

World's not enough

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by RICK MAUCH

AUSTIN -- At one point during her 100-yard butterfly final Saturday at the UIL State Swim Meet, Granbury senior swimmer Dana Vollmer noticed something. She was exceptionally far ahead of her nearest competitor, Olympic hopeful Andrea Axtell of Austin Bowie.

"I didn't expect to be that far ahead," Vollmer said. "When I was a body length ahead, I knew she was going slow or I was going really fast."

Vollmer was going very, very fast. Faster than she's ever swam the 100 fly, in fact, finishing in a state-record time of 52.70 seconds.

The Olympic gold medalist won the event at the University of Texas Swim Center by nearly three seconds over Axtell and Carrollton Smith's Molly Bollen, who each finished in 55.11.

It was one of two gold medals Vollmer won Saturday, and one of three state records she would set on her way to being named Class 5A female swimmer of the meet. She also took gold in her specialty, the 200 freestyle, swimming a sizzling time of 1:45.64, nearly five seconds ahead of runner-up Melissa Hain of Humble Kingwood.

In addition, Vollmer set a state record with a leadoff time of 22.93 seconds in the opening 50-yard leg of the Lady Pirates' 200 freestyle relay. The quartet, which also featured Carrie Greene, Xela Steenberge and Seabre Pope, set a school record with a 1:38.90 time to finish ninth overall.

Vollmer missed the national record in the 200 freestyle by 15/100 of a second. She was shy of the national mark in the 100 fly by 29/100.

"What is that, an extra kick?" Vollmer said of being short of the record. "I came in wanting to get state records. Now that I've gone 52, I wish I'd tried for the national.

"I hate getting beat, and getting that close and not getting the record is kind of like getting beat. But this has definitely got me pumped up for April (World Championship Team Trials in Indianapolis April 1-6). This is a confidence booster for nationals.

"Man, I want to go practice now."

But first things first. Vollmer will have an MRI on her back this week. That's right, she accomplished her feats with a pain in her back.

"Yeah, it hurts right now," Vollmer said. "But I'm not paying too much attention to it."

What Vollmer was paying attention to was the pomp and circumstance going on around her. She was congratulated personally by Gov. Rick Perry, when he placed a gold medal around her neck and again when he was on his way out and stopped by for a quick well-wishing visit.

She had to pose for photos with fans, including parents and other swimmers. And she loved every minute of it.

"This is fun, really fun," Vollmer said. "I'm really enjoying myself."

Vollmer even made sure other medal winners shared her joy. On the podium, after receiving her gold medals, she called the silver and bronze medal winners next to her for photographs and hugs.

"She knows most people want pictures with her because of who she is," Granbury coach Robert Laura said. "She's very aware of what her photograph and autograph means. That's another example of the kind of person she is."

Said Vollmer of the moment: "The other two girls had great swims also and deserved to be recognized. I didn't think it was right for the spotlight to be just on me."



Olympic champ Dana Vollmer dominates in state meet

As for Vollmer's performance in the water, Laura said: "Those were awesome swims. Everyone saw what a great swimmer she is. Considering she's still training for World Trials, to come that close to national records is incredible."

Vollmer broke the 200 freestyle record of 1:46.93 held previously by her friend Codie Hansen of Arlington Lamar. Hansen, who finished her four-year high school career undefeated, won gold in the 100 free and 500 free Saturday, setting state records in both events.

"I'm glad Codie got those records," Vollmer said. "We're good friends and she knows we're all out here to do our best, so she was fine with me breaking her record."

"It wasn't like I got in her face and said, 'I'm going to break your record.' I'd never do that. But we all want records. "Now she's got a couple of new ones, so it worked out for everyone."

Hansen's record in the 200 free stood for three years. Cedar Park's Alison McLead had the 100 fly record of 54.27 for two. Vollmer is hoping for greater longevity in the record books.

"I'd like to meet the person who breaks them," Vollmer said.

Actually, Vollmer broke her own record in the 100 fly Saturday. She swam a 54.10 at regionals, but it had been not certified yet as the state record by the UIL because Laura was waiting to see what she she would swim at state. The same was true of her time in the 50 free. She swam a 23.15 at district, and had a 22.97 in Friday's preliminaries during which the Lady Pirates swam a 1:39.58.

Indira Allick, of San Antonio Madison, had held the 50 free record of 23.24 since 1990.

Vollmer is believed to be the first Olympian to swim in the UIL State Swim Meet. She will decide soon where she will swim in college.

Vollmer has visits to USC and Cal lined up during spring break (March 12-20). She is also considering visits to Florida and Tennessee.

Of course, she's already seen Stanford, having trained there for the Olympics.

And even though the dual schedule of competing for Granbury High and preparing for World Trials has her a bit tired, you'd never know.

"Man, I want to go practice now," Vollmer said moments after winning the 100 fly. "I am psyched. I am ready to go."

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