



A new U.S. swim star is surfacing at Stanford

Stanford freshman David Nolan heads into national championships after setting five national prep records

By Keith Peters, Palo Alto Online Sports

David Nolan went from a fat kid to a fast kid -- from chubby to champion -- and from nowhere to somewhere as one of the fastest high school swimmers ever.

The Stanford-bound Nolan, who is a lock to be named the boys' national high school swimmer of the year by Swimming World Magazine, set the swimming world on its ear with three individual national public school records and two national relay marks this past season.

In doing so, Nolan accomplished something even Olympic stars like Michael Phelps and Ryan Lochte never did.

"I don't think anybody's ever done what he has in a high school season, so that's why all the hoopla," said Skip Kenney, the Stanford men's swim coach who won the recruiting battle for Nolan. "He's maybe the most successful swimmer based on his high school events -- that there's ever been."

During his senior year at Hershey High (Pa.), Nolan broke national records in the 100-yard free (42.34 relay leg), 100-yard back (45.49), 200 IM (1:41.39) and anchored the 200 medley relay (1:30.27) and 200 free relay (1:21.01) to national marks. All the records came at the Pennsylvania Interscholastic Athletic Association Class AAA Championships at Bucknell University in March.

"Nolan's time in the 200 IM would have won NCAAAs (in 2011)," said Kenney. "That's pretty amazing since

our guy (Austin Stabb) won it (in 1:41.57)."

Despite all the commotion surrounding his record-breaking, Nolan seemingly has kept everything under control.

"It is great to have the privilege of grabbing the few national records that I did this past season," Nolan said. "Just like any other record, it shouldn't be the end of the road, but a checkpoint and motivation to improve."

Kenney, who has seen Nolan swim on YouTube, actually has yet to see him swim in person. Kenney will get that chance next week when Nolan joins a top field for the 2011 ConocoPhillips USA Swimming National Championships that runs Aug. 2-6 at Stanford's Avery Aquatic Center.

Top swimmers from around the nation, including at least nine U.S. Olympians, are expected to compete. Prelims begin at 9 a.m. each day with finals beginning at 6 p.m.

Olympic gold medalists Jason Lezak, Ryan Lochte and Peter Vanderkaay lead a field of U.S. National Team members that includes Ariana Kukors, Katie Hoff, Dagny Knutson, Missy Franklin and Palo Alto's Jasmine Tosky. Hoff is the defending champion in the women's 400 free.

Lochte, Vanderkaay, Kukors and Franklin are currently at the FINA World Championships in Shanghai, China. Lochte won the gold medal in the 200-meter free on Tuesday and lowered his world record in the 200 IM to 1:54.00 on Thursday, beating longtime rival Michael Phelps in both races. Lochte won the 200 back, 200 IM and 400 IM at last year's national meet in Irvine.

Nolan is planning on swimming the 100 fly (seeded No. 5), 200 IM (No. 3), 200 free (No. 21), 200 back (No. 36), and 100 back (No. 11).

In addition to the top national swimmers, the local area will be well-represented by the Stanford men's and women's teams along with athletes from Palo Alto Stanford Aquatics (PASA). Stanford Olympians Julia Smit and Elaine Breeden are expected to compete in their specialties while current Cardinal competitors like Maya DiRado, Andi Taylor and Sam Woodward hope to improve upon last year's finishes.

The Stanford women will have 15-20 swimmers while the Cardinal men also will have around 20 with David Mosko, Bobby Bollier and Curtis Lovelace leading the

way.

Along with selecting the year's USA Swimming national champions, the event will serve as the selection meet for the 2011 Pan American Games, set for October 15-22 in Guadalajara, Mexico, and the 2011 FINA World Junior Championships, set for August 16-21 in Lima, Peru.

Everything, of course, is just preparation for next summer's U.S. Olympic Trials and Summer Games in London, England.

"London is definitely on my list of long-term goals," Nolan said. "When I get to school, the Olympics is what I will be thinking about for most practices. This summer, Nationals is my big meet."

