

**Arizona Swimming and Diving**

**April 6th, 2003**

**For Immediate Release**

**Contact: Elliot Magruder (bosox@email.arizona.edu)**

**Arizona Swimming and Diving Season in Review**

*Both Wildcat Squads Finish in Top 10 at NCAA's for Sixth Consecutive Year*

TUCSON, Ariz. - The University of Arizona men and women's swimming and diving teams battled through injuries, roster changes and other adversities en route to another season that can be described in one word; successful. The 2002-03 campaign brought the Wildcats an individual NCAA Champion, the establishment of six new school records, two individual Pac-10 titles as well as their most impressive finish at the NCAA Championships in the past decade. Under head coach Frank Busch, the Wildcat women have now placed in the top ten at the NCAA's for 13th straight years while their male counterparts have finished no lower than tenth for six consecutive years.

Both of the Arizona squads culminated a sensational 2002-03 regular season with record-setting performances in their respective NCAA Championships. For the first time since 1993, Arizona's men bested the women at the NCAA Championships when they scored 209 points en route to an eighth-place finish. The Wildcat men's achievement at the NCAA's is even more astounding if you consider they managed to score 209 pts. despite having only six swimmers score.

All in all, the men received 12 All-American First Team and honorable mention selections while the Wildcat women garnered a whopping 18 All-American First Team and 11 All-American honorable mention nominations.

Freshman Simon Burnett, a spring-semester enrollee from Great Britain, epitomized the Wildcat men's stellar yet unexpected effort at the NCAA's. Burnett, who was seeded eighth coming into the championship final and who finished third at the Pac-10 Championships, won the 200y free in a blistering time of 1:33.66. After Burnett's victory, a number of mainstream swimming publications commented that while they were unfamiliar with his name, they were unable to deny his overwhelming talent. Burnett's time was the second fastest in Arizona history behind Ryk Neethling's 1:33.09 at the 2000 NCAA Championships.

Burnett's NCAA championship victory continued Arizona's streak of individual national champions. The 'Cats have now posted an individual NCAA Champion on the men's side eight out of the last ten years.

In a further testament to Arizona's excellence at the NCAA Championships,

Burnett's victory was not even one of the three new school records set at the NCAA's. Junior transfer Luis Rojas broke Roland Schoeman's old record in the 100y fly by nearly half of a second when he touched the wall in 46.01. Rojas' time was good enough for second at the meet. In the final day of the meet, the 'Cats topped off a marvelous weekend with two more record setting efforts. Junior Juan Veloz, who was seeded first nationally in the 200y fly for the majority of the season, broke his own school record in the event in a time of 1:42.62 en route to a second-place finish. Later, in the evening's concluding event, the Wildcat quartet of freshman Lyndon Ferns, junior Eric la Fleur, junior Rojas and Burnett obliterated the old school record in the 400y free relay when they collectively finished in 2:52.65. In total, the Wildcat men have now broken eight school records in the last two years alone at the NCAA Championships.

Veloz also garnered a first-team All-America nomination in the 400y IM when he placed seventh in a personal best mark of 3:47.01. In his third event, the Mexico City, Mexico native narrowly missed another All-America selection by a mere one spot when he placed 17th in the 200y IM (1:47.39).

Seemingly every Wildcat male swimmer that made the trip to Austin swam their absolute best at the time when it was needed the most. A perfect example is the performance of junior Eric la Fleur. la Fleur swam a 42.86 of the preliminaries of the 100y free, a personal best and the second fastest ever for Arizona. In the evening final, la Fleur lost only a bit of steam as he finished sixth in 43.06. The Lund, Sweden native earned another honorable mention All-America honor by placing 11th in the 50y free (19.81). After the three-day meet, la Fleur had totaled an amazing six All-American selections.

Other notables at the NCAA's for Arizona included freshman Lyndon Ferns and junior diver Josh Anderson. Ferns, a spring-semester enrollee who earned the *Arizona Daily Wildcat Athlete of the Week* after he won five events in his first two collegiate meets against Stanford and California, accrued five All-American selections despite being hobbled for the entire weekend by a sore ankle. Individually, Ferns excelled the most in the 50 and 100y free, where he set new personal bests at the NCAA's. He finished 11th in the 100y free and 14th in the 50y free by posting times of 43.68 and 19.99, respectively. Anderson, a Portland, Ore. native, not only improved on his performance at the 2002 NCAA's but also boosted the Wildcats in the standings with much needed points. Anderson earned All-America status in all three of the diving events, up for two the season prior. His best finish came in the 10-meter platform after he missed the championship final by only one spot with his ninth place mark (469.90 points). Earlier in the weekend, he placed 15th in the 1-meter springboard and 12th in the 3-meter by totaling scores of 283.45 and 520.40, respectively.

