



Joshua Duplechian/NCAA Photos

Fans cheer for Drury's Mitch Snyder during heat four of the men's 1,000-yard freestyle Wednesday. Snyder won the event final later in the evening.

Diving right in Drury, Wayne State lead after Day 1

Coaches predicted the 2009 Division II Men's and Women's Swimming and Diving Championships would be the fastest ever.

So far, so fast.

Whether it's because of the talent or the technical suits the talent is wearing, Division II swimmers set four meet records in the first day's eight finals – and that was after four others were set in the afternoon preliminaries, only one of which survived the evening.

After it was all swum and done, Drury and Wayne State (Michigan) flip-flopped the 1-2 positions in the team standings, with Drury's men leading by two and one-half points and Wayne State's women ahead by 31 ½.

The records started in the meet's second event when Drury's Mitch Snyder beat Panthers alum Henrik Weible's 2005 mark by almost five seconds in the 1,000-yard freestyle with a time of 8:57.06. Snyder was a freshman when Weible set his standard.

"Once I got in the pool, it was a different feeling," said Snyder, who won the event last year in 9:11.85. "The main goal was just to win. I just felt that time was unbelievable. Mentally, I just put the pedal to the metal and just went for it. It still hasn't sunk in."

Other men's records fell shortly thereafter. Tampa's Aleksander Hetland won the 200-yard individual medley in 1:46.03, breaking the "old" record of 1:47.22 that Wayne State's Duarte Mourao set in the preliminaries. Second-place finisher Manuel Stiem of Indianapolis also topped Mourao's mark, but it wasn't good enough to top Hetland.

Ouachita Baptist, which stands third in the men's team race, got there primarily because of its winning 200-yard medley relay, which set records in both the preliminaries (1:28.04) and the finals (1:27.25). Wayne State finished second and also beat Ouachita Baptist's preliminaries time with a 1:27.97.

Significantly, the Drury men's medley relay team was disqualified or the Panthers' day-one lead might have been wider. Tampa and UC San Diego also lost their medley relay teams to DQ.

A DQ in the same event may have cost the Panthers even more dearly on the women's side. Drury's quartet completed the race as the unofficial winner until it and its 40 points were wiped off the board. Wayne

See *Swimming and diving*, page 2 ►



Stephen Nowland/NCAA Photos

Ross Eiden of St. Cloud State completes his dive during Wednesday's finals.

Grand Valley pole vaulter tuned into success despite hearing disability

By Gary Brown

Dianna Noonan's first notion that she could be competitive in track was after a sprint race across the parking lot during a seventh-grade recess – in penny loafers and a plaid skirt, no less. Under such adverse conditions, Noonan still finished neck and neck with two other competitors and her 27-year-old male science teacher, who told her that she had a scholarship in her future if she kept it up.

Now instead of pennies and plaid, Noonan wields a pole. The senior from Frankfort, Illinois, is fresh off a pole vault title for Grand Valley State at the Great Lakes Intercollegiate Athletic

Conference championships and is here in Houston

looking to compete for a national crown.

Her matriculation into pole vaulting from sprinting is interesting in its own right, but the fact that Noonan is 70 percent deaf and wears hearing aids in both ears makes her story even more remarkable.

Noonan was born with a moderate to profound neurosensory hearing loss due to oxygen deprivation at birth. The doctors told her parents that the complications could lead to physical and cognitive difficulties ranging from a learning disability to paralysis.

Her parents didn't notice anything unusual until she was about 4 and her younger brother began speaking better than she did. Noonan was diagnosed with a hearing loss and received her first set of hearing aids. She's worn them ever since.

"I wear my hearing aids all day from the minute I wake up until I go to bed," she said. "I wear them during every track meet, even while I pole vault. Imagine stuffing your ears full of cotton balls and trying to hear. That is what it sounds like without my hearing aids."

Noonan favored softball as a youngster, but she said playing team sports was challenging because she had a hard time hearing the coach's instructions.

"I had to interpret pieces of information that I thought I heard, try to make sense of it and then follow through with it during the game," she said. "It is really hard playing team sports in a mainstream hearing environment. I needed to read the coaches' lips, which meant standing still and facing them within a certain distance. I had to be extra aware of my surroundings and plan every move based on what I saw and could hear."