Nolan will go into the national championships at Stanford as arguably the most accomplished high school swimmer in U.S. history, but without the long-course credentials to match.

"Long course has always been more difficult for me due to the fact that I'm only training in that pool two out of 12 months a year," Nolan said. "Plus, I believe that swimming long course (meters) is completely different from swimming short course (yards). The technique of the strokes, strategy of races, and the mental game are barely comparable to that of yards. I would love to consider myself equally fast for LCM but, unfortunately, that is not the case. Improvement is very much needed."

Nolan made only one final at last year's nationals, held in Irvine. Then 17 years old, Nolan took seventh in the 200 IM in 2:01.01 while trailing the first-place Lochte (1:54.84) and the second-place Phelps (1:55.94) to the finish line.

"Last summer at nationals, I was able to race the big American guys and see how I raced with them," Nolan said. "That was a great opportunity and national-level meets are all great places to assess how I measure up with the big dogs. It is always fun to race them. Hopefully, I can pull a little bit closer each time I hop in the pool with them."

Kenney said the difference between long course and short course is technique and kicking.

"He has these down really, really well," Kenney said.

Stanford associate head coach Ted Knapp says next week's meet is crucial for Nolan.

"I feel he's a little unproven at long course and doesn't

have that experience," Knapp said. "He really came out of nowhere after his junior year of high school. He wasn't on anyone's radar as a sophomore."

Despite starting his swimming career at age 7, Nolan carried more weight around his middle than anywhere else and swimming was a way to shed the extra pounds. He didn't start to blossom until age 13.

"I was fat all over, I was a tank," Nolan told Joseph Santoliquito of MaxPreps.

Nolan is now 6-foot-2, 185 pounds and a seven-time Pennsylvania state champion. He has 13 gold medals with relays included.

Now, people are comparing Nolan to Phelps and Lochte and anyone else who has set world records, including Mark Spitz.

"A lot of people are putting a lot of unwarranted pressure on him," Knapp said. "Here's a guy who really only had a few great swims his senior year."

Nolan's times, however, were mind-blowing and comparisons were natural. Speaking of which, Nolan is not the first swimmer to come to Stanford with a handful of national marks.

Joe Hudepohl set national Independent (private) school marks in the 50, 100 and 200 freestyles and still holds records in the 100 (43.43 relay) and 200 free (1:34.96). Patrick Fowler set the still-standing Independent school mark in the 100 breast (53.66) before arriving at Stanford in 1998 and current Cardinal Matt Thompson did the same, in the 200 IM (1:45.27), before joining Kenney in 2009.

And former Stanford distance great Jeff Kostoff set an American record while still in high school and still owns the public school mark of 4:16.39 in the 500 free from 1983.

Thus, Nolan should be right at home with his Stanford teammates and the school's storied history.

"The recruiting process was the most amazing few months of my life," Nolan said. "I got to see plenty of colleges, talk to all sorts of coaches, and meet tons of cool people on all of my trips. It all came down to priorities and, for me, swimming and school are pretty much equal."

"With that said, Stanford offers the best combination between swimming and academics, and after receiving e-mails from most of the guys on the team and getting to hear their wise words, Stanford came

out on top."

Nolan said one particular comment stood out.

"A swimmer on the Stanford team taught me one of the most important questions I asked myself during the few months of searching . . . that was: "Where would I like to be if I got hurt and swimming was out of the equation? Stanford was the answer to that question."

Next week's national championships will offer Nolan a chance to get his feet wet on The Farm for the first time. In the fall, the real work begins.

"Our mission is to get him exposure and get him prepared for next year's Olympic Trials," said Knapp. "We look forward to this challenge of bringing him along at this level like his high school and club team did."

Kenney, for one, can't wait for Nolan's arrival.

"David is as good a young man as he is a swimmer," said Kenney. "He's just a normal kid who just swims faster than anyone else."