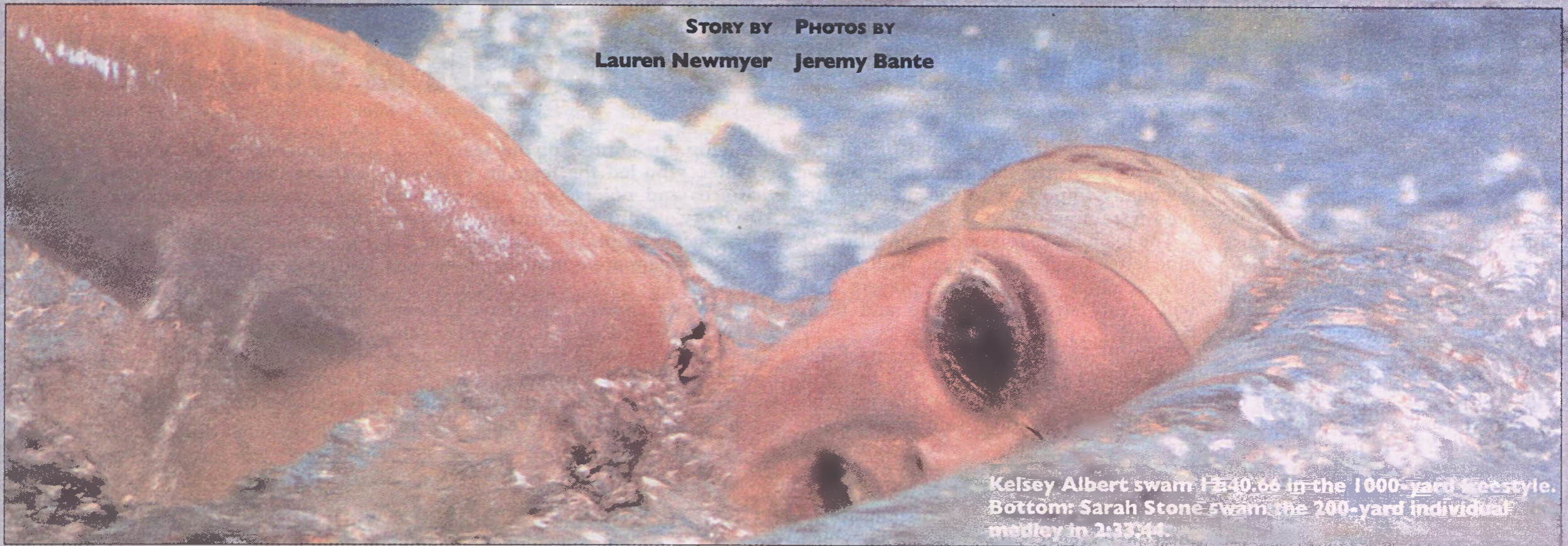


STORY BY PHOTOS BY
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Kelsey Albert swam 1:54.66 in the 1000-yard freestyle. Bottom: Sarah Stone swam the 200-yard individual medley in 2:33.44.

MEET GUILFORD'S STRONGEST SWIM TEAM EVER

A cacophony of splashes and indiscernible chatter echoes through the warm, muggy building, bouncing off the walls and lingering in the rafters of the vaulted ceiling. Nerves are shooting through the roof as swimmers from Guilford, Randolph Macon, and Randolph College warm up for the first meet of the season.

Finally, the water lies still and glassy and the room is quiet. A piercing whistle sounds and six swimmers drop into the water. A buzzer kicks off the first race, a four stroke relay beginning with backstroke.

"I was shaking in the water," said first-year Sophie Riley, who is one of the eight swimmers who swam for the first time at the college level.

Guilford got off to a shaky start. Their two relay groups finished last and second to last. In the second event, a 1000 yd. freestyle race, they fared no better.

Still, as the meet progressed, Guilford picked up its intensity and managed to finish second, losing to Randolph Macon 69-25, and beating out Randolph College 49-46.

Senior and team captain Genevieve Holmes finished second in the fourth event, an intense 50 yd. freestyle race. Holmes also placed fourth in the 100 yd freestyle race, right behind last year's top swimmer, sophomore Justine Merritt.

Karamfila Shalamanova, a first-year who came to Guilford from Bulgaria, swam the 100 yard breast stroke race and finished second. Senior captain Amanda Oehlert finished a few seconds behind her, in third place.

"As a team I think we did alright," Oehlert said. "It was respectable for a first meet. We have a lot of time for improvement."

Fourth-year Coach Steve Kaczmarek is anticipating the best swim season yet. He hopes to move up two slots from last year's final standings in the ODAC conference, from sixth to fourth.

"This is probably the most dedicated team that we've had at Guilford college," Kaczmarek said. "Practice has been very, very good. Everyone has been very attentive; everyone has been working very hard. Everybody wants to do real well as a team, even though it's an individual sport."

Kaczmarek, who has been coaching for 35 years, is a firm believer that individual accomplishment and achieving better times is more important than the team placing high in the division.

"Winning these meets isn't necessarily the most important thing," Kaczmarek said. "Say we have 'Suzie,' who can possibly qualify for the NCAA in X event. But, Suzie could win two other events for us and we have someone else who could swim X event, or Suzie could go to the NCAA in X event so we put her in X Event and by her not swimming the other two events, we might lose the conference. But having the individual go to NCAA is more important than the team winning the championship. We'd like to be able to win the meet and (have Suzie) go to NCAA but if we have to choose, it's the individual over the team."

The team agrees with this philosophy.

"I cheer for everyone else but I'm more focused on how I do," Holmes said. "I think (during the meets) everyone is more focused on their own times, but at the end it's always nice to know that you beat a team as a team."

Though its hard for a conversation to run 'dry' in a sport where the participants spend most of their time underwater, the nature of the sport can make it difficult for the swim team to bond. To encourage his team to get to know each

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Genevieve Holmes
Women's Swimming Team Captain

other, Kaczmarek organized a team dinner at his house.

The team has become friends fast in and out of the water.

"We all joke around and have fun," Holmes said. "We encourage each other to reach a certain time if we know that it's reachable. It's hard to hear cheering (when you are swimming) but it's really helpful to see people at the side of the pool and at the end of the lane (cheering for you.)"

The team of 12 consists of four varsity letter winners, five first-years, and four sophomores, making it a fairly young team with plenty of room for improvement. Kaczmarek hopes to hone in on individual skill now that the Quakers have had their first meet.

"From this point on, we're going to know how each athlete needs to train," Kaczmarek said. "As of today, we know who needs to work on pacing, who needs to work on stroke work ... a lot of people need to work on turns so we'll be spending more time on turns, but it's all individually based."

The technical aspects of swimming are hardly visible to the casual spectator, but can make all the difference in shaving seconds off swimmers' times.

"There's a lot of technique involved in your stroke," said first-year Julia Hohn. "For example, keeping your elbows high up when you're doing freestyle, and keeping them closer to your body to down the distance that you have to move your arms."

Assistant coach Emily Lapinski, who swam for Northern Michigan University, is available during practices for individual training.

Oehlert and Holmes hold open captains' practices on Sundays from 2:30 p.m. to 4:30 p.m., which are high intensity workouts, but not limited to swimmers on the team.

The ODAC season predictions placed Guilford to finish sixth in the conference, as they have the past three years, but Kaczmarek believes this year's team has the potential to surpass this expectation.

"I would like to think that we could finish fourth. So that's kind of a team goal, but not as important as individual goals," Kaczmarek said.