"I am very fortunate to be successful at an individual sport with my hearing loss. Pole vault is a high-energy activity like the other sports I played, but the setup does not rely on me having to hear athletes or coaches while I am doing the vault in order to maximize my performance."

That Noonan is a pole vaulter at all comes with its own set of twists and turns. After not making the varsity softball team as a high school freshman, Noonan caught the track coaches' attention for her sprinting abilities. Though she agonized over the decision, she chose track and said "it was one of the best decisions I have made in my life."

Still, she didn't know pole vaulting existed until she happened to pay attention to people who were flying through the air in the corner of the field house.

"My first thought was, 'Now that looks like fun,'" she said.

When she broached the idea with her coach, he thought she had the upper body strength to pull it off and liked the idea of her scoring points in an event other than sprints and relays. As the high school years passed, Noonan gradually spent more time vaulting than running. "I ended up dedicating myself to the pole-vault runway 100 percent of the time, except for handoff practice my senior year," she said.

Yet she admits to a "love-hate relationship" with the event. She almost quit in fact in her junior year because of the perfection required.

"The technical nature of the event requires you to hit a specific position from the time you take your first stride to falling 14 feet in the air. I was very critical of myself and did not like the fact that I was not mastering this event quickly like the sprints. After I started clearing higher bars, though, I started to build confidence in my career as a pole vaulter."

Now she's among Division II's best in the event, finishing second in the outdoor championships last year and sixth indoors.

She attributes her success in part to the support that being a student-athlete provides.

"I was extremely shy in school and competing in high-school track helped me gain self-confidence," she said. "I needed to find a program with coaches and athletes who made me feel like part of the family, who would help give me the self-confidence I would need to have successful relationships and be proficient in the classroom. During my first visit at Grand Valley, I immediately felt like I was part of the family and knew that my future teammates could help me grow as a person."



Grand Valley State pole vaulter Dianna Noonan

"I wear (hearing aids) during every track meet, even while I pole vault. Imagine stuffing your ears full of cotton balls and trying to hear. That is what it sounds like without my hearing aids."

Swimming and diving

► Continued from page 1

State, which had finished second in the event, used the Panthers' misfortune to lead the meet after the first day.

The Warriors got help from their first individual champion, Ashley St. Andrew, who won the meet's leadoff event when she cruised home in 9:54.97 in the 1,000-yard freestyle, about 12 seconds faster than her own school record. Wayne State in fact scored 62 of its 114 points in the event as Catherine Leix, Melissa Duff and Natalia Buso placed fourth, fifth and sixth, respectively.

"To have three teammates up there (on the podium) with me was really special," St. Andrew said. "I really can't believe it. I've been waiting for this moment for a long time."

While St. Andrew did not set a meet record, Truman's Kate Aherne did in the 200-yard individual medley – twice. Her finals time of 2:00.61 beat her preliminaries mark of 2:01.41. Aherne also placed second – by just one one-hundredths of a second – to Drury's Eunarte Garro in the 50-yard freestyle. Garro had set a meet record in the prelims (22.64) but posted a 22.80 in the finals.

UC San Diego won the women's 200-yard medley relay to help the Tritons to a third-place standing after

the first day, followed by Truman and Ouachita Baptist.

