

Val Stearns

Posted by editman

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School: North Penn



Sports: Swimming

Favorite athlete: Chase Utley

Favorite team: Phillies

Favorite memory competing in sports: Beating Emmaus junior year, such an exciting meet!

Most embarrassing/funniest thing that has happened while competing in sports: Changing the lyrics of "All I Do is Win" to "All I Do is Swim" with Lindsay and singing our new version to Mr. Weiser in the weight room

Music on your iPod: Zac Brown Band, Jack Johnson, John Mayer, Adele

Future plans: Attend College at Ithaca, Susquehanna, Syracuse or Salisbury with a major in communications and swim

Words to live by: If it's to be, it's up to me!

One goal before turning 30: Travel parts of Europe and have a steady job

One thing people don't know about me: I have a serious phobia with geese

Val Stearns is not the type of swimmer who plugs in her music and tunes out the world while preparing for a meet.

"I'm more of a talkative, upbeat person," Stearns said. "I don't really do the iPod thing because I then tend to psyche myself out. My one friend and I, we're always talking before races. I do focus right before my races. But up until then, I'm very talkative. I like to get excited or cheer."

Once she steps up to the starting blocks, however, Stearns is all business. The four-year varsity swimmer has already qualified for district championships in the 100 freestyle and is closing in on district cuts for the 50 free, 200 free and 100 backstroke.

While advancing to districts is an important personal achievement, Stearns admits she was a little bit surprised that she qualified so early in the season.

"Unlike a lot of the other girls on the team, I don't play water polo in the fall, so I tend to start the season more out of swimming shape than the rest of the girls," she said. "It usually takes me longer to get into good swimming shape. The past few years it's been the end of the season where I've been getting the cuts. I was very surprised to have gotten it as early as I did, but I'm definitely happy. It means I'm in a very good position training-wise."

North Penn girls swimming coach Matt Weiser, however, is not the least bit surprised at Stearns' early success. The senior captain -- who also swam at District Championships as a sophomore and junior -- has been a key factor in the Maidens' 6-0 (3-0 league) start to the season, both in and out of the pool.

"Val has been a great leader, a great captain of our team," Weiser said. "She's the kind of person who's always doing the right thing at the right time, she sets a great example for everybody on the team. She's somebody who's very dedicated to the sport and wants to work hard every day to improve."

"The last year or two she's really grown into the leader that she is now and she's really matured quite a bit, too. She's a great leader for the younger kids to follow, and she's very positive. You never get anything negative

from her."



Stearns is also an ideal example that -- despite the long hours of practice and training that swimming demands -- it's possible to be involved with plenty of other activities as well.

Stearns is carrying an impressive courseload that includes Honors English and AP Government. She made Distinguished Honor Roll for the first marking period and expects to make it for the second as well.

Stearns also has numerous responsibilities with two of her other in-school activities, Yearbook Club and National Honor Society.

In her second year as a member of the Yearbook Club, Stearns is responsible for helping newcomers learn the ropes and is also the Senior Section Editor.

"I have to make sure the entire section of senior portraits and writeups are perfect and everyone's names are spelled correctly," she said. "I get to cover some events, some sports teams. But it's a lot of fun. I love doing it. I love that kind of stuff."

As a member of the National Honor Society, Stearns must participate in one service project per semester. In the fall she worked with her church youth group to organize a senior brunch during the holiday season. There are also meetings to be attended, and charity fundraising events such as the upcoming Mr. North Penn competition that the club presents.

In addition to being a member of her church youth group, Stearns also plays volleyball and basketball with her church's CYO teams.

Some might suggest that that adds up to too many commitments. But Stearns wouldn't have it any other way. Swimming has helped teach her time management, she said. And besides, she sees herself as more than simply a swimmer.

Her coach couldn't be happier about that.

"Val sets the example that we want to see here at North Penn," Weiser said. "The younger swimmers see she's able to put all the time in to swimming and still excel outside of the pool. You have to put so many hours into swimming, so many hours into school. It can be frustrating, but when you see someone successful like Val is, it gives the younger kids something to shoot for."

But just because she has a lot on her plate, that doesn't mean that Stearns isn't fully dedicated to her team and to the pool. She added the 200 free and 100 back to her repertoire this year, and she said there's no thrill like that of a big meet.

"It is a little nervewracking, but I like it," she said. "I like the exciting meets when we swim Upper Dublin or Souderton or Emmaus. They're always fun, and it's an awesome experience."

The Maidens have already claimed a dual-meet win over defending District One champion Upper Dublin, and Souderton and Emmaus are looming on the schedule in February. So Stearns and her fellow captains are determined to keep the squad focused and working hard to improve their respective times as the big meets and the league and district championships approach.

"With swimming being such a long season, a lot of it is mental," she said. "You have to make sure the girls have their heads straight and make sure their team chemistry is OK and everyone's happy."

"It gets a little rough, especially in January where we feel we're training and training and training and it's hard to see the light at the end of the tunnel, but as a captain, our responsibility and our job is to make sure the girls are still working hard and giving their best."

And she'll do the same herself. Because North Penn swimming always has lofty goals for the championship season. And Stearns wants to go out on as high a note as possible.

"Individually, I'd like to make it to districts for the 100 back, 200 free and 50 free," she said. "My 100 back has been good; I'm less than a second off the district cut. I swam the 200 for the first time this season (against

Central Bucks West on Jan. 10) and I was one-tenth of a second off the district cut. So it's definitely looking good.

"As for my team, the goal every year is to compete for the District title. I really want to win Districts this year. We just have to stay focused and keep working hard and keep improving."

And you can bet that Stearns will be leading the way.