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## STANFORD WOMEN

### Smit's success has ballooned to top levels

Tom FitzGerald, Chronicle Staff Writer

Tuesday, February 23, 2010

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**(02-22) 21:06 PST** -- As team-building exercises go, this one was a dud. Lea Maurer divided her Stanford women's swimming team into groups and gave each balloons to pop, either in the water or on the deck. The quickest team to pop four balloons won.

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Oh, and you couldn't use your hands.

Maurer won't forget the sight of a couple of the larger swimmers landing - hard - in a sitting position on a shy freshman named Julia Smit, who was on her back with a balloon balanced on her stomach.

"Julia's getting mashed," Maurer said. "She looked at me like, What the hell are you doing?"

Smit's bruised rib healed, and Maurer quickly dropped the exercise from her coaching repertoire. Three years later, Smit laughs at the memory, one of many she has had in becoming one of the best swimmers in Stanford history.

In the pantheon of great Cardinal swimmers, three women stand above the rest. Janet Evans (1990-91) held seven world records and five Olympic medals, four of them gold. Summer Sanders (1991-92) led Stanford to a national title in 1992 and won two gold medals at the Barcelona Olympics in '92. Jenny Thompson (1992-95) helped the Cardinal win four national titles, took part in four Olympics and won 12 medals, including eight gold.

As a college swimmer, Smit walks very comfortably in their company. She already has two Olympic gold medals, for swimming preliminary relay races in Beijing, and she's aiming at the 2012 Games in London.

She has eclipsed Sanders in the 200 and 400 individual medley and Thompson in the 50 and 100 free. Smit holds five individual school records and three more in relays.

When the Pac-10 meet opens Wednesday in Long Beach, Smit will try to help Stanford to its first title since 2005. Unbeaten (9-0) in the dual-meet season, the Cardinal are tied with Georgia for the top ranking in the country.

"She is a machine," Maurer said. "She doesn't break down, and she is tenacious."

Smit is also the team's chief motivational force.

"I guess I could be seen as the bad cop," she said. "In practice, I feel like I hold people to a really high standard."

That's quite a development for a woman who was so timid she hardly talked to anybody

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for a month after arriving on the Farm from Long Island, N.Y.

More recently, during a morning practice when the fog shrouded the electric clock on the deck, the swimmers complained they couldn't see it. When assistant coach Shane Whildin said he could see it from his vantage point, Smit piped up: "You must have bleeping superhero eyes!"

She can crack up her teammates as well as ride them to reach new heights, which happens to be where she's headed. Taking a busman's holiday from the college routine in December, she broke two short-course world records in Manchester, England.

"She is the piper right now," Maurer said. "If you see her on the deck, she is confident and believes so much in the program that she's going to *will* people to know they're going to swim fast."

## Pac-10 meet

The women's championships run Wednesday through Saturday in Long Beach. The diving championships run Thursday through Saturday in Federal Way, Wash.

Some other Bay Area collegians to watch:

## Stanford

**Elaine Breeden, Sr.**, 100, 200 fly.

**Kate Dwelley, Sr.**, 100, 200 free

**Betsy Webb, So.**, 100 back, 50 free

**Meg Hostage, Jr.**, springboard

## Cal

**Sara Isakovic, So.**, 200 free

**Caitlin Leverenz, Fr.**, 100, 200 breast

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*This article appeared on page **B - 3** of the San Francisco Chronicle*



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