

ON TO PRINCETON

Sometimes people ask me, "Why Princeton? Why did you go to an Ivy League school when we're sure you had the opportunity to garner a scholarship from a school with a big-time swimming program?" The truth is, I wasn't offered swimming scholarships to a lot of schools. As a high school senior in '83, I had qualified for senior nationals, but I hadn't really done anything outstanding at the meet. I didn't think I was going to continue to swim after college, and I wanted to make sure I got the best education possible. Stanford was one option. I'd been accepted there, but the two scholarships they had were going to Jeff Kostoff and Pablo Morales. I could understand that. My father had gone to Princeton. I loved the school and respected the coach. A national team coach once told me that swimming for Princeton would reduce my chances of ever swimming at the very top level of the sport. But I thought Princeton had a great swimming program; certainly, it provided the level of competition I was ready for at the time. There were a fair number of senior national qualifiers in the Ivy League, though not necessarily national champions or even finalists. Overall, Princeton was right for me. And right from all angles.

Similar to the emotional growth that swimming provided during my adolescence, swimming gave me a stronger sense of identity at Princeton. It made me stand out. Because I swam, I was different from my classmates. Also, I was successful at college swimming, and that helped me stand out even more. At a dual meet with Columbia in the fall of my freshman year, my coach, Rob Orr, for whom I have the greatest respect, scored the meet out; Rob came over to me and said, "Dan, if we're going to win this meet, you're going to have to swim the 1000 free and the 200 free" (which are back-to-back events in the college dual meet schedule) "and win both." I looked at him in utter amazement and said, with as much scorn as I could manage, "You're nuts! How am I going to swim the 1000, then get right back up on the blocks and win the 200? Somebody else is going to have to pull through." Rob just smiled and said, "Well, I've been watching you train..." and, basically, he went on to feed me a line which, of course, I bought. I swam and won both events. That day stands out as one of the high points of my col-

lege swimming career.

Competing at the conference meets for the Ivy League Championships, I won the high-point award three of my four years at Princeton. In my junior year, David Berkoff was seeded first in the finals of the 200 backstroke. If I were to win the high-point, I had to win that race. My winning also meant that Princeton would beat Harvard for the team title. It was one of those pressure swims! Even though I tried to downplay the importance of the race, I realized what was at stake. I wasn't swimming just for myself; I was swimming for my teammates. My win affected the whole Princeton team, and I felt a greater sense of pride because it did. To me, dual meets were important, conference championships were important, NCAAs were important, as were school pride and school spirit. But, at the heart of everything was the fact that I was swimming with my college team, and we were trying to accomplish something together—whereas in other contexts, I had been out there swimming for myself. As important as the feeling of camaraderie had been when I was growing up, it was even more important in college. In college, you're training with a group of young men and women who are going through exactly the same things you are. When you go to a meet, you're all part of a team, and you want to work together to achieve the team's goals. Participation and teamwork were really important to me, and the paybacks for feeling that way were extraordinary. So many great and lasting friendships evolved from my years in college swimming!

Dermion F. Quinn was a Princeton graduate who was killed in World War I. He left a trust that sponsors an annual award for the Princeton swimmer who best demonstrates the qualities of dedication and intensity in practice and at meets. I won that award in each of my four years and was the first swimmer ever to have done so. I'm more proud of that than of any specific collegiate swim. Also, I'm proud of the fact that, at my graduation, I was honored as the outstanding athlete in my class and that I graduated with honors in economics. Although I don't take a lot of personal pride in what I do in the water, I do take a lot of pride in the amount of work that stands behind each swim. Over the years, I've discussed that idea repeatedly with Brent Lang. Brent swam for the University of Michigan and was on the '88 Olympic team with me; we've talked a great deal about what swimming has meant to us and about what's important and



*Left: Sharing the Tri-als victory with Mark Schubert
Above: Thinking things over*

CHARACTER AND EXCELLENCE



what's not. We've agreed that what's important is not necessarily a fast time. What's important is what helps us grow as people and helps develop qualities in us that we recognize as good. That's the primary reward for all the work and the long hours and everything that we've put into the sport.

My choice of Princeton was vindicated in every possible way, but in none more meaningful than in my good fortune at having Rob Orr for my coach. Rob is a special man. He's the kind of coach who cares for his swimmers as people, first, and as swimmers, second. I've seen so many coaches along the way who get so wrapped up in performances and times that they lose sight of their swimmers as people. Rob never did. It was important to him that my schoolwork was going well. He made it plain that the priorities were academics, swimming, then social life. He even gave the priorities an acronym: the Rob Orr "ass" principle. Rob was the first coach I considered a friend. As I grew up, my coaches were authority figures, but I thought of Rob as more on the level of his swimmers. Having been an outstanding swimmer at USC himself, he understood the way a swimmer thinks about swimming.