Men's team standings

1. Drury, 101; 2. Wayne State (Mich.), 98.5; 3. Ouachita Baptist, 78; 4. Limestone, 74; 5. Grand Valley State, 53.

Women's team standings

1. Wayne State (Mich.), 114; 2. Drury, 82.5; 3. UC San Diego, 74; 4. Truman 63; 5. Ouachita Baptist, 62.

Event winners

Women's 1,000-yard freestyle: Ashley St. Andrew, Wayne State, 9:54.97

Men's 1,000-yard freestyle: Mitch Snyder, Drury, 8:57.06*

Women's 200-yard individual medley: Kate Aherne, Truman, 2:00.61*

Men's 200-yard individual medley: Aleksander Hetland, Tampa, 1:46.03*

Women's 50-yard freestyle: Eunarte Garro, Drury, 22.80

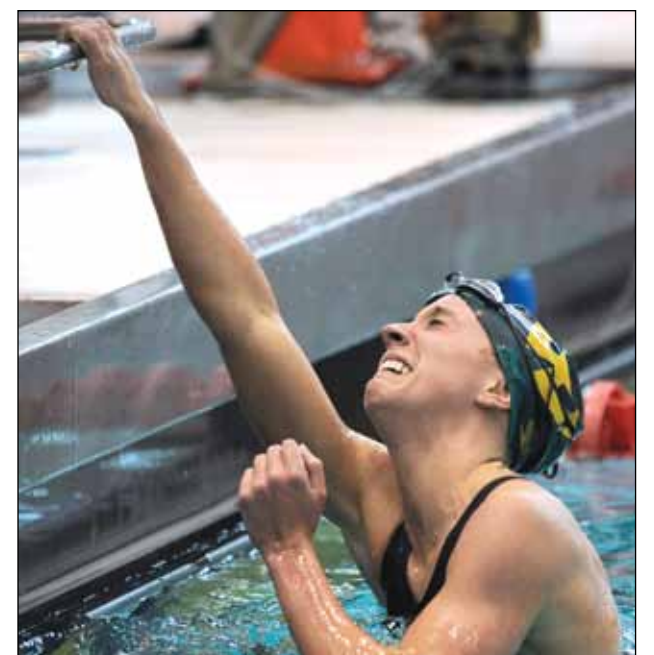
Men's 50-yard freestyle: Goran Majlat, Limestone, 19.63

Women's 200-yard medley relay: UC San Diego, 1:42.56

Men's 200-yard medley relay: Ouachita Baptist, 1:27.25*

Men's three-meter diving: Logan Pearsall, Clarion, 504.25

*meet record



Stephen Nowland/NCAA Photos

Ashley St. Andrews of Wayne State celebrates her win in the women's 1,000-yard freestyle.



When St. Cloud State wrestler Tad Merritt had the opportunity to buy a share of an airplane, he didn't hesitate to say yes.

Well-grounded wrestlers buy into aviation avocation

By Jennifer Gunnels

When it comes to his hopes for the future, St. Cloud State wrestler Tad Merritt's head is quite literally in the clouds.

A sophomore aviation major working toward a career in the airline industry, Merritt often can be found 5,000 feet above ground in the Cessna 172 airplane he owns a share in along with teammate Alex Kontz.

As a nationally ranked redshirt freshman on St. Cloud State's squad, Merritt has his sights set on becoming an all-American at this year's Division II National Championships Festival.

Merritt and Kontz grew up together in Canby, Minnesota, about 150 miles west of St. Cloud, where they are now teammates on the Husky wrestling squad. As Kontz was enrolling at St. Cloud State last fall and Merritt was returning for his second year, one of the co-owners of the plane Kontz and his father own shares in was looking to sell his portion. Merritt jumped at the opportunity to have more time in the air and bought the available share.

"I don't get to fly very much during wrestling season, and then I fly a lot during the offseason. It's something different and fun to do," Merritt said. Merritt and Kontz keep the plane in a rented hangar at the St. Cloud Regional Airport while at school and make the 45-minute flight back to Canby during breaks.

Although Merritt has been wrestling since elementary school, his passion for aviation has been a more recent discovery. Merritt was captivated by what he saw at an air show during his junior year at Canby.

"A buddy of mine who used to wrestle at Canby was a flight instructor at the time and he said, 'You should come up,' " Merritt recalled. About 40 hours of instruction fol-

lowed and in late June 2007, after graduating from high school Merritt earned his private pilot's license.

His newfound interest in aviation never distracted Merritt from competition on the mat. Following in the footsteps of his father, a two-time state champion for Canby in 1976 and 1977, Merritt captured two individual state titles of his own in 2006 and 2007, leading the team to the state title in 2006. His performance garnered the attention of St. Cloud State coach Steve Costanzo.

After redshirting his freshman season, Merritt is on a hot streak this year, ranking among the top grapplers in the nation in the 165-pound weight class in the National Wrestling Coaches Association poll.

Merritt and Kontz once convinced Costanzo to join them for a ride in their four-seater single-engine plane.

