

Not just treading water: FHS' Giehl has made amazing strides in pool

By Chris Shelton

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Jonathan Castner, For the Camera

Fairview senior Julie Giehl is a good bet to win four state titles, including two in relays, next week in her final high school meet.

There is a drive inside Fairview senior Julie Giehl that can't be measured in horsepower.

It's a drive she used to transform herself from an uncoordinated, slow athlete growing up into this year's fastest distance swimmer in the state.

Giehl will be favored to win four gold medals at the Class 5A state swim meet Feb. 16-17 at the EPIC in Fort Collins as second-ranked Fairview aims for its first team state title since 2004 and second overall.

"I tried to play sports when I was younger and it just doesn't work very well," Giehl said of her coordination troubles. "My club coach doesn't even want me to go skiing, not that I like skiing very much, and sometimes he brings a pogo stick to practice but he doesn't want me to use it because he's afraid I will get hurt. "I've accepted it. I know that if I work hard, it'll come."

Just how far has Giehl come?

Whereas past Fairview stars such as Sarah Fischer were dominating in youth summer meets, Giehl was in the back of the pack.

In the summer of 2000, Giehl was 25th out of 27 girls ages 11-12 in the Boulder Valley Summer Swim League's 200 freestyle event — not exactly showing signs of a promising future.

But Giehl kept swimming, and just before she became a freshman at Fairview, Knights coach Bob Smartt saw something in Giehl and encouraged her to join a year-round swim club.

Giehl joined Jim Richey's Boulder Swimming club program and dropped 18 seconds off her 200 free time in nine months. Fischer and former Niwot standout Christine Jennings were in Richey's program.

"The training was a lot harder," Giehl said. "I'm not very coordinated so I just threw myself into it. I swam with Sarah and Christine and it was very motivational to see where they were. I always tried to copy what they did."

While improvements were underway — she qualified for state in her first high school meet her freshman year — she did not place at state.

Undeterred, Giehl would go on to score 30 individual points for Fairview at the state meet her sophomore year. Last year she was fourth in the 500 and third in the 200.

But last season's results were both disappointing and frustrating.

At the time, Giehl kept becoming sick. She was coughing a lot and having difficulty breathing. At first, doctors thought she had walking pneumonia. This summer, however, she was diagnosed with asthma and it made all the difference.

"It's reduced all my stress," Giehl said. "I know I can train harder because I don't have to worry about what's going to happen to my lungs."

This year, Giehl is favored to take home state titles in the 200 and 500, as well as in two Fairview relays.

She has already signed a letter of intent to compete for Nebraska, even though her parents Nancy and Alan graduated from Colorado.

"They have a really good distance program and they have a lot of distance swimmers leaving," said Giehl, who also considered Washington State, Ohio and Kansas.

Giehl wants to be a teacher after college.

"When I was 5 years old I really liked my kindergarten teacher," Giehl said. "It always stuck. I know that having one good teacher can change the person you are."

Before she begins the next phase of her life, Giehl hopes to close out her high school career on top.

Giehl already owns All-American times in the 200 and 500. She set her personal best in the 500 at the Colorado Coaches Invitational to beat Cherry Creek's Loren Brandon with a time of 5:02.32.

"My goal at state is to go under five minutes," Giehl said. "I'm ready to do it. ... I've had a lot of success this season, so it gives me confidence to win at state."



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