

Vollmer leads way with pair of golds

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by RICK MAUCH

AUSTIN -- Olympic champion Dana Vollmer's short-lived career on the Granbury High School swim team came to an end Saturday at the University of Texas Swim Center. But what a way to go out.

Not only did the senior world-class swimmer win two gold medals and set three state records, she teamed with her three good friends, Carrie Greene, Xela Steenberge and Seabre Pope, to finish higher than any girls relay ever has in school history.

Vollmer joined the GHS swim team after helping the women's 800-meter relay team win a gold medal and set a world record of 7:53.42 in the Olympics in Athens, Greece this past summer. She also competed in the 200-meter freestyle individually in Athens, finishing sixth.

Saturday, Vollmer won the 200-yard freestyle and the 100 butterfly, both in state-record time. She swam a 1:45.64 in the 200 and a personal-best time of 52.70 in the 100 fly, earning female swimmer of the meet honors.

She also led off the 200 free relay with a time of 22.93 seconds over her 50-yard leg. That was slightly faster than her 22.97 the day before and that was faster than the 23.15 she swam at district, meaning she now owns the three fastest times in the state history in that event.

Vollmer also bested her previous mark of 54.10 in the 100 fly, which she swam at regionals. She has the top two times in state history in that event.

And the Lady Pirate relay team finished ninth overall, posting a school-record time of 1:38.90 in the consolation finals Saturday. That was faster than the previous school record of 1:39.58 they swam in Friday's prelims and nearly two seconds faster than the 1:40.47 they swam at regionals.

"Let's see, three events, three school records, three state records, two gold medals and a ninth-place relay," Granbury coach Robert Laura said. "Yeah, I'd say it's been a great weekend. You can't get much better than that, and this being our first year in 5A."

As expected, she dominated her two individual events, winning the 200 free by nearly five seconds and the 100 fly by almost three seconds.

"A personal-best, wow!" Vollmer exclaimed after the 100 fly. "I did not expect to get my personal-best here at all."

Especially considering she was swimming in some pain. Vollmer is going to have an MRI on her back soon as she continues to prepare for the World Championship Team Trials in Indianapolis April 1-6.

"She's tough," Laura said. "She battles through things. That's part of what makes her the great swimmer she is."

Vollmer wasn't the only one to post a personal-best Saturday. Each of the other three members of the 200 free relay swam their best 50-yard leg ever.

Pope swam a 25.00, Greene a 25.01 and Steenberge a 25.96.

"That is wonderful to see," Laura said. "That is the first time Xela has broken 26. They are just getting better and better."

And, best of all, Greene is a sophomore and Pope and Steenberge are freshmen.

The foursome not only set a school record, they improved to the sixth-fastest time overall at the meet. Their time was better than two teams that had beaten them on Friday to make the finals.



Gov. Rick Perry presents Dana Vollmer with a gold medal at the state swim meet

"We wanted to prove we belonged in the finals," Greene said. "We wanted to go out and show we're one of the best teams in the state, and I think we did that.

"What an awesome way to finish."

The Lady Pirates missed making the top eight in the prelims by 38/100 of a second.

"We had a goal. We wanted to beat some people in the finals and we did," Steenberge said. "It was disappointing not getting to the finals, but it was great that we finished strong like we did."

And, Pope said, the strong finish added one more great memory to a season of great memories for the four friends who all came up through the Granbury SEALS program.

"We've had some great times together," Pope said. "Getting to state together was incredible."

The state performances wrapped up a season that saw the Lady Pirates become the first Granbury program to win a district title at the 5A level. They edged Mansfield by a point for the 4-5A championship, qualifying seven girls and seven boys for regionals.

"I miss the guys being here," Pope said Saturday. "It was fun going to meets with them, like Xela's brother (Brier) and Carrie's brother (Tim). We're all close. It would be great if some of them could get here next year."

All seven of the Pirates who qualified for regionals return next season, as do six of the seven girls. Vollmer is the only senior in the bunch.

"It was a great year, no doubt about it," Laura said. "Having Dana on board was a big perk, but this was a very good team overall. Dana just made it that much better.

"I'm going to look back on this season and remember it well."

Likewise for Vollmer.

"It means something special to swim your last high school meet with friends," Vollmer said, hugging Greene. "Like getting to swim with Carrie one last time.

"This season will always be special to me."

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