"It was kind of windy so there was a lot of turbulence," Merritt said. "He'd never been in a small plane before, and he didn't like it so much. Then we gave him a negative-G, where

you're weightless for a minute, and he really didn't like that, so we took him back down."

Costanzo recalled the experience from the back seat of the plane. "I felt very uncomfortable, and then they thought it would be kind of funny to drop the plane so my guts were in my throat, so to speak. I trust them, and they've got a lot of experience, but it just kept going through my mind that these guys are 18 or 19 years old, so I told them to go on back down."

Costanzo's squads consistently are among the top 15 Division II wrestling teams in grade-point average, a statistic he contributes to the attitude of his coaching staff and student-athletes like Merritt.

"That's the mission of our coaching staff, to know that wrestling is just part of the journey here, but ultimately these guys are here to graduate and develop lifelong skills," Costanzo said. "(Merritt's) GPA is high enough that he isn't required to come to study hall, but he does anyway because he's made academics a priority. He leads by example."

Along with pursuing his dream of becoming an airline pilot, Merritt hopes to tackle a few other goals during his time at St. Cloud State.

"My goal at St. Cloud State is to be a national champion and set as many records as I can, but more importantly my No. 1 goal is to be national champion as a team before I graduate," Merritt said. "That would be so much more rewarding than just an individual national championship because...wrestling is more about team than individual."

Costanzo emphasized Merritt's impact on the team's outlook.

"He's going to be a force to be reckoned with in years to come, and we feel really fortunate to have him in our program," Costanzo said.

■ Wrestling individual preview

Just three of the 10 student-athletes who won individual titles are back to compete for another at this year's festival. The lone defending champion in his original weight class is Chadron State senior **Josh Majerus** at 197 pounds. Majerus defeated Western State's **Donovan McMahl** in last year's title match but has lost to the Mountaineers sophomore twice this season. McMahl and Majerus are 1-2 in the rankings... Nebraska-Omaha junior **Cody Garcia** and senior **Todd Meneely** won crowns last year but are in different weight classes this year. Garcia is top-ranked at 133 pounds after winning 2006 and 2008 titles at 125. He was named the 2008 tournament's most outstanding wrestler. Meneely, now ranked first at 157 pounds, has won individual crowns at 149 in each of the last two years and was recently named the most outstanding wrestler at the Midwest Regional... Chadron State senior **Brett Hunter**, ranked fourth in

a deep 174-pound weight class, also has a national title to his credit, taking the 2007 title at 165 pounds, but he will have to best a field that includes 2008 174-pound runner-up **Ross Taplin** of Nebraska-Omaha, ranked first in the country... Adams State has the top-ranked man at 141 pounds in **Raymond Dunning**, who looks to improve upon his third-place finish at 133 pounds in 2008... Wisconsin-Parkside's **Craig Becker** is ranked first at 149 pounds and is 30-0 on the season after redshirting a year ago. His main competition could come from Minnesota State Mankato's **Tommy Abbott**, who placed fifth last year. Third-ranked redshirt freshman **Esai Dominguez** of Nebraska-Omaha could also contend and would likely face Abbott in the quarterfinals if he gets by two-time all-American **Joey Deaguero** of Adams State in the opening round.

Behavior matters, but don't forget to have some fun

When people first hear about our Division II game-environment initiative, I know what the reaction will be: "Great! It's about time somebody paid attention to sportsmanship!"

In fact, every responsible administrator and coach should want better sportsmanship. It's one of the six basic attributes of Division II membership, and it's a fundamental principle of intercollegiate competition.

But what we're trying to accomplish in Division II goes beyond sportsmanship. Specifically, Division II is trying to create a climate that will encourage more people to attend our events.

Division II athletics is great for participants – more than 90 percent of student-athletes say they would recommend their experience to others – and it's great for fans. How many other events provide you with close-in parking; inexpensive tickets; and a close-up view of high-quality, college-level athletes (like the track and field, swimming and wrestling student-athletes here this week) competing as hard as they can?

It's all a tremendous value for families who are looking for suitable entertainment. We are foolish indeed if we permit inappropriate behavior, either in competition or in the stands, to ruin our events. And that doesn't even get into the basic question of behaving properly simply because it's the right thing to do.

