *really* spectacular times. You always wonder if somebody who can swim times like that can do it against really good competition. . . . She answered all of those questions at the nationals [in Atlanta]. She answered all of them." To Knutson, more remain.

Thanks in part to the USOC funding, she will travel to several grand prix events in the coming months, the first the USA Swimming Austin Grand Prix, which begins Thursday. She will fly to Indianapolis in July for the U.S. championships, the qualifying event for the world championships in Rome later that month. "I don't have any limits," Knutson said. "I think if I just keep going like I've been going, I can probably achieve anything I want."

Early to Rise

Swim coach Kathy Aspaas unlocked the door to the Minot High gymnasium at 5:54 on a recent morning as Knutson silently emerged from the darkness of the parking lot, bundled in a hooded parka. It was already 14 degrees, above the previous day's high of 9, so Knutson hadn't had to warm up her Expedition as long as usual before driving from her parents' split-level home. Without a word, she followed Aspaas inside. Two other high school girls also trudged in, as did a pair of boys and a 52-year-old woman.

Aspaas has helped the Minot High girls' swimming team win 16 state titles since 1975. As the swimmers headed into the locker rooms to change, she pushed through a door, shed her coat and gloves and began writing the details of a swim workout on a large whiteboard.

In moments, her daily community education class called "Morning Conditioning Swim" would get underway. Knutson, who trains with whoever shows up, makes for an incongruous centerpiece; typical attendees include a few adults in their 50s. Aspaas began offering the class, which costs \$30 a month, to give Knutson a means of meeting her training goals without actually paying for the pool time, since neither the high school program nor local swim club offered frequent enough sessions.

In the afternoons or evenings, Knutson swims at Minot State University, where she has been offered free use of its 25-yard pool during its "open swim" hours. Since the pool is available to students and faculty, a handful of people inevitably splash around while Knutson ticks off the elements of each day's workout. Once, the entire MSU baseball team showed up for low-impact water training. They ran laps in circles, sending massive waves into Knutson's lane. During this particular week in early February, Knutson intended to swim 65,000 yards. A light week.

Aspaas and Knutson's parents realized long ago it was best to provide Knutson with a regular training schedule, even one a bit inconvenient and unconventional. "If I say, 'We're not going to practice today,' she will go on her own to the YWCA or the youth center or something," Aspaas said. "She just won't miss." In addition to 11 swim practices a week, Knutson undergoes two hours of dry-land training three nights weekly with Jason Blackburn, who owns a sprawling facility called Advanced Sports Kinetics that he built out of an old church. Blackburn created a program specifically for Knutson four years ago; every exercise is designed to mimic her body's movement in the pool.

"She's never missed training, she's never missed a practice," Blackburn said. "She comes on holidays; she works out on Christmas. She's got a constitution that is unflappable. When she first walked through the door, there was something that was just different about her. . . . Whatever she had to do, she just did it. No matter what."

Knutson speculates her swimming costs her parents more than \$20,000 annually; they say they don't even want to add up the numbers. When Knutson was younger, her parents drove her to meets all over south-central Canada and as far as Washington state in search of credible competition, frequently putting more than 1,000 miles on their car in a single weekend. As their daughter qualified for regional and then national championships, the longer flights brought additional costs, and her year-round participation in the fitness club run by Blackburn also strained their wallets, even though he, like Aspaas, offered his services at a discount.

Before receiving the stipend from the USOC, the Knutsons paid Aspaas a substantial sum for them, but one that worked out to just more than \$4 an hour to her. It was a figure that made Jim Knutson wince with embarrassment when he revealed it. "Both of them are paid not what you would think," Knutson said, "not what they are *worth*."

A former running back at the University of North Dakota, Jim Knutson works as a registered nurse at a local nursing home. Dagny's mother, Ronda Knutson, a former basketball player at the University of Louisville, is the youth programs director at the Minot Air Force Base.

For years, Jim Knutson said, he has worked as many double shifts as he can land.

"My dad, he works so much overtime, trying to pay for Kathy's plane tickets, my mother's plane tickets and my plane tickets, and food and hotel," Dagny Knutson said. "All three of us and Kathy and my dry-land trainer, we're all in it together." Her parents "have seen her potential and they do whatever they need to do to get her to this level," Aspaas said. "The sacrifices they've made, it's crazy."

As participants in the morning conditioning swim performed their workouts, Aspaas chatted with one of the boys in the water, a high school senior. The boy reported that his best time in the 500-yard freestyle was the 5:06 he had swum at the previous year's state high school championships. He had finished second.

Someone asked Aspaas: Could that young man beat Knutson?

Aspaas looked apologetic. If the record keepers would allow it, Knutson would hold three North Dakota high school state swimming records -- *for boys*.

"She's at 4:33," she said, cringing. "There isn't anyone right now that can hang with her."

Early Impressions

Knutson's parents did not anticipate her success in the water. In her early childhood, it was clear she had great speed and coordination, but her parents figured she would devote herself to basketball or another traditional team sport. That changed when they signed her up for sessions with the Minot Swim Club at 9 1/2 . A year after she started, Knutson won several races in her first zone championships in Minneapolis. "It got her hooked and it got me and my wife hooked," Jim Knutson said. "I'll be the first one to admit it. It was so exciting."

