

From McDonald's to colleges, everybody wants a part of Dana

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Rick Mauch

Dana Vollmer may not be competing in the Olympics these days, but her schedule has had her moving every bit as fast as she did in Athens, Greece. From the local McDonald's restaurant to a banquet in New York City, Vollmer has not slowed down since she and her teammates set the world record of 7:53.42 in the 4x200 relay in August.

"She's absolutely loving it," said her mother, Cathy Vollmer, who arranges most of Dana's public appearances. "And I have to admit, it is fun for me too. I really love watching her have a great time."

And now, there's a new thing in Dana's life to keep her even busier. On a pace to graduate early from Granbury High School, she is officially a senior now, and that means college coaches are coming calling to recruit the 17-year-old.

"I like it. They all want me to come there, and it makes me feel special," Dana said.

"It's interesting to hear them talk up their school."

Dana said she is planning visits in January or February to five schools--Stanford, Southern Cal, California, Florida and Tennessee.

"That is going to be fun," Dana said of the visits. "These are all good schools with great programs." Dana wants to study forensic science.

Oh, and Dana has successfully returned to competition after a little time off. She was named the top amateur swimmer at the Kerr McGee Elite Meet in Oklahoma City recently, taking first in the 50 freestyle, 50 butterfly and being the top amateur in the 200 individual medley and 100 freestyle with runner-up overall finishes.

"I wasn't expecting that," Dana said. "I hadn't been back in the water very long, but it felt good."

Dana's most recent public appearance was in New York City recently at the Hammerstein Ballroom. She and her teammates from Athens were awarded Relay Performance of the Year at the Golden Goggle Awards. The awards celebrate 2004's top performances while benefitting the newly formed USA Swimming Foundation.

But as fun as being in the Big Apple--shortly after her 17th birthday no less--was for Dana, it paled compared to riding in an Indy race car at the Texas Motor Speedway. She was a grand marshal of the recent Indy race held there in mid-October.

"Oh my gosh, what a thrill," Dana said of the ride in which she traveled up to nearly 200 mph. "I've never dreamed of going so fast in my entire life."

Dana also had a chance to show off her baseball pitching skills at Ameritrust Field in Arlington. She threw out the first pitch before a Texas Rangers baseball game in September.

"I was worried I might not get it to home plate," said Dana who, while not throwing a strike, did get the ball to the plate.

"Winning a gold medal is up there on everybody's list, and everybody wants to see that person," said Greg Elkins from the Rangers' public relations office. "People who set records and who are the best in the world at what they do, they are always going to be welcome by thousands."

"Baseball is the great American sport, and the Olympics is about athletes representing America. They go hand-in-hand."

Dana also dropped the ceremonial first puck when the Fort Worth Brahmas played their home opener in late October. And not too long after returning from Athens, she was honorary master of ceremonies at a Montgomery Gentry concert.

"I got to yell, 'Hello, Texas!'" Dana exclaimed. "That was cool."



Dana Vollmer

And then there was a fund-raiser for Happy Hill at which Dana met former Dallas Cowboy Chad Hennings. While she was in awe of him, he appeared equally so to be in front of the gold medal winner.

"It was weird. I was getting his autograph, and then he wanted mine," Dana said. "I was surprised. This is a guy who played for the Dallas Cowboys."

But Dana said the best times of all are when she gets to visit with children.

"Nothing makes you feel better than knowing you made them smile," Dana said. "It just makes you all warm inside.

"I like knowing, too, that I have given them something to believe in, that maybe they can do something great someday."

Dana is planning on swimming for Granbury High School beginning on Jan. 13 in a meet against Arlington Heights at Wilkerson-Greines Activities Center in Fort Worth.

"I am so excited about swimming for my high school," Dana said. "Even at this meet (in Oklahoma City) I had my Granbury pants on and my Granbury bag.

"Everybody was asking me about my high school. It was really cool."

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