

Vollmer seeks spot on world team

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by RICK MAUCH

Dana Vollmer is anxious to take on the world again. Before the Olympic world-record holder can do so, however, she has to tangle with the best the United States has to offer at the World Championship Trials at Canseco Fieldhouse in Indianapolis Friday through Wednesday.

Vollmer will be competing in four events. Along with her specialty, the 200-meter freestyle, she is entered in the 50 free, 100 free and 100 butterfly.

Vollmer qualified for the 2004 Olympics in Athens, Greece, in the 200 free, finishing sixth. She also swam a leg of the 800 relay that set a world record of 7:53.42.

Not only will Vollmer be competing in the next week, she'll be attending a reunion of sorts.

"Katie Hoff said she's going to swim the 200 free and that I'd better watch out," Vollmer said with a smile. "I told her I might swim the 200 IM (individual medley, Hoff's specialty)."

Vollmer and Hoff, 15, became good friends during the Olympics. Hoff was seventh in the 200 IM at the Olympics.

"I think all of us have a great time when we get together," Vollmer said. "We all really look forward to it. It's a huge event, and it's lots of fun.

"We compete, but we also catch up on things."

Fort Worth Area Swim Team coach Ron Forrest, the area club team for whom Vollmer swims, trains the Olympian. He said almost the entire Olympic team will be in Indianapolis.

"With the exception of a few who retired, they'll pretty much all be there," Forrest said. "A lot of the girls who were below her at the Olympic Trials will be there, and most are swimming faster."

Vollmer has also continued to steadily get faster throughout her career. Since becoming the youngest ever to compete at the Olympic Trials at age 12 in 2000, she has seen one success after another.

Most recently, Vollmer won two UIL state championships in the 200 free and 100 butterfly, setting state records in both with times of 1:45.64 and 52.70. She also set a state record in the 50 free, leading off the 200 relay with a time of 22.93.

And Vollmer enjoyed success in her most recent trip to Indianapolis. She won two gold medals as a member of the 800 and 400 relays and bronze in the 200 free competing in the World Short Course Championships in October.

"Basically, you have one meet a year that stands out and means a lot more to you," Vollmer said. "Last year, obviously, that was the Olympics. This year it's this one

"It's the first year after the Olympics, that makes it even tougher. We just finished swimming at the highest level a few months ago, and to swim at that pace again this soon is much tougher."

Vollmer's never competed in the World Long Course Championships, which are in Montreal beginning July 17. To get there, she has to finish in the top two in an event in Indianapolis, or be selected for a relay by placing in the top six.

"It's just like the Olympic Trials," Forrest said. "If she earns her way onto this team, she will have accomplished something very impressive."

Vollmer's also never won a national championship. And while this would not count as an official national championship, it would serve as an unofficial one in her mind if she wins.

"They don't recognize it, but it would be nice to know I did it," Vollmer said.

Vollmer appears to be mentally ready. Physically, she has been battling a sore back, but Forrest said her workouts have improved recently.

"It's been better the last little while," Forrest said. "She's been able to do some better workouts the past week or two.

"It's hard to say. It affected turns for a while. Backs are tricky things."

The last time the World Championship Trials came around in 2003, Vollmer was unable to compete. She had injured her knee playing basketball.

But Vollmer said there was never a question about competing in this meet.

"No matter what, I was going," Vollmer said. "You have to at least try. If you don't go, you never know what might have happened.

"But I'm okay. I'm fine."

Added Forrest: "She really wants this. I think she should be pretty competitive.

"I think she'll do fine."

Rick Mauch can be reached at (817) 573-7066, ext. 251 or e-mail speditor@hcnews.com.