

## Watertight: State-bound swim quartet more than teammates

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by RICK MAUCH

They sit around talking about hot boys, makeup and the latest music that has caught their fancy. In short, they are just like any other group of teenage girls. Except this group of teenage girls has a chance to do what no other group of teenage girls from Granbury High School has ever done--finish among the state's best in a relay at the UIL State Swim Meet this weekend at the University of Texas at Austin.

Senior Dana Vollmer, sophomore Carrie Greene, and freshmen Xela Steenberge and Seabre Pope will compete in the 200-yard freestyle relay Friday. A top-eight performance there will put them in the finals Saturday, the first team from Granbury to ever get that far.

And because these girls have been friends long before they joined forces on the Lady Pirate swim team this season, the accomplishment has extra meaning.

"We've planned this for years," said Olympic gold medalist Vollmer.

"We were hoping for two years with Dana," Steenberge said. "We've only got one year with her. That's a little sad."

Vollmer, who swam on the world record-setting women's 800-meter relay team in Athens this past summer, made the group complete when she decided to swim for GHS shortly after the Olympics. But she is graduating early, so this is their one shot as a foursome.

Vollmer is the only one of the group competing individually. She is the top seed and is going after state and national records in the 200-yard freestyle and the 100 butterfly.

But the relay, and enjoying this with her friends, is what seems to be most important.

"I don't think anybody wants to go to state with just their coach," Vollmer said. "Not only will this make it less intense, it's going to be nice to have us all there as a group."

For a moment there was a distraction in the discussion as the group worked on a couple of cheers, led by Greene and Vollmer chanting, "Icky-wabicky-wicky."

Greene then chimed in with, "Three days together, you guys, it will be so much fun."

Pope added, "It's going to be a lot of fun because we know each other."

Pope noted that teammates travel together all the time. These teammates, however, have a history that dates back to their days in the Granbury SEALS. All four swam in the organization, and even though Vollmer left at age 11, she is a regular visitor/supporter at their meets and practices when she is in town.

Also, Vollmer and Steenberge swim together on the Fort Worth Area Swim Team for coach Ron Forrest, who trained Vollmer for the Olympic Trials this past summer.

Vollmer met Greene in junior high. They competed against each other at a track meet.

"She beat me in the high jump," Vollmer said.

Vollmer and Steenberge hooked up as friends through the SEALS.

"I had to get over the stage of Barbies," Steenberge said with a laugh.

Likewise for Pope and Steenberge.

"She never talked to me," Pope said, smiling. "I can't believe we became friends."

Steenberge wasn't being rude. It just took a little while for them to get to know each other. Now they talk constantly, as do all four team members. Often, it's about improving their time, and often it's about things like dying their hair (the color purple was mentioned) for the state meet.

The pressing question was whether to dye their hair the night before the meet (Thursday) or Wednesday so the whole school could see their new look.

"That would be cool if everybody could see it," Greene said, eyes getting widening.

The subject then switched to a compact disc of assorted music to listen to on the trip and during the competition. Every athlete has his/her favorite pump-up music.

"The camaraderie they have really makes them a strong group," Granbury coach Robert Laura said. "They are comfortable talking about anything."

"They're not just talking dreams. They know what each is capable of doing, and they know how to encourage each other, how to give constructive criticism that each is going to listen to."

The Lady Pirates are the 13th seed entering the state meet with a qualifying time of 1:40.47. However, the difference between the No. 8 seed, Fort Bend Elkins (1:39.39), and the Lady Pirates is less than a second.

"They have to figure out what it's going to take to get into the top eight," Laura said. "That's where such a good friendship can come in. They critique each other, work together, and it's more like friends as well as teammates. There's just an extra comfort that comes with it."



Granbury Lady Pirate swimmers (clockwise from left) Seabre Pope, Xela Steenberge, Dana Vollmer and Carrie Greene