As aforementioned, Arizona's men made the best of having only nine swimmers

and a diver qualify for the NCAA Championships, as evidenced by the 209 points scored. Even after the unfortunate disqualification of the 400y medley relay due to confusion over the difference between international and USA Swimming results that undoubtedly prevented more points from being scored, Arizona still averaged an astounding 29.8 points per swimmer.

Similar to their male counterparts, the Arizona women, who were ranked in the top ten nationally by the CSCAA (College Swim Coaches Association of America) for the balance of the regular season, performed to the best of their ability in their NCAA Championships from Auburn, Ala. The Wildcats finished in the top ten for the 12th consecutive year, a year in which in they broke three school records. The setting of three new Wildcat apogees was the most in one NCAA Championship event since five were established in 2000. The Wildcat women have also had an individual NCAA Champion for 10 out of the past 13th years, albeit they were without one in 2003.

Sophomore Emily Mason led the way for the Wildcats with some of the best swims in Arizona history. Mason actually started off her weekend in a disappointing finish when she failed to qualify for the finals of the 500y free (4:47.17), despite being seeded third after the conclusion of the regular season. However, Mason erased all of that disappointment with a performance for the ages over the final two days of the NCAA Championships. After all the swimming had finished, the Phoenix, Ariz. native had broken two school records, the 400y IM and the 200y fly, secured two new personal bests and earned three All-American first team nominations. Mason's 2nd place finish in the 400y IM in the second event of Friday's competition served as the starting off point for the Wildcats rapid ascension up the NCAA Championship standings. Her time of 4:07.07 demolished her own school record from the 2002 NCAA's by almost five seconds. Mason wrapped up the weekend with another school record and second place finish in the 200y fly when she touched the wall in 1:54.25. She also swam the opening leg of the 800y free relay in 1:46.87, an Arizona season best, a relay squad that finished sixth.

Senior Beth Botsford, the unquestioned leader of a very young Wildcat team, punctuated her career at Arizona with her lifetime best in the 100y back at the NCAA's. The Timonium, Md. native broke the 53 second plateau for the first time when she led off the 400y medley relay on Thursday morning in 52.91, breaking her own school record in the process. Botsford, a 2000 NCAA Champion, earned first-team All-America status in both the 100 and 200y backstroke events. She placed 3rd in the 100y and fourth in the 200y back by finishing in times of 53.46 and 1:54.17, respectively. Botsford finished her wonderful career with a total of one NCAA Championship and an astonishing 16 All-

American First Team selections.

A prominent part of Arizona's squad throughout the season was the presence of five impact, productive freshmen. This quintet of first-year athletes overcame every obstacle they encountered and the NCAA Championships proved to no different. The NCAA freshmen contingent of Marshi Smith, Jenna Gresdal, Katie Willis, Lisa Pursley and Erin Sieper scored valuable points for the 'Cats, they also earned 13 All-America selections. Pursley, who hails from Colorado Springs, Colo. dictated the pace for the Wildcat freshmen by receiving two first-team selections by swimming the butterfly leg of the 200 and 400y medley relay squads, each of which finished in the top eight. The trio of Smith, Willis and Gresdal contributed nonetheless, as an integral part of their given relay squad. Gresdal swam her section of the 800y freestyle relay in 1:50.12, which helped her teammates to a sixth-place finish, she also tallied much needed points for the 'Cats in the 100y back. Willis clocked a time of 1:48.41 in the anchor leg of the aforementioned 800y free relay squad, the Kent, Wash. native also assisted the Wildcats in earning consolation final status in the 400y free relay squad as well. Smith, who won the 50y free in her first collegiate meet against USC, was an essential part of the fifth place 200y medley relay squad (1:38.96), she also scored points in the 100y back.

Many other Wildcat upperclassmen contributed significantly to Arizona's exceptional swimming at the NCAA's. Junior Jessica Wagner set a new personal best en route to a sixth-place finish in the 100y breast (1:00.50). Later in the competition the Naperville, Ill. native set her second personal best in as many days in the 200y breast (2:14.18). She has now totaled eight All-American selections in her three-year career. Sophomore Jessica Hayes, a three time All-American first team selection in her freshman year, continued to excel at the NCAA Championships, she placed 12th in the of the 200y back (1:57.45), and she was a member of the 13th place 200y free relay quartet (1:32.61). Hayes ended the season ranked in the top five in eight different events for the 'Cats, including all three free relays. Last, but certainly not last least is the NCAA performance of senior Julie Manitt. Manitt, a Marietta, Ga. native, was beset by injuries throughout the 2002-03 regular season but she overcame all of them with a wonderful effort at the NCAA's. In her final collegiate meet, Manitt swam a lifetime best of 1:58.15 in the 200y back, good enough for a 12th place finish. Manitt's leadership as well as excellent swimming at the meet was one of the catalysts in leading Arizona from 14th to ninth after two days of the competition.

