

Baldwin-Wallace College Freshman Diver Todd Richert Sets School Records and Qualifies for Division III National Meet

By: Andrew Middleman '09, Sports Information Student Assistant

BEREA, OHIO -- For freshman diving sensation Todd Richert, success at Baldwin-Wallace College has come at him like a tidal wave. Although the 18 year-old diver has broke, set and re-set multiple records in his quick, two-months Yellow Jacket diving career, he still managers to “walk soft, but carry a big stick.”

Although other competitors may not know immediately who he is, second-year B-W Head Swimming Coach Sara Gildea says, “Todd always makes his presence known. People are always amazed by him diving. “At just about every meet this winter, parents or other divers have approached me to say how impressed they are with his diving performances,” said Gildea.

It didn't take long for the North Royalton native to write his name in B-W's record books as he broke and set a school record in his second career meet. In Alliance and at Mount Union College on October 27, Richert finished first as he recorded 274.85 points in the one-meter optional dive. He surpassed a nine-year-old record that was set by Dan Kress in 1998 with 255.60 points. I didn't seem like it was a big deal to the young phenom.

“I just went out there and did what I could do to help my team,” said Richert.

In the same meet, Richert scored a 174.85 points in the one-meter voluntary diving event to again place first, and he hasn't looked back since. He followed that meet with two first places in the one and three-meter events at Oberlin College in early November; and then at Wilmington College a day later, Richert won the 1-meter voluntary and 1-meter optional events en route to another Yellow Jacket victory. The following week, in a tri-meet against Washington & Jefferson (Pa.) College and versus Ohio Wesleyan University, Richert reset the 1-meter voluntary mark and earned his first of two Ohio Athletic Conference *Swimmer of the Week* awards (the other came following the Dec. 2 Fredonia State, N.Y. Invitational Meet)

Suprisingly, diving hasn't always been Todd Richert's forte.

As a youngster he was a gymnast, but due to a wrist injury, Richert took up diving to stay active. After some time of balancing his time between the two sports, he decided to focus on diving. It was a lucky turn of events for B-W according to Gildea.

“He [Todd] is the best diver in the conference (OAC),” said Gildea.

Echoing Gildea's comments is Diving Coach Tim Croy.

“Todd's goal is to be the OAC champion this year,” said Croy. “Todd has a great work ethic, is focused and technical. He has a great shot and needs to keep working hard and staying focused.”

Todd's most notable diving competition on the boards is Ohio Northern University junior George Chesney, who ironically Richert competed with in high school and both men have trained with under the direction of Croy.

Croy, a former Ohio University diver with a bevy of his own accolades, as well as accolades from his pupils to his credit, is more a west side (of Greater Cleveland) diving coach who has mentored numerous divers from Berea, Strongsville, North Royalton, Bay Village, Olmsted Falls, North Olmsted and Middleburg Heights. He has filtered many of his students to B-W and other OAC schools.

“I started coaching Todd in 10th grade at North Royalton High School because he wanted to be involved in a high school sport,” said Croy, who joined Gildea's B-W coaching staff a year ago. “Prior to that, Todd had had no diving experience.

“Todd is a natural diver,” continued Croy. “Everything came to him easily because he had such a strong gymnastics background and he was able to transfer it over to diving.”

Although Gildea notes that Richert has Division I diving talent, the competition between him and Chesney is as high as it gets at the Division III level. But Richert and Chesney always make sure to keep what's most important at the forefront of their minds.

“Friendship's always first,” said Richert. “The rivalry's always there. We're good friends, so I don't let it get in the way when we are competing against each other. We both hope and wish for the best for each other, but don't get me wrong, I still want to win!”

“They [Richert and Chesney] go back a long way,” said Croy. “They were both coached by me at the Berea Diving Club and they have trained together for a long time. It is a healthy, competitive friendship.”

Not only is Richert an outstanding diver, he epitomizes the philosophy of the student-athlete according to both Croy and Gildea. Upon deciding to come to B-W because of the influence of Croy and his own family, Richert enrolled in B-W's outstanding Honors Program.

"Todd is a very intelligent person," said Gildea. "He prioritizes exceptionally well, is very good student and excels both in the classroom and the pool. He is the kind of young man and/ or woman who we want to attract to the swimming and diving program at B-W. Todd is a solid role model."

Even as a freshman, Todd has proven himself to be a quiet leader who is receiving great support from his teammates.

"A year ago, we didn't even have a diver by the end of the season due to injuries and other reasons," said Gildea. "But Todd has sparked an interest among the swimmers and they have come to appreciate it [diving] more."

"At our meets, the entire team lines up when Todd and the other divers are set to dive," continued Gildea. "It is that type of team spirit that develops and fosters success for the whole program."

"I think it's really cool that they support me," said Richert of his teammates. "On some teams, the swimmers don't support the divers. So I think it's really nice that they're out there cheering for me and the other divers. It makes us want to cheer for them too. It becomes a team thing."

As Richert bucks the trend of setting school performance records as a freshman, he continues to concentrate on his studies toward his chosen career path. The sport medicine and pre-physical therapy major keeps an open mind regarding the future of his career, and right now would like to become a pediatric physical therapist.

"I am keeping my options open as I am just a freshman," said Richert. "I have some thoughts and ideas but just want to enjoy the college experience before getting more serious about an intended chosen field."

In diving, both Richert and Croy continue to set the bar high in terms of his career goals.

"I expect him to qualify for the Division III National Meet all four years he's here," said Croy. "He has all the ability and talent to make it to nationals, and I'm pretty confident he'll have all the school records by the time he's done diving."

Richert has quite a layoff until his next meet. Only the swimmers will travel to B-W's Annual Florida Winter Break Training at Florida Keys Community College, so Todd will stay behind to train. He and the rest of the team will next compete against Westminster (Pa.) College on Saturday, January 12 at the B-W Natatorium inside the Lou Higgins Recreation Center in Berea. The meet begins at 1:00 p.m.

FOR MORE B-W SPORTS INFORMATION, please contact Sports Information Director Kevin Ruple by telephone at 440-826-2327 or e-mail at kruple@bw.edu or Assistant SID Cory Blackson at 440-826-2780 or e-mail at cblackso@bw.edu. Head Swim Coach Sara Gildea can be reached by phone at 440-826-2387 or e-mail at sgildea@bw.edu.