



Brian O'Shaughnessy/Index

Junior Jason Stokes swam in seven races at last week's NSISC meet. He finished second in the 50-yard freestyle and fourth in the 100-yard freestyle.

# Stokes posts top times at NSISC

BY JOE BARKER  
Sports Editor

Jason Stokes didn't think he would put up top times heading into the New South Intercollegiate Swim Conference meet.

The junior, along with the four others with national A cuts, didn't have a full taper for the conference meet. Instead, they did a drop rest in which they tailed off training before the meet.

"Going into the meet, all the national guys just felt like crap," Stokes said. "We were really tired — and it's usually like that when you do a meet mid-taper. Your body feels weird from the rest because it's not used to it yet. We all thought we were going to swim really slow."

Once the conference meet started, Stokes showed no signs of being tired. He swam seven races — two individual and five relays — and helped the men claim fifth at the meet.

On the individual side, Stokes managed to set a lifetime best in the 100-yard freestyle with a time of 46.35 seconds.

He narrowly missed out on his lifetime best in the 50-yard freestyle with a finishing time of 20.89 seconds — just two-tenths of a second shy of his best mark set at the Miami University taper meet. His time was good enough for second place at the conference meet.

"When I hit the water in that race, it didn't feel good at all," Stokes said. "It felt like I had a really slow start and a really slow turn. To come in and

see that I got the A cut unshaved and untapered — it felt really good."

Stokes was scheduled to swim in another individual event, but head coach Mark Gole said he decided the team would be better served if Stokes swam on five relays, two of which earned national A cuts.

"I looked at our relays, and if our relays were going to do anything, I was going to need [senior Alex] Totura and Stokes on all five of them," Gole said.

The five relays all earned their second-best times of the season.

Gole said he didn't think Stokes would be capable of putting up the times that he did on short rest.

"I was pleasantly surprised," Gole said.

Gole said he has leaned on Stokes all season long to put up points for the men and that Stokes hasn't disappointed.

"He is a performer when it matters," Gole said. "We have told him that he has had to win the 50-free at certain dual meets, and he's come through for us. I think the excitement level of that meet and being able to race the guys that he was racing against, ... I think he really wanted to take advantage of that competition and do things he hasn't done before."

Now that Stokes has shown what he can do unshaved and without a full taper, he said he has big plans for the national meet.

"I would like to set a school record in the 50- and the 100-[freestyle]," Stokes said. "I've never told anybody that before, but that's what my goal is."

## Athlete of the Week

**Jason Stokes**

**Sport: Swimming**

**Year: Junior**

**Position: Sprint free**

**Hometown: Blue Springs, Mo.**

Swimming in without the benefit of a full taper, Jason Stokes posted top times at last week's NSISC meet. The junior posted a lifetime best time of 46.35 in the 100-yard freestyle and claimed second place in the 50-yard freestyle. Stokes also was a member of all five relay teams.

## BASEBALL | Team drops first three games of 2008 season in Arkansas

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Davis said two things stood out when the Bulldogs struggled during the three-game weekend. The first, he said, was the inability to throw strikes.

In the opening game, sophomore starter Justin Robbins had control problems, Davis said. Before being pulled in the second inning, Robbins allowed seven runs on just three hits. The Reddies were able to capitalize on four walks and a wild pitch by the lefty hurler.

"We had a pitching breakdown early in the game," Davis said. "We couldn't throw strikes. I think we had four walks and a wild pitch in the first inning. When we did throw a strike, they hammered it because it was up over the middle of the plate."

Robbins was pulled for junior right-handed pitcher Corey Tomasek. Tomasek initially had control issues, but he settled down to pitch three innings in relief.

"Early I had a little bit of trouble being able to pitch down in the zone," Tomasek said. "I was leaving a few pitches up, and that resulted in me giving up a few runs. But I was able to use my experience and be able to find better command and better control."

The second issue Davis said the team needs to work on before taking the field is getting timely hits. In the 5-2 loss to Ouachita Baptist, the 'Dogs hit only 2 for 12 with runners on base and 2 for 10 with two outs.

"We had runners on base all day long, and the one thing we couldn't do was find a way to get a clutch hit," Davis said.

Hall was able to get a clutch hit against Henderson State. With two outs and runners on second and third with the Bulldogs trailing 4-0, Hall had a chance to get the team back in the game. He delivered.

"I think I was down 0-2, and he threw me a fastball up and in and actually jammed me," Hall said. "I just kind of looped it over the second baseman's head."