The sense of excitement was soon replaced by anxiety. Jim and Ronda feared they would be unable to meet their daughter's needs in a town not terribly equipped to produce an elite swimmer. Jim Knutson, who grew up just north of Minot, a town of about 35,000, began investigating local fitness facilities, convinced from his own athletic experience that workouts outside of the water would help her gain an edge. Just 10 when she started regular training sessions at a local gym, Dagny embraced the challenge.

For a while, she swam only at the practices offered by the high school team (she made the varsity in the seventh grade) or the Minot Swim Club. But she became convinced she wasn't doing enough after her first U.S. junior national championships in Irvine, Calif., when, at 14, she advanced to just one final and finished the meet ranked 76th among 128 entrants.

After the competition, "I couldn't find her," Ronda Knutson said. "When I did find her, she was just sobbing. . . . Ever since that meet, I honestly think it was a turning point." It was.

Knutson began printing out swimming workouts from the Internet and supplementing her formal practices with improvised training at the YWCA, the pool at the Minot Air Force Base or after-hours laps at the outdoor community pool in the summer. On those occasions, her father would park his Jeep next to the pool and turn on his headlights so she could see. "I wasn't getting enough," Knutson said. "When I was 13, I don't think I improved as much as I would have liked."

The family hadn't yet hired Aspaas as a personal coach, so Knutson relied largely on her parents. They earned their coaching certification so they could stand on the deck with her at meets. When she trained at random facilities at odd hours, they would sit nearby with a stopwatch, studying her technique and reading off drills.

"I don't really know what drives her at times, to tell you the truth," Jim Knutson said. "Early on, we pushed her, but certainly Dagny would agree, as time went on, she's been pushing us."

Said Dagny: "I don't want to go two days without swimming -- I don't know why. . . . Everything didn't really work out at first. It took some time. When my times started dropping, it did confirm I was doing the right thing."

Still Working Out

When Dagny Knutson arrived at Minot State on a recent weeknight, the pool was filled with noisy preschoolers in the middle of a swim lesson. Aspaas yanked a lane-line across the 25-yard pool to give Knutson her own space and perched a Diet Coke near one end.

It was well after 6 by the time the children had filed out and Knutson dived in to commence the day's third and final workout, a second 5,500-yard swim. "I haven't found it boring yet," Knutson said. "At times practices get long, lap after lap, but there's always a reason why I'm doing it."

As Knutson churned up the water, Aspaas, a full-time teacher at Minot High, marveled that she would again put in another 14-hour day. Aspaas thought she had retired as a swim coach when she quit her high school post in 2000. Two years later, however, she returned as an assistant.

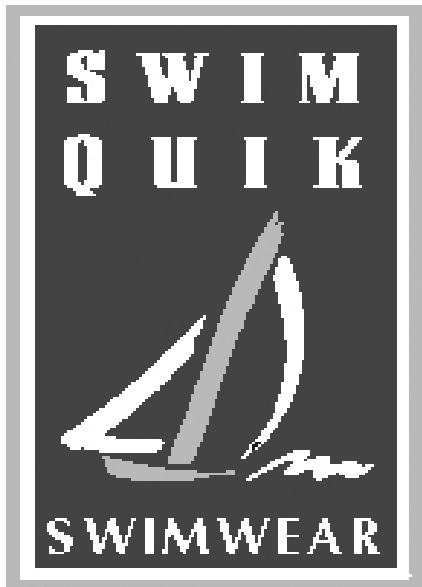
That's when she met Knutson. Aspaas's ambition and spirit for the sport haven't been the same since.

In her 30 years of coaching in the town in which she grew up, she never imagined she could help produce an athlete ranked among the world's best. Knutson "is saying, 'I'm doing this, so do it with me,'" Aspaas said. "I've learned through her that this is what it takes to do this. Never in my wildest dreams would I have thought this is possible."

As the clock ticked past 8, Knutson's mother, who had watched the workout from one of several rows of bleacher seating, used a squeegee to clean water from the sides of the pool, then headed to Subway to get Knutson what serves as her dinner about three nights per week: a foot-long sandwich loaded with vegetables. In the last year, at least, the long training days have brought great rewards. "If she can keep everything in perspective, and keep enjoying the journey . . . this summer will be a big step for her," Schubert said. "There's no doubt in my mind if she makes the world championship team, she will be successful" in Rome.

At nearly 9, 15 hours after her departure that morning, Knutson slid into a chair in front of the family's wooden dinner table, her work for the day finally done. She unwrapped a foot-long turkey sandwich and devoured it, then assembled a peanut-butter-and-honey sandwich on potato bread, and ate that, too. She figures she consumes about 5,000 calories daily, yet still maintains her weight at about 142 pounds -- she stands 5 feet 9 inches -- with just over 12.5 percent body fat.

After dinner, she climbed the stairs to begin the day's final challenge: homework. In one of the upper rooms, her computer desk seemed all but obscured by thousands of ribbons, medals, trophies and plaques displayed on shelves, tie racks and bulletin boards. Virtually wallpapered with various honors, the walls bore just one empty rectangular spot above the computer's monitor. Knutson has cleared that space for more.



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