THINK BIG PICTURE

Since the summer of '85 was lost to mono, I didn't have the chance to show that my performance at the '84 Olympic Trials was, in fact, a sign that I'd taken a step up to a new level. The World Championship Trials in Orlando in '86 gave me that chance. Winning both the 100 and 200 meter backstrokes in Orlando was definitely a highlight in my swimming career. I don't

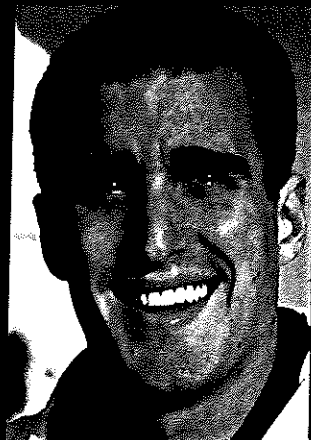
remember too much about my swims, however. What I do remember was being interviewed by Rowdy Gaines for ESPN immediately after the finals of the 200 backstroke. I guess I still didn't quite have my priorities in order. Perhaps I was in transition, still thinking of myself as a newcomer, but a newcomer on the way to becoming a regular member of the U.S. national team.

In June of '87, I graduated from Princeton and moved to Boca Raton to train with Mark Schubert at Mission Bay. My goal was to make the Olympic team in '88 in the 200 meter backstroke. The most difficult thing I had to deal with over the ensuing 14 months was that everything was going to come down to two minutes at about 7:30 p.m. on the 4th of August, 1988. I tried not to look at it that way, however. Instead, I told myself, "I don't know what's going to happen at the Olympic Trials, but between now and the day of the race, I'm going to have a range of wonderful opportunities that I'd miss out on if I were not making this commitment." I tried to set myself up for satisfaction either way. That's not always an easy thing to do. But it's far preferable to going forward with an "all-or-nothing" attitude. I didn't want to be in the position of saying to myself, "I'm going to train these 14 months exclusively to make this team. If I make it, then that's everything, but if I don't, then I'm going to be crushed." You can't do that to yourself. It's not fair. Fortunately, I qualified for the Olympic team. But had I not, I think I'd have been able to handle that pretty well, too.

For me, there's a nice contrast between the '84 and the '88 Olympic Trials. In '84, I'd been the unknown, "*Dan Vetch*." In '88, the people at the meet knew who I was and how to pronounce my name. All the other swimmers in the backstroke finals were, to varying degrees, in a position similar to the position I'd occupied in '84. They all were new to Olympic Trials competition. Thus, many of them reminded me of myself in '84—really nervous, really upset. I was pretty confident going into the race. As I marched out, my teammates launched into a cheer, "Let's go, Big Dog!," since at the time, "Big Dog" was my nickname. I pretended to bark at them, and they were laughing. I was laughing, too. In the race itself, I don't think I was ever behind. Going down the third length, I was thinking, "This could be the last swim of my life!" All of a sudden, I started thinking about all this other stuff. As a result, the 150 was there before I knew it. Then, I realized that David



THERESA ANDREWS



MIKE BARROWMAN



MATT BIONDI



TRACY CAULKINS

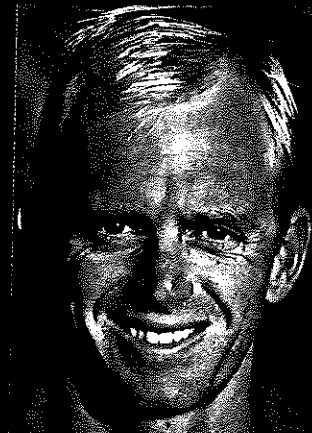
Every swimmer's life is a personal odyssey.

Swimming: Character and Excellence

is meant to be a guidebook for the journey.



TOM DOLAN



ROWDY GAINES



TOM JAGER



BETSY MITCHELL



PABLO MORALES



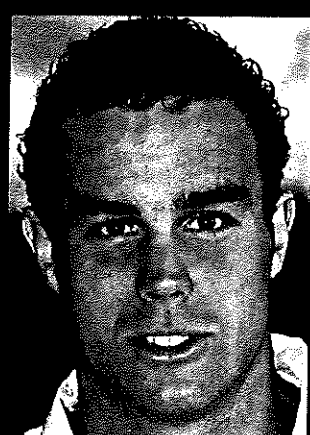
RICH SCHROEDER



JILL STERKEL



AMY VAN DYKEN

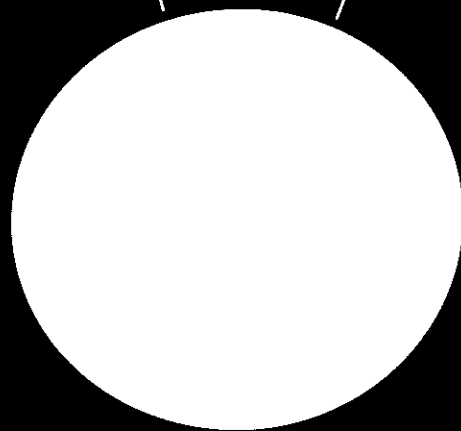


DAN VENTCH



SIPPY WOODHEAD

SWIMMING: CHARACTER AND EXCELLENCE



THERESA ANDREWS

MIKE BARROWMAN

MATT BIONDI

TRACY CAULKINS

TOM DOLAN

ROWDY GAINES

TOM JAGER



BETSY MITCHELL

PABLO MORALES

RICH SCHROEDER

JILL STERKEL

AMY VAN DYKEN

DAN VEATCH

SIPPY WOODHEAD