

Swimming and diving adds 11 for 2005-06 season

By University Athletic Association

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University of Florida men's and women's Head Swimming Coach Gregg Troy announced on Tuesday the addition of 11 student-athletes that will join the Gators for the 2005-06 season.

Jeana Bartell (Boca Raton, Fla.), Stephanie Cota (Granite Bay, Calif.), Erich Matulic (Federal Way, Wash.), Alecia Miller (Hobie Sound, Fla.), Naomi Nickson (Orlando, Fla.), Silke Nowotzin (Essen, Germany), Cory Smith (Melrose, Fla.) Jos Smith (Macon, Ga.), Whitney Stern (Parsippany, N.J.), Rex Tullius (Daytona Beach, Fla.) and Dana Vollmer (Grandbury, Texas) will compete for the Gators beginning this fall.

"Overall we have signed some great student-athletes with a tremendous amount of ability," Troy said. "Both teams have addressed some of their needs and have added a great deal of depth to the rosters. I think we have a strong men's signing class that will contribute to our immediate and long term goals, while the women's class could be one of the best we've ever signed. We have some exceptional talent on our teams right now and these additions will help push us towards our goal of competing at the highest level."

Bartell, a district and regional diving champion, recorded the highest individual finish of a diver at the Florida State High School Diving Championships ever from her high school. She single-handedly re-wrote the record books at Westminster Academy and was named to the All-America Diving team in 2003-04. Bartell captured the 2004-05 district and regional championships en route to earning all-region honors. She is a four-time team most valuable player and an Academic All-American.

"Jeana has a lot of talent," Head Diving Coach Donnie Craine said. "We're excited to have her join the squad and I expect that she will come in and contribute right away."

A Junior National Champion in the 500, 1000 and 1650 freestyle, Cota currently holds the national record in the 500 (4:45.80) and 1650 (16:21.57) freestyles. Cota qualified for nationals in the 200-yard butterfly, 500, 1000 and 1650-yard freestyles, while also making the mark in the 400 and 1500-meter freestyles. Sporting a world ranking in the 800-meter freestyle (SCM), Cota was named to the High School All-American team in the 500 freestyle. She currently owns the Sacramento-San Jauquin 500 freestyle record in addition to holding four Sierra Nevada Swimming records.

"Stephanie is a strong distance swimmer," Troy said. "I think that she has the potential to contribute a great deal in the distance events and I can see her making an immediate impact on the team."

Matulic helped lead his high school to a pair of Washington State Team Swimming titles in 2003 and 2005. He registered four U.S. Open cuts to compete in the 200 and 400-meter individual medley, 200-meter butterfly and the 500-meter freestyle. Matulich boasts career-bests of 1:52.71 in the 200-yard IM, 3:58.45 in the 400-yard IM, 1:51.30 in the 200-yard butterfly and 4:31.71 in the 500-yard freestyle.

"Erich is a Washington State Champion who will add some immediate depth to our lineup," Troy said. "We look for him to contribute right way and see several places where he can potentially help us out."

Taking third-place in the 2004 Florida State diving championships, Miller will help bolster a young women's diving squad. Miller collected three team MVP titles in four years, while also garnering top diving honors at the 2004 Martin County Diving Championships.

"Alecia will come in and help our depth right away," Craine said. "She has a lot of talent in all three diving events and is very excited about coming to Gainesville and helping the team win."

Nickson joins the Gators after breaking the school record at Dr. Phillips High School in the 100 butterfly and placing sixth at the Florida State High School Swimming Championships in the 50 freestyle. She garnered All-Central Florida and All-Orange County honors all four years of her career and has competed in a number of national swimming meets. Swimming for Team Orlando (YTO), Nickson helped lead her team to three of the four relay records (200 FR, 400 FR, 400 MR). She is the younger sister of former UF swimmer Natalie Nickson who was a member of the Gators from 1998-2002.

"Naomi has a lot of talent," Troy said. "Her older sister swam here and she has a huge upside. I look for her to add to our depth in the butterfly and contribute to the overall success of the squad."

