

# Freshman Nolan already a superstar

By George Chen, Stanford Daily

Picture a high school quarterback star who's touted to be not only the best high school quarterback in the country, but also better than the best quarterback in college football. Yes, this may seem close to impossible, but what if, just what if, there was a high school quarterback who's better than Andrew Luck?

As absurd as that scenario might sound, it might be the best way to describe how good freshman David Nolan is in the pool. And there's plenty of statistical evidence to back it up.

At the Pennsylvania state championships last March, Nolan put on the greatest performance in high school swimming history. Nolan obliterated three individual high school national records in the 200 individual medley, 100 freestyle and 100 backstroke. On top of that, Nolan led his Hershey, Pa., high school team to a new national mark in the 200 freestyle relay. To put things into perspective, one state record at the meet is usually an impressive accomplishment in high school swimming.

Men's swimming head coach Skip Kenney (above, left) raves about freshman David Nolan, who set four national high school swimming records before coming to Stanford this fall. (AUDRIE LIN/The Stanford Daily)

Nolan broke a total of six state records and four national records, including relays, within a span of two days. He finished his high school career with a total of thirteen state titles.

In his signature event, the 200 individual medley, Nolan lowered the national high school record, which he set the previous year, by over two seconds—a ridiculous drop considering that a tenth of a second is a sizeable margin at the elite levels.

But the most stunning fact about his performance is that his time of 1:41.39 in the 200 IM would've won NAAs by almost two tenths of a second. In any sport, a high school senior performing better than the top collegiate level is phenomenal. In swimming, it's almost unheard of.

Nolan garnered numerous accolades, including being named the Male High School Swimmer of the Year by Swimming World Magazine, based on the otherworldly swims that solidified his permanent impact on high school swimming.

Fast-forward eight months, and Nolan is now in the pool for the Cardinal, racking up 12,000 to 13,000 yards a day in training with his teammates. Given the grueling hours, it's not always easy to balance time between academics and swimming.

"The transition's been difficult, especially with the academics. High school was easy; college is hard," Nolan said. "I thought practices back in Hershey were tough, but practices here out-do them by a mile. Sometimes it's hard to wake myself up for practice in the morning and then later go to class tired. It gets difficult for a couple days each week, but it usually works out."

Just because this transitioning period has posed some challenges doesn't mean that Nolan hasn't adjusted well.

"I don't think he's missed a beat. As far as I can tell, there haven't been any setbacks in his transitioning," said men's head coach Skip Kenney, a 20-time Pac-10 Coach of the Year, six-time NCAA Coach of the Year and three-time Olympic Coach.

One of the factors in this smooth transition is that the freshmen on the team are so closely knit.

"Talent-wise, this freshman class is one of the best we've had," Kenney said. "But in my time here at Stanford, I've never seen a freshman class that's bonded as well this early in the season as this group has. Their self-image is quite strong."

Nolan also credits the upperclassmen for helping him settle in and feel more comfortable.

"[The upperclassmen] have taught us everything they know about the team aspect," he said. "They've gotten so far in teaching us how to act around coaches and how to act towards each other. They've also kept us motivated in the pool."

In a sport that sometimes struggles to receive recognition outside of the Olympics, Nolan has gained a huge amount of attention in the swimming world and beyond—even landing in national spotlight with an article in ESPN Rise.

Fairly or unfairly, comparisons of him to younger versions of Olympic stars Michael Phelps and Ryan Lochte have already been made. Despite such a high profile for a swimmer, Nolan is humble and focused on his team's success.

"I just want to have a good time with my team, sharing the great meets and the great practices with them," Nolan said.

"David's completely team-oriented," Kenney echoed. "We had a team meeting the other day, and one of the things David suggested was for the freshmen to have more meals together. Just an outstanding team guy."

You would think that in his 33rd year as the men's head coach at Stanford and after developing numerous Olympic medalists, Kenney has already seen it all. He has arguably as much experience in training elite swimmers as any other coach in the world. But Nolan might be

one of those few exceptions.

“I’m used to seeing his speed now, but the first couple times I saw him swim backstroke in practice, I was surprised at how fast he was going,” Kenney said. “All of David’s strokes are technically sound and that’s one of the reasons why he’s so fast. This diversity allows me to move him around and put him in different events because our team has the depth. He’ll definitely have a full plate at NCAAs.”

Kenney has a system for categorizing the elite swimmers he has trained.

“There are two types of elite swimmers,” he said. “One type trains extremely hard during practice and races well at meet. The other type trains hard, too, but doesn’t over-train. These swimmers train smart and are more ‘meet swimmers’ than ‘practice swimmers.’ The bigger the meet, the bigger they show up. Most of the elite swimmers that I’ve coached are the second type, and David’s definitely in that category. He’s an outstanding racer, without a doubt.”

Nolan also claims that racing is his favorite part about the sport.

“I like swimming collegiately. College swimming is definitely tougher competition, but I enjoy it. High school swimming was fun, but this is more serious and more of a team effort, which makes it a lot more interesting.”

Many college coaches might feel an enormous amount of pressure when given the responsibility to coach a rare talent like Nolan, but not Kenney. He isn’t doing anything different because his methods have worked in the past—developing 72 NCAA Champions certainly proves that.

There is an enormous sense of trust between the coach and his swimmers and that relationship is no different between Kenney and Nolan.

“There’s no pressure at all in coaching. The attitude here is so great. Right now, I just want David to get adjusted to college,” Kenney said. “We’re laying out the base, and I want to keep him fresh. He and I will start talking more about season goals during early winter quarter.”

Nolan agrees that he’s swimming under a diverse training regimen.

“I move around different stroke and distance lanes, depending on the day. Right now, we’re mainly working on stroke technique and aerobic base. I think I’ve improved in those two areas since coming here,” he said.

Last year, the Stanford men’s team beat Cal at the Pac-10 Championships but ultimately finished behind the Golden Bears at the NCAAs. The addition of Nolan and the talented freshman class, along with key returning veterans, could make revenge likely this year.

In fact, the Cardinal swimmers possess a sense of confidence—not cockiness—about the rematch. And a little of that extra confidence comes from their coach.

“I know we’re going to beat Cal,” Kenney said. “There’s no doubt in my mind.”