

COLUMN | National championship puts Biermann in an elite class at Truman

Continued from Page 15
opponent didn't get the job done. But it's rare when you fail more than your opponent, you equal your opponent's best performance and you still win. Biermann failed to clear the bar in five of her last seven jumps. The runner-up failed four out of seven total vaults. Yet Biermann won because she failed at the right time. She needed just one jump to clear the second-to-last height, while Lauren Stelten from Minnesota State University-Mankato needed two.

Biermann went first in the final round and nearly cleared the bar twice. After Biermann again was short, it was a make-or-break vault for Stelten in her third attempt.

"I couldn't watch," Biermann said. "I was sick to my stomach. ... I had to close my eyes and lay down. It was too much for me to handle."

Biermann said she didn't expect to beat Shelten coming into the meet, who has the best mark in Div. II.

"It was kind of surreal," Biermann said. "It took a while to get in. I still can't believe it. When it first happened I was completely shocked."

3. Few people at Truman have any idea how to pole vault.

People can run, throw, kick, swim, skate, jump, hit a golf ball and roll around on mats.

But how many people know how to drive a 13-foot pole into the ground while running, then rise 13 feet into the air over a pole? Not many.

Roughly speaking, here are the steps to a successful vault: Pick up a weighted, 13-foot pole. Run with pole for about 100 feet. Stick pole into ground. Elevate. Try not to break neck. Bend body around another pole higher than a basketball hoop.

Land on cushion.

Sounds easy enough to me. Pole vaulting is like no other sport — and it's a sport in which, sometimes, even the best in Div. II have trouble. Biermann said that on one of her misses she never left the ground. Assistant coach Tim Schwegler said Stelten never was close in her final three attempts.

4. It's a shared spotlight. Two days before Biermann claimed her championship, senior swimmer Kate Aherne made news of her own with a three-peat in the 200-yard individual medley at the national meet in Cleveland, Ohio (see story, page 15). Aherne swam a 2:00:56 to set a new national record in the event and become the first Truman swimmer to win an event three straight times.

It's the first time since 2004 that Truman has had two individual national champions in the same year in any two sports. It is believed that this year and 2004 are the only two times the feat has been accomplished.

Biermann and Aherne also excelled in their other events. Biermann claimed sixth in the triple jump and Aherne nabbed three more top-three finishes in individual events.

5. Only five Truman track athletes have ever won a national title, and none since 2004.

Biermann joins Marlene Frahm and Deb Carter as the only two indoor national champions. Biermann is the only one to win in the pole vault. This spring, she has a chance to become the second indoor and outdoor champion for Truman.

"It doesn't come very often — I guess you have to try to appreciate it when it does," Schwegler said. "Am I ever going to coach a vaulter like her again? Probably not."

BIERMANN | Senior places first in pole vault, sixth in triple jump

Continued from Page 15
nerves. I had never started that high before. ... But once I made that first bar, it was just kind of a relief."

As the competition was trimmed down, the heights and pressure increased. Biermann used all three attempts at 12-10.00 feet to stay in the competition.

"That was probably the most important vault of the meet, because it was the difference between sixth or seventh place or fourth or fifth," Biermann said. "I had to refocus all that nervous energy and just do it."

Assistant coach Tim Schwegler said this competition emotionally drained him as a coach.

"Friends of mine kept telling me, 'She's got a shot,'" Schwegler said. "I was going to be happy if she was top three. That one height where she had two misses, I'm sitting there going, 'Well, the worst she could do is fifth ... but this would be her best national finish ever.' But she made it, and [her next jump] moved her from fifth to first ... I try not to think about these things."

Biermann said she felt relaxed after she cleared the 12-10.00 feet bar. The next height of 13-1.75 feet was the height she had set for herself in practice. Biermann said she was relaxed but very shocked when she made the vault on the first attempt. Her vault set a new school record.

"When I was [preparing for my vault], I wasn't nervous, I was just think-

ing of the jump I did in warmups when I made it," Biermann said. "I kind of ran off the mat screaming a little bit. It was exciting."

Hansen and Blair both could not clear the bar. Biermann and Stelten were the only two competitors to move up to 13-5.75 feet.

Schwegler said he was excited about Biermann's performance and knew her hard work had paid off. He had the opportunity to present her with her award at nationals. This was Schwegler's first time to present this award.

"I think that really helped out a lot, and she hung in there mentally really well," Schwegler said. "She's matured as an athlete, where she can do that."

Biermann also earned All-American honors in the triple jump. She placed sixth with a jump of 39-8.00 feet. This is also a new school record for Biermann. Nkeiruka Domike of the University of Nebraska-Omaha won the event with a jump of 42-02.25 feet.

Cochrane said the competition for the triple jump was also intense for Biermann. All the women's competitors except for one had automatic qualifying marks in the triple jump.

"The fact that I was able to improve my mark from where I was seeded, I couldn't have asked for anything better," Biermann said.

It was the first time in her career that Biermann had placed at nationals in



Brian f/Index
Senior Katrina Biermann practices earlier this season. Biermann won the pole vault indoor national title last weekend.

the triple jump.

"Most of the people we've had haven't been two individual-event people," Cochrane said. "She did a good job doing those things. I'm proud of her. Her work has paid off. Now we have to hit the reset and really start to do some stuff with outdoor [track]."

Biermann will continue to triple jump and

pole vault during the outdoor season. Tough competitors will join the conference to rival Biermann, such as triple jumpers from Fort Valley State University, Asia Adams from Angelo State University and others. If Biermann qualifies for both outdoor national events, she will not compete in both because they occur at the same time.