A 10-time German Junior Champion, Nowotzin brings a wealth of international experience to the Gators' lineup. A 2000 and 2001 European Junior Swimming Championship competitor, Nowotsin collected a bronze medal in the 800 freestyle

relay. At the 2002 German Short Course Championships, Nowotzin placed fourth in the 200 freestyle and later added a sixth-place finish in the same event at the World Cup of Melbourne. Contributed to a ninth-place effort in the 800-meter Freestyle relay at the 2003 World Championships, while racing to two second-place finishes in the 200 and 400-meter freestyle at the World Cup of Korea.

"Silke is an extremely talented freestyler," Troy said. "She has quite a bit of international experience and I expect that she will come in and contribute immediately."

Earning both academic and athletic NISCA All-American honors, Cory Smith has posted back-to-back top-five finishes in the 200-yard IM and 100-yard backstroke at the Florida State High School Swimming Championships. Named as the Gainesville Sun Swimmer of the Year in 2003 and 2004, Smith has won four district swimming event crowns and a regional championship (200 IM) in his four-year career. Smith has earned numerous academic accolades including a three-time USA Swimming Scholastic All-American (2003-2005), the President's Award for Academic Excellence and the Office of Naval Research's Naval Science Award.

"Cory has a lot of untapped potential," Troy said. "He is a local athlete that works hard and he will certainly help us in the future."

Jos Smith joins the Gators as a three-time Scholastic All-American. Smith finished third in the 100-yard freestyle at Georgia State High School Swimming Championships, while garnering a sixth-place effort in the 50 freestyle at the Southeast Sectionals. Named as his high school and club team MVP, Smith was a Junior National qualifier in the 50 freestyle.

"Jos has some real good speed that will be an asset to the team," Troy said. "I look for him to help us out in the future and to contribute in several events."

As a three-time Junior Olympic East Winter National qualifier, Stern joins the youthful women's diving squad. In 2003, Stern qualified for the Junior Olympic Summer Nationals and competed in the three-meter springboard competition. Stern has posted career-best scores of 330.05 on the one-meter springboard and 339.35 on the three-meter.

"Whitney will be a strong addition to our lineup," Craine said. "She dives in all three events and it has been a while since we've had a strong group of divers that compete in all three events."

As the 2004 Daytona Beach News-Journal and Orlando Sentinel Swimmer of the Year, Tullius joins the Gators from Spruce Creek High School where he was the team's 2004-05 captain. The Daytona Beach Swim Club product collected the 2004 district and regional 100-yard backstroke crown, while finishing as the runner-up in the same event at the 2004 Florida State High School 3A Swimming Championships. Tullius also earned 2004 Pinch A Penny Florida All-Star status, while being awarded the Florida Medallion Scholars Award and a Florida Bright Futures Scholarship. In 2003, Tullius helped lead his 200-yard medley relay team to the 3A State Championship.

"Rex could be one of the best young backstrokers in the country," Troy said. "He has a bright future ahead of him and has the potential to help us out right away."

Joining the Gators after collecting a gold medal in the women's 800-meter freestyle relay in a world record time at the 2004 Olympic Games in Athens, Greece and winning the 2004 United States Olympic Trials 200-meter freestyle, Vollmer will bring a wealth of high-profile international success to the 2005-06 women's team. Vollmer is a member of the U.S. National Swim team and is one of Troy's highest profile signees in his tenure at Florida. At the 2004 World Short Course Championships, Vollmer raced to a third-place finish in the 200-meter freestyle at the Conseco Fieldhouse. Vollmer owns the Pan American Games records in the 100-meter butterfly, 400-meter medley relay and the 800-meter freestyle relay, while claiming three gold medals in Pan-Am Games competition. At the 2005 Texas Public High School 5-A State Championships, Vollmer re-wrote the Texas State record books in the 50 and 200-yard freestyles as well as the 100-yard butterfly by posting times of 22.93 seconds, 1:46.54 and 52.70 seconds.

"Dana is the highest-profile American athlete in the country and is by far the biggest recruit that Florida has landed since we signed Dara Torres," Troy said. "She is a tremendous athlete and I know that she can make an immediate impact on our team."

The 11 spring signees will join Bradley Ally (Tamarac, Fla.), Julie Carusone (Gainesville, Fla.), Cody Kauffman (Hummelstown, Pa.), Jenny Lago (Miami, Fla.), Kelsy Smith (Cary, N.C.) and Jonathan Wilcox (Yarrow Point, Wash.) for the 2005-06 season.