

Vollmer in Turkey for WUG competition

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by RICK MAUCH

Dana Vollmer is now officially a college swimmer. Vollmer, who will swim for the University of Florida this coming season, will first represent the school and the United States at this week's World University Games in Izmir, Turkey. And it will be a busy week for the Olympic gold medalist and 2005 state champion from Granbury High School. Vollmer's schedule will include the 100-meter butterfly, 100 freestyle, 50 fly, 400 free relay, 800 free relay and 400 medley relay.

Who will be swimming with Vollmer on the relays has yet to be announced. It is also unknown whether she will swim in preliminary competition or be saved until the finals.

It was as part of the 800 free relay that she won a gold medal last summer in the Olympics in Athens. That tandem set a world record of 7:532.42, with Vollmer posting a personal-best time of 1:58.12 on the third leg.

Vollmer also qualified individually for Athens in the 200 free, winning the Olympic Trials in Long Beach, Calif. She placed sixth in the world, becoming the first American to reach the finals in eight years in that event.

"With the eight-day format, that is a good level of swimming, and not too burdensome," said Ron Forrest, Vollmer's coach when she swam for the Fort Worth Area Swim Team and the man who coached her to qualify for the Olympics.

Vollmer could not be reached for comment.

"The competition should be interesting. It will absolutely be world class," Forrest continued. "At the World Championships (in Indianapolis in April), the Chinese were said to have only brought half their A team, saving the other half to compete in Izmir.

"Also, there will be swimmers who competed at Worlds who will be doing a double and heading to Turkey. And the U.S. Team that is attending is an outstanding one, so she will be pushed by some of the world's best as well as some of her teammates from the United States who are also top world-class swimmers themselves."

Vollmer failed to qualify for the World Championships held recently in Montreal. Forrest said she was simply tired after constant competition through the Olympics and high school season which ended in February, and with increased academics to graduate early.

Vollmer followed the Olympics by competing in the World Short Course Championships in Indianapolis, winning two gold medals and a bronze. She then joined the GHS swim team, winning state titles and setting state records in the 200-yard free (1:45.64) and 100 fly (52.70), also setting a state record in the 50 free (22.93).

"Dana is in better shape than she was at the World Championship Trials," Forrest said. "At that meet she was still being overwhelmed by so many things in order to try and graduate early that swimming, by necessity, had to take a back seat for a while.

"It is supposed to be a year off for athletes who competed at the Olympics, but since FINA (the sponsor) insisted on having a World Championships this year, it kind of forced athletes who may have more time off to jump right back into the pool."

But Forrest said the ultimate goal is long-term. And that goal is getting Vollmer back into the Olympics in Beijing, China in 2008.

"If having a down year was going to allow her to be in peak form in three years, then I can live with that," Forrest said. "We have done very well over the past years with trusting each other to make decisions that were going to be best for her long-term success, and not necessarily doing things a certain way because that's what the 'experts' party line says we should do.

"In the last few months I have seen her interest level in being one of the best swimmers in the world again steadily start to increase, and she is very excited to be a major player on the NCAA level after Turkey."

Besides, Forrest said, the World University Games will offer a different environment for his swimmer, who loves to check out new places.

"In some ways she is looking forward to this trip maybe more than a trip to Montreal," Forrest said. "Turkey is obviously a vast change in culture from what we are used to in America. Montreal was just kind of a trip up the highway.

"This will be something entirely different, and generally she swims well when she gets into situations like this where things will be interesting and fun."

A strong performance on the world stage can do wonders for a swimmer about to enter the collegiate realm, not that Vollmer needs a confidence boost, Forrest said.

"Dana is an intelligent athlete. She understands what her choices have been over the past 10 months and was okay with those choices," Forrest said. "I think she understands that just because she didn't go to Montreal doesn't mean that there was a problem with her swimming. Just some work was needed to get back into prime shape."

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