So, yes, for many reasons, it's about time that we paid more attention to sportsmanship. But we also need to pay more attention to something else: entertainment.

In my 13 years as athletics director at Grand Valley State, I have seen hundreds of Division II athletics contests, and the problem at far too many has not been bad behavior. It has been disinterest.

This isn't necessarily the fault of the fans. After all, they usually come to events to be entertained and involved. They want to be loud, but it's uncomfortable to yell alone. Noise may be contagious, but so is silence.

Here's a surprising fact: Student-athletes consistently counsel administrators to act carefully when dealing with sportsmanship. It's not because student-athletes are bad sports (in fact, they are almost always very good sports). Instead, student-athletes have seen too many cases where well-meaning administrators have restrained behavior to the point that fans are afraid to yell.

These athletes make a good point. Surely the answer to dealing with out-of-control behavior involves something other than creating a polite, almost sanitized, event.

With that in mind, consider these three tests when you think about the proper Division II game environment:

- Is the event conducted in a civil manner? This involves sportsmanship, both in competition and in the stands.
- Are fans made as comfortable as they can possibly be? Features like chair-back seats may be hard to implement because of cost, but others – like clean restrooms and healthier choices at concession stands – are virtually free.
- Are steps taken to ensure that the event is as entertaining as possible? Bands and cheerleaders are extremely invigorating, but there are hundreds of other ways to spice things up.

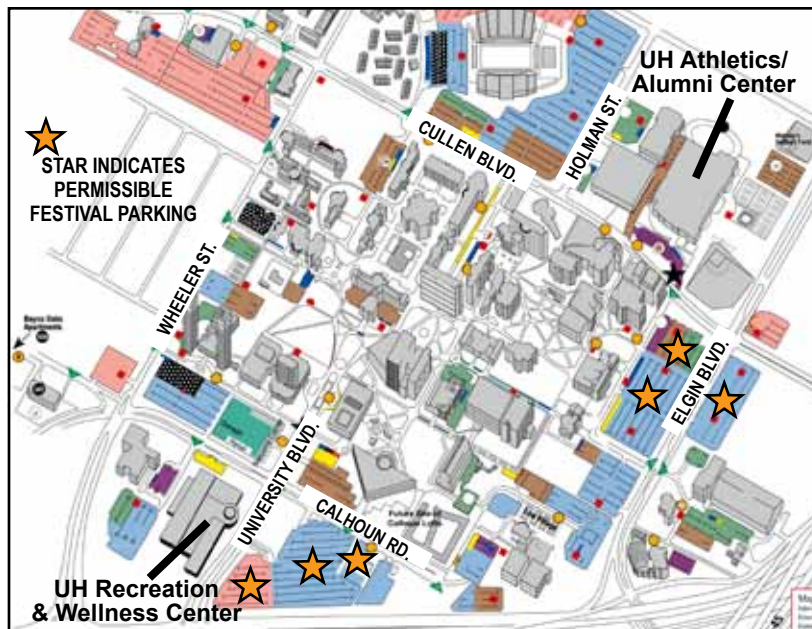
If you think about it, most Division II institutions can find a great advantage in their smallness. They can achieve personal relationships with their fans that large Division I programs can only dream of. Those relationships have the potential to build exciting events for participants and spectators alike.

Let's take a step in the right direction this week by treating our swimmers, divers, wrestlers, and track and field athletes to some positive – and high-energy – support.

Tim Selgo is director of athletics at Grand Valley State and chair of the Division II Management Council. Learn more about the Division II game environment at diicomunity.org.



Tim Selgo



Schedule of events

Thursday, March 12

Swimming and diving preliminary competition10 a.m.
Swimming and diving finals competition 5:30 p.m.

Friday, March 13

Track and field competition9 a.m.
Swimming and diving preliminary competition10 a.m.
Wrestling competition (Session I) 11 a.m.
Swimming and diving finals competition 5:30 p.m.
Wrestling competition (Session II)6 p.m.

Saturday, March 14

Track and field competition9 a.m.
Wrestling competition (Session III)10 a.m.
Swimming and diving preliminary competition10 a.m.
Swimming and diving finals competition 5:30 p.m.
Wrestling competition (Session IV)6 p.m.
Closing ceremony 7:30-10 p.m.