The single knocked in two runs, but it was the last hit of the day for the Bulldogs, and they couldn't mount a comeback.



File Photo

Senior first baseman Larry Hall lays out for a foul ball during a game last season. In 2007, Hall started all 47 games for the Bulldogs and put up a .243 batting average.

## PREVIEW | Baseball team expected to be led by 18 freshman in 2008 season

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when you get your pitch, you get one opportunity, and sometimes one opportunity per game, and you can't miss it. You have to jump on it, and you have to attack the ball."

Junior shortstop Corey Eagen joins Over as a returning starter. Eagen played third base last season but shifted to shortstop prior to this year after winning a position battle with junior Neil Bleish.

Eagen batted first most of last season but struggled at the plate, where he hit .200 with a .315 on-base percentage. Eagen said he is trying to cut down on his strikeouts this season so he can get on base more. He also said the switch to shortstop, which is where he played his senior year in high school, shouldn't be a big adjustment.

"I always kind of played third base with a shortstop mentality a little bit," Eagen said. "I think I'm a shortstop at heart."

Sophomore outfielder Keaton Jones, who led the team with 34 RBIs in 2007, senior first baseman Larry Hall and sophomore outfielder Brandon Pearl are

other veterans who should factor into the lineup.

But the second base and third base positions will be anchored by a contingent of four freshmen. At least three freshmen should contend for playing time in the outfield, and two more will see time at first base.

Freshman third baseman Matt Herrick, who will split time at the position with classmate Jordan Nietzel, said the youth of the lineup shouldn't keep them from producing.

"We're pretty young, but there is great leadership from the older guys, too," Herrick said. "They've done a great job of taking everybody under their wing, showing them the ropes."

The team's youth will be seen even more in its pitching staff. Senior A.J. Barton — the team leader in wins in 2006 and 2007 — had offseason shoulder surgery to repair a torn labrum and is on a rehabilitation program. Barton said there is no timetable to return but that he hopes to make it back sometime this season.

With Barton out, sophomore Justin Robbins will be the veteran of a rota-

tion that will feature as many as three freshmen. This group will try to help lower last season's 8.67 earned run average, which was the highest it's been since the team started tracking the stat in 1997.

Senior Jesse Brady and junior Corey Tomasek return to the bullpen, but Davis said freshman Jordan Nietzel probably will anchor the closer position.

"The thing [Nietzel] has is tremendous run-and-see on his fastball," Davis said. "It really bores in on right-handed hitters."

The Bulldogs will need help from young pitchers such as Nietzel if they want to improve their conference performance. Truman stumbled to a 5-27 MIAA record last year and has not finished above .500 in the conference since 1999, but Over said the big recruiting class should help the team compete better this season.

"Just because a guy is 18 doesn't mean he can't compete at this level," Over said. "So we're going to have some guys who are going to be big-time surprises to a lot of opposing teams in the conference."

## SOFTBALL | Nine returning starters seek to rebound from 17-29 year

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category and most notably made a jump to .414 in slugging percentage.

Brown said that last year because the team had trouble getting timely hits, many baserunners were left stranded.

"Hitting is a big one that we have been working on in the offseason — being more consistent and scoring baserunners," Brown said. "That's kind of where we had some problems last year. We would get people on base, and then we couldn't score. ... I feel like it's there, we just need to keep it going and not so up and down."

The team also received computer video software to help break down hitter's swings as well as starting a new weightlifting program.

When the team does get on base, it is very good at advancing, with a conference-leading 106 stolen bases last season. Belcher led the team with 45 stolen bases, a Truman record.

Brown said that in the offseason, pitchers were eased back into throwing to prevent injuries. She said the pitchers took time off in the fall and then worked on their different pitches separately. Seniors Katie Noski and Katie Jeannin both missed significant time because of injuries last season. Brown said each pitcher this year has her own qualities, and there is no No. 1 pitcher.

"Each pitcher has their specialty, or what really works for them, and so mixing that up and keeping the batters off balance is kind of what we're going to go for this year," Brown said.

The team's four freshmen should make the Bulldogs deeper in many spots where they have not been in the past. Freshman shortstop Leah Reimnitz said the seniors, especially the captains, are helping to bring the team together.

"We have a great group of senior leadership," Reimnitz said. "Our two captains have made it their job to make the freshmen feel welcome and a part of the team, and they're really good about the team bonding together."

The team opens the season this weekend at the Alabama-Huntsville Tournament.

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