

Swimming prepares for taper meet

BY SONDRA LANGLEY
Staff Reporter

This weekend's men's and women's swimming meet in Iowa City is different than other meets for the teams. The meet is the team's fall taper meet, when the teams hope to earn their A cuts for nationals in the spring.

"Basically, what we are looking for is A cuts, and that's really what we want," senior Kendra Brunkow said. "The outcome of the meet isn't necessarily our highest priority."

The majority of the women have multiple B cuts already, but only one swimmer, senior Kate Aherne, has an A cut needed to qualify for nationals. The 400-yard medley relay was less than a second off the time needed Nov. 8

in Pershing Natatorium.

"I am pretty confident that we are going to get the ones we think we can get," head coach Mark Gole said. "It's kind of like a dry run of the conference and national meet."

Gole said tapering allows the swimmers to rest their muscles and get them fully repaired to swim their best times.

Bulldog captains Brunkow, Aherne and senior Danielle Odenthal have high hopes for the taper meet.

"I feel like we are in the position that we are going to get our A cuts," Brunkow said. "Collectively, compared to last year, we are ahead of where we were. Even coming in the first month, we were practicing better than we were last year. I think we are going to get the A cuts we got last year, and more."

Nine women swam an A-cut time at the fall taper meet last season and 16 qualified for nationals by the end of the season.

Aherne said the women not only feel confident in their past performances leading up to the taper, but the motivation of a strong team has helped keep the team focused on its goal for nationals.

"As a team, we just really want to focus on getting the cuts for nationals," Aherne said. "And seeing how all that hard work we have put in so far has paid off and see what we can do with just one semester of work."

The chemistry of the team this year has helped to create a group more focused on team and individual goals.

"We have much more solid ground, we definitely have a bet-

ter idea of what's going on in the team and that affects where you are mentally," Aherne said.

For the men, only freshman Jerod Simek has a B cut so far, in the 1,000-yard freestyle.

"We would love to see him get [an A cut]," Gole said. "It's going to be a pretty significant drop. His top time is 16:30 and to qualify is 15:58. It is very realistic."

The men are going into the meet with high hopes of A and B cuts, just like the women. The men qualified four individuals for nationals at the fall taper meet last season.

The freestyle relay teams have had a good showing in the past, but senior Andrew McCall will not be at the meet until the third day of competition. McCall is the main sprint freestyler for the relays.

"Relays are something that we are usually strong at, but this year we are going [to] have to see where we are at, and if that is a possibility," Gole said. "Chances are we are going to make more runs at conference with relays than here."

A cuts early in the season allow for more focused training on national swims throughout the season, rather than continued focus on getting there.

"The goal is to get it out of the way right now so that we can train through conference and put more training from now until nationals," Gole said. "If we don't get it here, we have to shift focus for those individuals to train for their peak performance at conference, and change the training for nationals in a month."

Graybeal records big weekend

Senior combines for 28 kills in two matches

BY BLAKE TOPPMEYER
Editor in Chief

In just a year's time, right side hitter Lauren Graybeal transitioned from being a role player her junior year to one of the volleyball team's go-to players this year, her senior season. She has handled the move in stride.

Graybeal continued to provide steady production for the Bulldogs last weekend. She totaled 28 kills and hit a combined .268 in matches against Northwest Missouri State University on Friday and Missouri Western State University on Saturday.

In the match against Northwest, which the 'Dogs lost 3-1, Graybeal hit .256 and racked up 15 kills. She was the only Bulldog with at least four attacks to hit above .200 and also Truman's only player to have double-digit kills.

"I saw around the block, and they gave me lines," Graybeal said of her performance against the Bearcats. "That's my strength. They were giv-

ing me the line, and I took it."

Graybeal is second on the team with 17 matches of double-digit kills.

The offensive production isn't entirely new to Graybeal. She hit .271 last season when the Bulldogs reached the Final Four.

But with three senior All-Americans to lead the offense in 2008, Graybeal wasn't the top player on opponents' scouting reports and often worked against a single blocker.

That changed this year. Head coach Ben Briney said Graybeal consistently is seeing a double-block in matches.

"She's not hidden as much," Briney said. "She's in the forefront. We've had to rely on her a lot more this year. Because of that, teams are keying on her so she's facing a lot more double blocks, especially when we're out of system and maybe our middles and our outsides are struggling, we have to get the ball to her when she's in the front row."

Partly because of the double-block, Graybeal's hitting percentage has dipped to .208 this season, although her kills per set is at a career-high 2.55.



Brian O'Shaughnessy/Index

Senior right side hitter Lauren Graybeal combined for 28 kills during two matches last weekend. The Bulldogs open play in the NCAA Tournament today against West Texas A&M University.

Graybeal also is getting more attempts this year, having already surpassed 1,000 attempts for the season. Tra-

ditionally, only outside hitters approach the 1,000 attempt mark.

tempts a game, which is kind of outrageous for a right side," Graybeal said. "But I think I'm an outlet to our setters more than our outsides have been just because I was there last year and they know me."

Graybeal has 44 kills and a .291 hitting percentage in her last three matches, dating back to Truman's 3-2 win against the University of Nebraska-Omaha on Nov. 7. Her current hot streak comes at a good time for Truman, as the Bulldogs begin play in the first round of the NCAA Tournament's South Central Regional at noon today against West Texas A&M University.

Graybeal's production heated up during tournament time last year. She racked up 26 kills and hit a blistering .421 in the three South Central Regional matches.

But although last year's tournament production came as a pleasant surprise for Truman, this season, the Bulldogs will rely on solid production from Graybeal.

"I think she's taken it upon herself [to be a go-to player]," Briney said. "She wants it. She wants the ball. She wants to put the ball away."

Athlete of the Week

Lauren Graybeal

Sport: Volleyball

Position: Right

Side Hitter

Year: Senior

Hometown:

Olathe, Kan.

Senior right side hitter Lauren Graybeal combined for 28 kills during Truman's two matches last weekend. Graybeal was the only player in double digit kills during Friday's loss to Northwest.



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