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BIG MAN AT BIG RED

COACH PARINI

BY MICHAEL J. STOTT

Gregg Parini, seven-time NCAA Division III Coach of the Year, consistently places his Big Red swimmers among the nation's elite by stressing academic, social and aquatic success.

[PHOTO BY DIANA PORTER, COURTESY OF DENISON UNIVERSITY]

Gregg Parini, Head Coach
Denison University

This year, Gregg Parini received Denison's 2007 Charles A. Brickman Teaching Excellence Award, a recognition for his ability to challenge his students in academics and life. An 18-time All-American at Kenyon, he earns similar high praise from his swimmers, 20 of whom have earned NCAA postgraduate scholarships.

In 20 years as the head coach of Denison's women's and men's teams, Parini has guided the school to a combined 40 straight top 10 NCAA Division III finishes and has led more than 200 All-Americans to 1,541 All-American performances.

His women's team captured the NCAA Division III Championships in 2001.

Q: Swimming Technique:
The academic, social and physical pressures of swimming for an accomplished D-III team are immense. How do you help your men and women cope?

A. Coach Gregg Parini:
Swimmers chose Denison because it offers opportunities to pursue academic and professional goals while maintaining a swimming focus. A team composed of people with big expectations brings attendant pressure.

A disciplined lifestyle that integrates aquatic, academic and social components goes a long way in instilling confidence to manage expectations. Our success at managing pressure has a lot to do with how we view individual and team goals.

We take steps daily to manage pressure. We give swimmers some latitude in handling studies and swimming commitments. Our practice attendance policies are user-friendly. We offer multiple afternoon workouts to minimize conflicts with classes and labs. As a professor, I live in the academic mainstream, and swimmers know that I'm an advocate and mentor for both their academic and swimming development.

But Denison swimmers do train, right?
We have a demanding training regimen with workouts that are regularly performance-centered. These are designed to put persons and/or groups in pressure situations that include goal and team expectations. These opportunities, which can be either water or dryland exercises, include "get-out sets" or a "Coach's Delight" in which the entire team or groups of athletes are excused if a goal is met. Successful competition here builds confidence and prepares athletes for the bigger swims at championships.

Sometimes, we handicap our team when going into a particular competition. By deliberately leaving some of our best at home—or having them swim in off-events—we shift the focus onto some of our less-seasoned swimmers. The obvious risk is this can leave you vulnerable and might even cost you the meet. The upside is speeding the athlete's learning curve and potential success at championships.

Is it the same method that earned you Denison's 2007 Charles A. Brickman Teaching Excellence Award?
Whether it's in the classroom with my exercise physiology classes or on deck with my teams, I'm at my best when I'm teaching. Effective teaching and coaching means putting the needs of the student and athlete first and recognizing where an athlete is on his or her learning curve, and adapting your presentation to maximize learning. Effective teaching and coaching means meeting your students on their terms and finding a way to connect with each of them.

That approach emphasizes learning above simply performing. My teaching

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COACH PARINI — *continued from 31*

and coaching role models were mentors, and included my father, who was also my first coach; my high school coach, Butch Briggs; Jim Steen (Kenyon); and Dr. Bill Heusner, one of my professors in graduate school. Bill taught me the value of going the extra mile and making sure that my students and athletes understand the lessons of the day.

Speaking of pressure, what did you learn as a swimmer and record-setting national champion at Kenyon under Jim Steen?

Jim taught me that as long as I was striving for the things I wanted and was living consistently with those pursuits, I really had no reason to feel any pressure. Pressure comes when we're asked to do things that we don't want to do or when we've compromised the pursuit of our goals in some way.

You have a reputation for being an intuitive coach. That runs counter to the modus operandi of two of your influences, Steen and Jon Urbanchek. What kind of things do you intuit, and how do you meld the two styles?

I've always relied on my intuition. I'm trained as a scientist, and I use research-based training plans in our season and workouts. Effective coaching and teaching demands a sensitivity to athletes' lives. We need to be willing to step outside the box to make sure that we're doing the right thing on any particular day. That's when we step away from the science and into the art of coaching. I have often scrapped a practice plan in the middle of warm-up because it wasn't going to serve our swimmers' needs that day.