Broadband schedule

Thursday, March 12

Swimming and diving prelims 10 a.m.-conclusion of session
Swimming and diving finals5:30 p.m.-conclusion of session

Friday, March 13

Swimming and diving prelims10 a.m.-conclusion of session
Swimming and diving finals5:30 p.m.-conclusion of session
Track and field 9 a.m.-7:40 p.m.
Wrestling session I 11 a.m.-conclusion of the session
Wrestling session II 6 p.m.-conclusion of the session

Saturday, March 14

Swimming and diving prelims 10 a.m.-conclusion of session
Swimming and diving finals 5:30 p.m.-conclusion of session
Track and field 9 a.m.-6:30 p.m.
Wrestling session III 10 a.m.-conclusion of the session
Wrestling session II 6 p.m.-conclusion of the session
Swimming and wrestling events are at the UH Campus Recreation and Wellness Center. Track events are at the UH Athletics/Alumni Center.



Jim Makovsky of Minnesota State Mankato instructs students on proper technique in wrestling Wednesday at the YES Clinic.

NCAA complimentary shuttle service

The NCAA will provide complimentary shuttle service from the Hyatt Regency downtown to the University of Houston (both competition venues). Because of limited parking, teams and fans are encouraged to use the shuttle service when traveling to the competition venues as well as to the opening and closing ceremonies.

Date	Service from	Service to	Hours of service
Thurs.	Hyatt Regency	UH	5:30 a.m.-10 p.m.
Fri.	Hyatt Regency	UH	5:30 a.m.-10 p.m.
Sat.	Hyatt Regency	UH	5:30 a.m.-9:30 p.m.
	Hyatt Regency	Discovery Green	7:30 p.m.-11 p.m.
	UH	Discovery Green	7:30 p.m.

The Hyatt Regency to University of Houston shuttle will run on the half hour. The transportation loop will include the Hyatt-Melcher Pool (5:30 a.m.-noon)-CWRC-Track-CWRC-Hyatt.

Directions

Directions from Hyatt to the UH Campus

Recreation and Wellness Center (4500 University Drive):

- Start out going northeast on Louisiana Street toward Lamar Street
- Turn left onto Capitol Street
- Turn left onto Houston Avenue
- Turn slight left onto Heiner Street
- Merge onto I-45 south via the ramp on the left toward Galveston
- Take the TX-5-Spur exit, exit 44B
- Merge onto TX-5 Spur
- Merge onto TX-5 Spur toward University Drive
- Turn right onto University Drive
- End at 4500 University Drive (5.66 miles)

Directions from Hyatt Regency to the UH Athletics/Alumni Center (3100 Cullen Blvd.):

- Start out going northeast on Louisiana Street toward Lamar Street
- Turn left onto Capitol Street
- Turn left onto Houston Avenue
- Turn slight left onto Heiner Street
- Merge onto I-45 south via the ramp on the left toward Galveston
- Take Exit 44C toward Cullen Boulevard
- Turn slight left onto Gulf Freeway
- Turn right onto Cullen Boulevard/FM 518
- End at 3100 Cullen Boulevard (4.4 miles)

Parking

Swimming, diving and wrestling: Institutional vans or cars transporting team personnel will be able to use parking lot 2B directly behind the University of Houston's Campus Wellness and Recreation Center.

Swimming teams that use the early morning swims at the Melcher Pool may drop off student-athletes in lot 15C. To park at the Melcher Pool, use Lots 16 B and D near the track and field venue. Parents and fans attending the swimming and diving or wrestling championships will be able to park in the parking garage near the CWRC for \$8 a day. Campus parking passes are also available for purchase at the campus Welcome Center.

Track and field: Institutional vans or cars transporting team personnel should park in lots 16 B and D near the track and field venue.

Tickets

Tickets will be sold at the main entrance to the University of Houston's Campus Recreation and Wellness Center and at the main entrance to UH's Athletics/Alumni Center. Tickets will be \$5 daily for Wednesday and Thursday and \$10 daily for Friday and Saturday. Each ticket will be good daily and will allow entrance to any national championship competition that day.