The road to the NCAA Championships was paved with an abundance of accomplishments from nearly every Wildcat on the roster and many of them came at the 2003 Pac-10 Championships. The Wildcat women placed fourth at their Pac-10's with a total of 1,013 points while the Arizona men finished fifth with 392.5 points. Botsford, as she had done the entire season prior to the Pac-10's, led the young squad by winning both the 100 and 200y backstroke in times of 53.21 and 1:55.24. Botsford saved the best for last, 2003 was the only year in her illustrious career that she won both the 100 and 200y

back titles in the same year. Other noteworthy efforts for the 'Cats at the Pac-10's, held in Federal Way, Wash. and hosted by California, included Manitt finishing fourth in the 200y back (1:58.33), the quartet of Willis, Smith, Gresdal and Hayes being the runner-up

in the 800y free relay (7:16.58) and Hayes' third-place mark in the 200y free in a time of 1:48.14, an NCAA "B" consideration standard. Over the three-day competition, the Wildcats compiled an amazing 10 NCAA automatic or consideration times.

The Wildcat women have now placed in among the top-five squads at the Pac-10 Championships for nine consecutive years.

While Arizona's men did not have an individual champion at their Pac-10's, held in Long Beach, Calif. that should not discount the plethora of fantastic swims. Both Burnett and Rojas logged NCAA "A" qualifying standards in their respective events on the second day of competition alone. Burnett logged his NCAA time with a third place finish in the 200y free when he touched the wall in a speedy 1:36.14. In qualifying with his "A" time, Rojas also finished third in the 100y fly (47.34). Burnett would later become the NCAA Champion in his event while Rojas would break a school record in the 100y fly in their very next meet, quite an improvement over a span of three weeks. In other action, Junior Greg Owen finished fourth in the 200y breast (1:59.37) and the 400y free relay quartet of Burnett, Ferns, Rojas and la Fleur swam an impressive 2:55.26 en route to a third-place finish. The Wildcats set season best times in 12 out of a possible 19 events at the Pac-10's.

Like their female teammates, Arizona has now finished either fifth or higher in nine straight Pac-10 Championships.

Both the men's and women's squads competed against possibly their toughest set of opponents during the regular season dual meets in the history of Wildcat swimming, but despite that, they emerged time and time again with victories and superb individual performances. The Wildcat women defeated seventh ranked Stanford, No. 8 California, tenth-ranked Wisconsin and No. 12 as a part of a 6-3 (4-1, Pac-10) dual meet record. The only losses on Arizona's 2002-03 ledger came to No. 9 USC fourth-ranked Texas and No.5 Texas, all on the road. Arizona's men were only able to garner one victory during the regular season (1-6, 1-3, Pac-10), in the season's final dual meet versus Arizona State. It should be noted that the losses for the Wildcat men during the regular season all came at the hands of Top 25 opponents. Of the top ten teams in the final CSCAA poll, Frank Busch's squad faced five, including the top three; Stanford, Auburn and California.

In only the fall semester of the 2002-03 season, the Arizona men and women accomplished what most teams take a year to do. Veloz's success both for Arizona and on the international level personified Arizona's excellence. At the 2002 Texas Invitational

Veloz demolished his old school record in the 200y fly when he swam the race in a blistering 1:42.72, in the process easily winning the race by over two seconds. In addition to being a Texas Invitational meet record, Veloz's early season swim was so far above his competitors that no other swimmer nationally came within one second of his time until conference championship time in March. What made the Mexico City, Mexico native's swim even more impressive was because it came on the heels of winning the Central American Championships only a few weeks prior.

Other notable achievements during the regular season was Lyndon Ferns winning four events in his first two collegiate meets against then top-ranked Stanford and No. 3 California, the women winning 12 out of a possible 13 events against intra-state rival NAU on 1/15, and the Wildcat men rallying from 20 down with two events to go to win their first dual meet of the season against Arizona State on 2/15.

The season truly never ends for elite swimming programs like Arizona, and the 2003 off-season promises to be loaded with numerous international and stateside competitions for the Wildcat swimmers and coaches alike. The best example comes after Ferns and Owen did not even return to Tucson with the rest of the team after their NCAA Championships, they flew immediately back to their homeland of South Africa to prepare for their upcoming nationals. Mason competed in two events at the "Duel in the Pool" and she intends to participate in the Pan-Pacific Games later in the summer. Finally, Frank Busch has already assisted for the United States team at the Mutual of Omaha "Duel in the Pool" and he will travel to Barcelona in late July to serve on the USA coaching staff at the X-Fina World Championships, the most prestigious international swimming event besides the Olympics.