You've had great success with flyers and now sprinters and distance athletes. How do you explain that success?

Our successes come from convergence of good training with swimmers who are trending up in their development. Division III national record holder Aaron Cole was 52+ in the 100 fly coming out of high school and dropped to a 47.4. Division III women's national record holder Mollie Parrish arrived with a 59.8 in the same event and achieved a 55.1. These time drops are a bit above the norm, but they mirror what we see. That we're getting the same kind of improvements in distance and sprint freestyles tells me that we're doing a pretty good job of providing what they need.

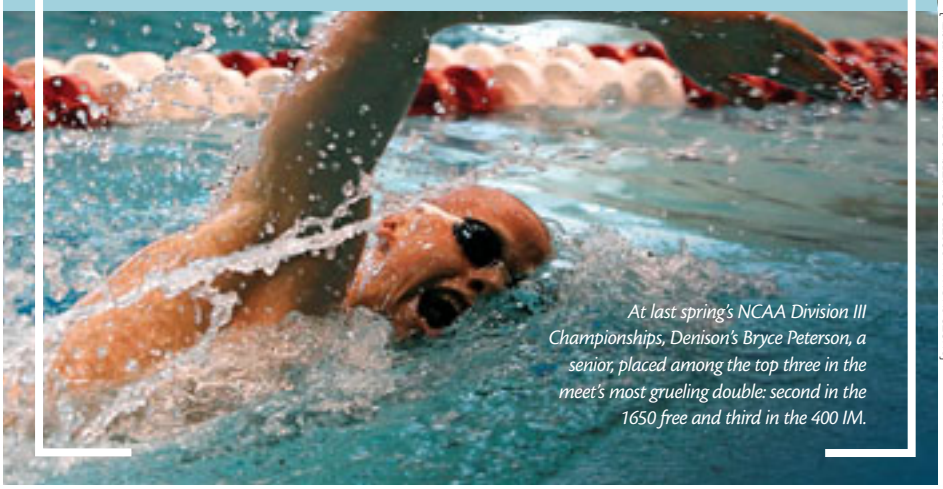
Steen adapts his training according to his athletes involved. Does that method work for you?

That's the only way I know how to coach effectively. To operate in a way that trains every athlete in the same way will yield only marginal results. Every athlete brings in a different history and predisposition—physiologically, biomechanically, psychologically—to workouts. The art of coaching centers on understanding these differences and demands that we adapt our training program so as to maximize our swimmers' development. This is not only the most challenging part of coaching, but also the most rewarding.

How do you go about the process of team and individual goal-setting?

We sit down at season's end with individuals and the team and do a thorough assessment and explore our direction for

BRYCE PETERSON



At last spring's NCAA Division III Championships, Denison's Bryce Peterson, a senior, placed among the top three in the meet's most grueling double: second in the 1650 free and third in the 400 IM.

[PHOTO BY DIANA PORTER, COURTESY OF DENISON UNIVERSITY]

the upcoming year. It's critical that everyone understands that desire to succeed needs to be aligned with willingness to prepare for success. Freshmen are introduced to team goals very early in both team and individual meetings.

How often do you review individual goals with your athletes?

Ongoing throughout the season, but not necessarily formally. The coaching staff also has regular weekly meetings to discuss how each swimmer is doing.

What elements of your dryland are transferable to the water?

All of it. Our strength and conditioning coach, Brian Johnson, has done a masterful job of developing an innovative program that carries over to the water for all of our swimming groups. Whether it's work on strengthening stabilizers or primary movers, the comprehensive program is designed to get maximal power from our swimmers.

The program is interesting, involved and effective, and it includes work with biokinetic swim benches, slide boards, medicine balls, heavy jump ropes, plyometrics and yoga.

What role does kicking play in your program?

We kick daily and have a number of test sets to measure progress. Two of our favorites include a timed 2,000 kick as well as 20 x 100 kick for best average. The timed 2,000 kick is much like a T30 swim in that it gives us the opportunity to measure our kicking threshold. The 20 x 100 kick is simply a grind-it-out set. We'll shift the interval to suit our needs on a particular day. We also do a lot of sprint underwater kick sets, frequently racing from the blocks. ❖

Michael J. Stott is one of Swimming World Magazine's USA contributors, and is based in Richmond, Va.

