

# Girls state swimming preview: Chatfield's Perkins reaps rewards of hard work

By Angie Mudd, Special to the Rocky

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Sitting in the stands watching the state swimming finals of the 50 freestyle her sophomore year, Chatfield's Shelley Perkins had a moment of clarity during those 24 seconds.

"I told myself that I should be there, I should be in that race," said Perkins, who had finished 22nd in the preliminary rounds. "I wanted to be in the pool, in that race. I knew I could do it, I just needed to put forth the effort to make it happen. It was right then and right there, the reason I became so driven."

A year later, Perkins found herself out of the stands and on top of the podium with a first-place medal in the event (along with Fort Collins' Tricia Nelson after the two tied for the title).

And this year, Perkins has posted the season's top times in the 50 and 100 freestyle events as the Chargers senior seeks another title this weekend at the state swimming championships.

The Class 5A state meet will be Friday and Saturday at the Edora Pool Ice Center in Fort Collins, while the Class 4A championships will be at Mountain View High School in Loveland the same days.

"I've learned a lot these last few years," said Perkins, who also will swim on the Chargers' 200 and 400 freestyle relay teams. "I think I thought success would just come. I took it for granted, and I was a little bit naive. It wasn't until the end of my sophomore year that I really realized how much extra you really have to put into it, you have to put forth the effort.

"And last year, my only goal was to win the 50 free. There was nothing else. It's all I wanted. And I was able to win, so I learned that it's really true, that all that heartfelt work really pays off in the end."

Perkins said she wasn't upset to share the title last year with Nelson, who had won the title in 4A the year before.

"I didn't care because No. 1 is No. 1," Perkins said. "It wasn't easy, and it's not going to be easy this year."

This senior season has pushed Perkins into the favorite's role, and while she has continued to get stronger and faster - she broke the Jefferson County League records in both freestyle events last weekend - so has her competition.

In addition to Perkins, Nelson and Rampart junior and defending 100 freestyle champion Jenna Gregoire will make the sprinting events challenging and exciting for the athletes and spectators.

"I am ready to guarantee that no matter who wins, the 50 and the 100 freestyle races will definitely be faster than last year," Perkins said. "Those are the shortest races out there, so we don't have much time to think about too much, because these races feel like they are over almost before they start.

"But I think it's going to be exciting. We all have a chance. And I feel pretty confident and I'm happy with how I've done, and where I'm at right now."

In the team race, no team figures to stand much of a chance against Cherry Creek. The Bruins are searching for their fifth consecutive championship and have recorded a tremendous season with a sensational team, led by the Brandon sisters.

Loren Brandon, a senior and defending champion in the 500 freestyle, and freshman Bonnie - she possibly is the most talented all-around swimmer in Colorado - have led the Bruins to a dominant performance this season. The Bruins won 10 of the 12 events at the Centennial League championships last weekend.

The 4A team race has been a one-sided contest the past two seasons, but with Ralston Valley moving up to 5A, Rock Canyon is in position to win its first 4A title.

Behind seniors Taylor Curado (two-time defending champion in 100 butterfly) and Kirsten Milberg (trying to become only the second girl in Colorado to win four titles in the 100 backstroke), the Jaguars are the clear favorites and have enough depth to make a mark in every event.

## **2008 TEAM CHAMPIONS**

\* **Class 5A:** Cherry Creek. The Bruins have won four titles in a row and qualified four swimmers in each of the eight individual races.

\* **Class 4A:** Ralston Valley. The Mustangs won their second consecutive championship but have moved up to 5A this season.

## **RETURNING CHAMPIONS**

\* **Class 5A**

**Loren Brandon**, Cherry Creek, Sr.: 500 freestyle (winning time of 5 minutes, 1.63 seconds).

**Jackie Cromer**, Lewis-Palmer, Sr.: 200 freestyle (1:53.16).

**Jenna Gregoire**, Rampart, Jr.: 100 freestyle (52.03).

**Tricia Nelson**, Fort Collins, Jr.: 50 freestyle (24.17).

**Shelley Perkins**, Chatfield, Sr.: 50 freestyle (24.17).

**Caroline Piehl**, Smoky Hill, So.: 200 individual medley (2:07.16).

**Lauren Rigg**, Fairview, Jr.: 100 butterfly (57.50).

**Christine Wixted**, Cherry Creek, Jr.: 100 breaststroke (1:06.49).

\* **Class 4A**

**Taylor Curado**, Rock Canyon, Sr.: 100 butterfly (57.18).

**Kirsten Milberg**, Rock Canyon, Sr.: 100 backstroke (58.56).