

Dwellely Putting Finishing Touches on Her Career

By Ann Killion, Pac-10.org

Last autumn, Stanford swimmer Kate Dwellely found her inspiration. Not in the pool, but on the baseball field.

The Stanford swimmer grew up in a family of San Francisco Giants fans, hearing stories about the horrors of Candlestick, the heartbreak over the years. During the team's autumn World Series run, as Dwellely witnessed something special happening, she tried to draw lessons that applied to her own sport.

"They needed everyone to contribute, they had veterans and young players who became stars," Dwellely said. "I clung to that connection."

Dwellely even brought the Giants' "There's magic inside," theme into Stanford swimming, posting signs in the locker room that sent positive messages like, "There's mental toughness in here," "There's team in here," and "There's love of the game in here."

Like the Giants, the Stanford team has different swimmers contributing in different ways, and key youngsters from a highly regarded recruiting class. But there's no doubt that one of the most important roles belongs to Dwellely. The 22-year old is one of just four seniors, a two-time team captain and a swimmer who has assumed leadership of the team after several key athletes – including Olympians Julia Smit and Elaine Breeden – graduated last year.

"Kate has really found her voice this year," said Stanford coach Lea Maurer. "Her confidence has grown, but her heart has stayed just as pure and big as ever."

Dwellely, a 16-time All-American and the most experienced swimmer on the squad, is savoring every part of her last season swimming for Stanford.

"This is my last time doing everything," she said. "I'm sad it's going to be over. But it's been a great motivator."

Dwellely – whose strongest events are the 100 and 200 freestyle - isn't deterred by a setback at the end of the regular season. Her top-ranked Cardinal team lost to fourth-ranked Cal. It was Stanford's first dual meet loss in almost four years.

"It's always disappointing to lose," Dwellely said. "But my perspective is to keep an eye on the championships. It gives us motivation to take revenge on the Bears."

The chance for revenge comes at the Pac-10 Championships, which begin on Feb. 23 in Federal Way, Washington. Dwellely said the Pac-10 championships are fantastic preparation for the March NCAA championships, which will be held in Austin, Texas.

"We have such great strength in our conference," she said.

Dwellely had her sites set on Stanford from the time she was in seventh grade, when an older teammate from her Concord-based Terrapins Swim Club signed with Stanford.

Dwellely grew up on a 1000-acre sweet corn and green bean farm in Brentwood, in the East Bay. Aside from working at a roadside fruit stand when she was young, she wasn't a hands-on contributor. But she learned her work ethic from her family, and never had a problem rising early for morning swim practice with the Terrapins.

In 2004, Dwellely missed making the Athens Olympic team by two-tenths of a second. Four years later, she finished ninth when competing for a spot on the Beijing team.

"That was much more disappointing," she said. "That I had come so close at a young age, I automatically thought I would make the team. But the others' rate of improvement was higher."

She represented the United States at the World Championships in Rome a year later and is determined to make the 2012 Olympic team. Though her collegiate swim career is coming to a close and she will graduate in December, Dwellely plans to stay at Stanford and train for the Olympic Trials.

"It's a great training environment here," Dwellely said. "We're all fast, we all get along and we love each other."

Dwellely takes pride in continuing Stanford's great swimming tradition.

"As a senior, she wants to leave the program better than she found it," Maurer said. "It's like she's putting the finishing touches on a work of art."