ADAM ULRICH

Senior Adam Ulrich was Denison's "go-to" man in backstroke at last spring's NCAA Division III Championships. He won the 200 yard back and placed third in the 100.

[PHOTO BY DIANA PORTER, COURTESY OF DENISON UNIVERSITY]

HOW THEY TRAIN
DAVID CURTIS

Sophomore David Curtis came to Denison from Pioneer High School in Ann Arbor, Mich. His development into one of Division III's strongest swimmers mirrors the improvement that Denison swimmers have shown over the past two decades. His victory in the 200 yard free at last spring's NCAAs underscored a season that was characterized by a number of significant breakthroughs. Note how much Curtis has improved over the last two years:

EVENT	HIGH SCHOOL	FRESHMAN	SOPHOMORE
50 Free	22.49	21.87	20.88
100 Free	47.12	47.59	45.52
200 Free	1:40.55	1:40.12	1:37.98
500 Free	4:35.43	4:27.54	4:25.74

At Denison, Gregg Parini asks all of his swimmers to extend their range of events and distances. For some, that means being able to compete in longer events. In Curtis' case, it meant learning how to sprint well. While the transition demanded additional sprint-related sets, his work centered mostly on technical considerations (i.e., starts, turns, breakouts).

Through the first half of the season, Curtis' dryland training followed the Denison middle distance program, while 90 percent of his water time was spent with the distance swimmers. As the season progressed, his water time increasingly shifted toward the mid-distance and sprint workouts.

Denison weight training includes slideboard drills, plyometric work, dumbbells, pull-ups, biokinetic and a lot of core work. The dryland circuit encompasses med balls, heavy jump ropes, calisthenics, swim bench training and plyometrics.

"We typically drop the dryland circuit by the second half of the season," says Parini. "The water and stretching that follow these sessions are usually low-impact kicking and swimming plus drill work."

Dryland and weight training sessions last from 60 to 80 minutes.

Denison's distance/mid-distance training programs are heavily influenced by former Michigan coach Jon Urbanchek's color training model **(see chart at right)**. Most of the workouts involve a lot of speed play and demand that the swimmers shift gears throughout the sets.

"We usually begin each set at slower paces and progress toward more speed and intensity. In the middle-distance training groups, our threshold paces are determined by a modified timed 2,000 plus a 6 x 100 best average protocol," says Parini.

—By Michael J. Stott

[PHOTO BY DIANA PORTER, COURTESY OF DENISON UNIVERSITY]

ABOVE » *David Curtis*

WEEKLY SCHEDULE AND SAMPLE SETS

WEEKLY SCHEDULE (FALL)

Monday and Thursday
- A.M. Weights followed by 30 minutes in water
- P.M. Main set threshold (up to 5,000 yards)

Tuesday and Friday
- A.M. Dryland circuit followed by stretching
- P.M. VO_2 max and speed work

Wednesday
- A.M. Off
- P.M. Quality/Lactate

Saturday
- A.M. Quality/Lactate
- P.M. Off

Sunday
- Off

TYPICAL THRESHOLD SET
- 6 x 175 @ white/pink on 2:00... low to moderate intensity (heart rates 120-140)
- 6 x 150 @ white/pink on 1:45...same
- 6 x 125 @ pink/red on 1:25...moderate to hard but tolerable intensity (heart rates 140-170)
- 6 x 100 @ red on 1:05...hard but tolerable intensity (heart rate approx. 170)
- 6 x 75 @ red on :50...same (heart rate approx. 170)

TYPICAL QUALITY SET
- 400 @ white on 4:30...low intensity (heart rate 120-140)
- 300 @ pink on 3:40...moderate intensity (heart rate 120-140)
- 200 @ red on 2:50...hard but tolerable pace (heart rate 150-170)
- 8 x 100 @ blue...4 on 1:30, 4 on 1:40... hard and uncomfortable intensity (heart rate 180+)
- 6 x 50 sprint from a dive on 2:00... best effort (heart rate max)