

GLVC champs prepare for nationals



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The Truman State women's swim team has carried the title of 2016 GLVC champion for more than two weeks after a comeback Feb. 13 that put the 'Dogs atop the GLVC podium for the first time in school history.

Entering the final day of competition down by 52.5 points, the Bulldogs rallied past Drury University, the nationally ranked two-time defending GLVC champions for a 946.5-910 finish. Four Bulldogs placed in the top five of the 100 freestyle and 200 backstroke, and six Bulldogs finished in the top 15 spots of the 1650 freestyle. These three events gave Truman a 32-point cushion going into the meet's final event — the 4x100 freestyle relay — during which the 'Dogs broke Drury's existing GLVC record by .31 seconds.

The Bulldogs finished second in the GLVC Championships behind the Panthers a year ago, but senior captain Ashley Shanel said the team did not want to experience the same feeling again this year.

"Last year, I think everyone knew that we had the potential to at least put up a fight against Drury, which we kind of did, but we knew that there were things we needed to change going into this year," Shanel said. "It was like everyone had a

chip on their shoulder, and so everyone was coming to practice and doing the work and putting in extra time."

Shanel has been a team captain for three years. Although Shanel will not be competing in Indianapolis for nationals next week, Head Coach Ed Pretre said she has been one of the main swimmers who have kept the team together. Pretre said despite not swimming in the event for five years, Shanel was one of the Bulldogs' six top finishers in the 1650 freestyle.

Pretre said he has never seen such a complete team effort to win out of all the championships he has attended. He said members of the team sacrificed their individual times to collectively take down the No. 2 Div. II team in the country.

"I think what makes this victory even sweeter for us is no one gave us a chance," Pretre said. "No one expected us [to win]. Drury didn't. But we were the only ones to believe in ourselves."

Pretre, who was voted the 2016 GLVC Coach of the Year, said he credits the student athletes for their perseverance throughout the season. The swimmers sported their very own "Darth Dog" shirts that read "I find your lack of faith disturbing," which Pretre said gave the team motivation.

Eight members of the women's team will represent Truman State during the NCAA Div. II Swimming & Diving Cham-

pionships. Two Bulldogs will compete in four events — junior Hannah Nicks, who will swim the 100 and 200 backstroke, 100 butterfly and 200 individual medley, and sophomore Nikki Sisson, who is set to swim the 50, 100, 200 and 500 freestyle.

Junior Alison Strickler will compete in three events — the 50 and 100 freestyle and 100 backstroke — and sophomore Jamie Fitzpatrick has earned an entry into the 50 and 100 freestyle. Freshman Emma Barnett and sophomore Jasmine Roghair will appear in the 4x400 freestyle relay, and junior Ally Neumann will compete in the medley relay events.

The women's team will be making its 28th appearance at the national meet and have an opportunity to add the program's eighth NCAA title to this season's resumé.

Junior Evyn Spencer has been no stranger to the big stage throughout her career at Truman. A three-time All-American and the 2016 GLVC Swimmer of the Year, Spencer said she plans to focus on keeping her composure this time around.

"My main focus is to not let my nerves get the best of me," Spencer said. "The past two years that I've gone, I've gotten there and let my nerves take over, and then my first race can decide my whole meet, and I am not going to do that this time."

Spencer set a new GLVC record at the conference meet in the 200 individual

medley with a time of 2:00.95, in the 100 butterfly at 54.54 — which also is a school record — and is a member of the conference and Truman record-setting 4x200 freestyle relay group.

As a school and conference record holder with one season still remaining, Spencer said she wants to give the rest of her team and future Bulldogs a chance to go for something. She said the win over Drury was good for recruiting and was a way for Truman to separate themselves as an elite program.

"My number one thing is that this is the chance now for future teammates and swimmers to look at Truman as something more than just another swim team," Spencer said. "It's something that's pretty proud to be a part of, and I'm helping younger people set goals."

Sophomore Will Shanel will be the sole representative for the men's team at the national meet. The GLVC Men's Swimmer of the Year is returning to the national meet for the second year in a row with the country's third-fastest time in the 400 individual medley at 3:48.56. Will Shanel also will appear in the 200 butterfly and the 200 individual medley.

The NCAA Swimming & Diving Championships will begin March 9 and end March 12 in Indianapolis. Live coverage of the meet can be found at NCAA.com.



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Top: Junior Mackenzie Neeley pushes ahead at the GLVC swimming championships. Neeley swam in four events during the meet, all of which were individual events. Above: Arms flail during an event at the GLVC swimming championship at Crawfordsville, Indiana. Truman men's swimming placed fifth at the meet. Above right: Freshman Laney Klar gasps for breath during one of her six events. Klar finished seventh in the 200 butterfly and the 400 individual medley events. Right: Senior George Dowdy dives into the pool. Dowdy was the final leg of Truman's 4x100 medley relay, which finished with a time of 3:21.86, set a new Truman State record. The medley finished fifth in the meet.



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