

Diving coach climbs ladder — of success

By KATHLEEN MCELROY
Battaion Reporter

The person coaching the Texas A&M University diving team knows exactly how it feels to be a full-time student trying to participate in a year-round sport. She knows how college life can get you down and how it can also give you a lift.

In fact, the diving coach knows about as much about being a student as any other student — mainly because she is one.

Vicky Ryan is a senior wildlife and fisheries science major, who, as she puts it, is "leading" this year's diving team which consists of three men and five women.

This year, there is no specific diving coach, but Swim Coach Mel Nash oversees the divers. Nash needed help with the team, and Kay Don, women's athletic director, recommended her.

Ryan wasn't too sure how she got the job, but reasoned, "Since I'm a senior diver, that's how I think it came about. Also I had the most experience — male or female." Ryan has experience not only in actual diving, but also in coaching.

She taught beginning and intermediate swimming classes at the YMCA's Dad Club her junior and senior year at Marion High

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School, both are in the Houston area. In the summer of 1977 and '79, she taught beginning swimmers and coached the morning workout of the Dad's Club diving team. The Dad's Club is where Ryan learned competitive diving.

Ryan went to the Rice University pool to swim, as a "youngster". There a lifeguard taught her the basics of diving and suggested she go to a club to learn more. She made the move to the Dad's Club ten years ago and has been there ever since.

Ryan said she tries to coach the Texas A&M team in the spirit of the club.

"At the Dad's Club, it's a very intensive American Athletic Union program and the workouts demand a lot of you. When I came here, the workouts weren't that hard.

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Ryan said she doesn't mind coaching girls with which she competes.

"Well, I hope that I'll still dive well," she said, "but when I see somebody do a dive that is so close to being perfect, but isn't, even if it's a competitor, I want to go over and encourage them. Maybe I can point out something that'll make the dive better, even if it makes her beat me.

"I've always wanted to see a

good dive so I've coached my competitors to the best of my ability. And as far as that goes, I don't mind crossing school lines either.

"It's happened before that I've been in a meet and the Rice divers haven't had their coach with them, and I'll coach them, too. Of course, I want our team to win," she said, "but I don't want us to win by default. I want to win by being the better of the two."

Ryan said she won't have to worry about any competitive meets until the weekend of Nov. 8 when the Texas A&M divers compete with SMU and later Texas Christian.

Even though the majority of their meets are in the spring, the

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divers workout all year. But Ryan says she doesn't mind the daily workouts.

"Diving has always helped because it's been a release for me. I can take out my frustrations and get my physical exercise, so that physically and mentally I feel good after workouts.

"I would say more than anything, it's helped my grades."

Not that her grades needed help. Ryan has an overall gradepoint ratio of 3.9. But, she said, she doesn't consider herself "brilliant or anything like that."

Ryan has won many awards with her high academic record. Last spring she won Phi Kappa Phi's (a national honor society with a chapter here) award as the outstanding junior in the College of Agriculture.

"I was not expecting it," she said. "I didn't know it existed, for one thing. But even if I knew it existed I would have been caught by surprise."

Perhaps her most impressive achievement as a student came this year when the College of Agriculture selected her as one of its four Rhodes Scholar nominees.

"I was called out of class to go and see the department head," she said. "He told me that the College of Agriculture had called him to tell me that they were nominating me for the Rhodes Scholarship.

"I almost fell out of the chair," she said with a laugh. "I'm not joking 'cause I started to stand up in amazement and sat back down again."

She wasn't selected as the Texas A&M nominee, but made it to the final three. She said she's just proud she made it that far.

Ryan got another surprise this year. She was given a full scholarship to dive. And again, she wasn't expecting it nor, she



Vicky Ryan, "leader" of the Texas A&M Diving Team, shows how it's done.

Photo by Lynn Blanco

said, was she sure whether she deserved it or not.

"I don't know," she said.

"When I was diving my sophomore year some people told me that they thought that I should

be on scholarship. But personally I can only see myself as a medium diver. I'm not bad, but I'm not what I would consider worthy of a scholarship."

She laughed and added, "But I'm happy I got it. I mean really, who's going to say no?"

The scholarship has changed her attitude some about diving.

"I feel more dedicated," she said. "Before if I really didn't feel well, I'd talk myself out of a workout or two. I'd say, 'I don't need to go today.' But I won't do that now because I feel I have an obligation to live up to."

As to whether she'll continue diving and coaching after she graduates in August, Ryan said, "I haven't come to any decision yet, which in some people's mind is not cool. 'You should have a decision by the time you're a senior.' But everyone in my family has taken things as they come and they're all happy where they are now. And I guess I have the same attitude — a 'wait and see' thing.

"Although I love diving, and I love to coach diving. I'm very interested in it, but that could never fully become my career because animal behavior is always first."

She also said she doubts her qualifications to coach. "I'm not of the caliber to even consider coaching at the collegiate level."

Even though she said she won't go into coaching, she does enjoy it.

"You feel that something you say and how you coach them can affect them and can improve them.

Besides, she added with a giggle, "I've always wanted to be great."

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