Brian O'Shaughnessy/Index
Senior Kate Aherne was the only swimmer at the national meet to set an individual NCAA record.

WOMEN | Bulldogs have 10 of 12 swimmers score, with eight earning individual All-Americans

Continued from Page 15
in the 200-yard individual medley and new NCAA record in the event (see story, page 15). Aherne and junior Julia Jones each captured four individual All-Americans. They combined for five of Truman's six top-eight individual finishes.

Overall, Truman had eight swimmers score individually. Junior Anna Grinter picked up the other top-8 finish with a sixth place in the 200-yard butterfly and senior Kendra Brunkow ended her career with six All-Americans.

The Bulldogs started out slow with a 17th-place finish in the 200-yard medley relay on the first day. It was only the second time since 1998 that Truman did not score in every relay. The team also missed scoring in the 200-yard medley in 2009 because of a disqualification.

"Obviously it was not the highlight of the weekend, but you have to put races behind you that didn't do well and focus on your

next event and how you can do better," said junior Tanya Sylvester, who swam the butterfly leg.

However, the team rebounded with four top-eights in the other four relays. The 200- and 800-freestyle relays improved on their pre-race seed.

The performances in the relays helped Truman move up as the meet progressed. The Bulldogs were seventh after Days 1 and 2 and sixth after Day 3.

However, Gole said he thought each relay could have gone a little faster.

"We did so many little tiny things wrong in each one of those races that we could have placed higher," he said. "And I hate walking away from a national meet knowing that we had more left in the tank than what we showed."

Like the 200-yard medley relay, the Bulldogs nearly missed scoring in many individual events. They had seven places in the top 20 that did not score and five races in which a swimmer placed 17th, including two by junior Claire Myers, who also scored in the 200-yard IM for the first time in her career. The top 16 swimmers score.

"Getting touched out is probably the worst thing that could happen in swimming."

Kate Aherne
Senior

"It's definitely hard when you're just so close, and you miss it by maybe a 10th of a second or even one second," Aherne said. "And just getting touched out is probably the worst thing that could happen in swimming. And being 17th when they take the top 16 back for finals is really hard."

Freshman Allison Harding did not score despite also having two top-19 finishes.

A number of swimmers who scored declined in their performance from 2009. Sylvester earned an individual All-American but did not repeat her previous feat of two top-eight finishes. Jones, Grinter and junior Emily Buss also did not place quite as high. Gole said he blames himself for Buss' decline — she placed 15th in the 100-yard breaststroke and 16th in the 200-yard breaststroke — because he over-rested her.

Gole said the competition continues to improve every year as more teams become fully funded. Every team but one that finished ahead of Truman is fully funded.

"The competition in Div. II has gotten very intense," Sylvester said.

The Bulldogs will have eight seniors on next year's squad, six of whom had an A cut this season. The sophomore class also will be strong, as four of the five swimmers attended nationals.

AHERNE | Senior ends career with seven All-Americans

Continued from Page 15
capped off another stellar nationals for Aherne. She placed second in the 50- and 200-yard freestyles and third in the 100-yard freestyle. Aherne also helped each of the three freestyle relays to top-eight finishes.

Aherne had four of the six top-eight individual finishes for the Bulldogs, who finished fifth overall at the meet.

But her best achievement could have been her three-peat and the new national record. After faster suits were implemented in 2009, records dropped nonstop, including Aherne setting one in the IM.

This year, with the suits now banned, only one individual record fell — the 200-yard IM.

"She put it together," head coach Mark Gole said. "With the competition, she just didn't even give them a chance."

Gole said the 200-yard IM was the best race he has ever seen Aherne swim.

Aherne said the record was a really big surprise, but she was still happy just to get the win.

"I was incredibly nervous the whole day — I could hardly eat, and it was just such a good feeling to be able to get that third win in," she said.

In the freestyle events, Aherne dropped time from each of her qualifying times and moved up from a 13th seed in the 50-yard freestyle. West Chester University's Jackie Borkowski, who was named swimmer of the meet, swept the sprint freestyles.

Aherne said she knew going into the meet Borkowski was going to be tough. The two swam completely different styles: Borkowski went out as fast as possible in each event while Aherne aimed for negative splits. Particularly in the 200-yard freestyle, Aherne didn't quite have the backstretch to make up for Borkowski's early lead.

"She went out like a bat out of hell, and Kate was trying to run her down and she couldn't quite catch up," Gole said.

If there was a blemish for Aherne, it was probably the prelims in the 100-yard freestyle, in which she nearly missed making the finals.

She swam 51.28 to tie for eighth in the prelims before winning a swim-off in 50.60 and racing the final in 50.43 to improve on her 2009 finish by one spot.

Aherne ends her career as one of the most decorated swimmers in Truman history. She has 27 All-Americans, one short of the NCAA maximum. Seven of her 15 individual All-Americans are in the top two. She was part of the 2007 team that finished second at nationals and played a key role in the 2008 first-place finish.

Aherne said she tries not to compare herself to some of the past Truman greats, even though she said a few of them in the 2008 senior class helped influence her.

"Looking up at the record board every day and seeing Diana Betsworth and Molly Polette and those relays that they set a couple years ago, Emily Greenwood on the board — it's nice to be able to train with some of those swimmers," Aherne said.

Kendra Brunkow, Danielle Odenthal and Aherne are the only three seniors on the women's squad this year. Brunkow claimed six All-Americans — two in individual events — to end her career with 16.

"[Aherne has] been a great captain, and her and Kendra and Danielle have been really great captains," junior Tanya Sylvester said. "They set the example high."