

# LOUISIANA LIGHTNING: Karnes takes aim at the rest of the nation's top swimmers

By JEFF WEBB  
Staff writer

Senior Stacie Karnes has one advantage over her competitors before she even enters the pool. Karnes can intimidate. Her own apparent lack of fear to ascend great heights of athleticism is why she is one of the top swimmers in the Big 12 Conference.

Teammates have respect for her, enough to elect her team co-captain for her senior season. Sophomore Monica Stroman cited her leadership and presence in the pool as reasons for the nomination.

"She's very focused," Stroman said. "If I weren't on her team, I would be intimidated by her. She's very powerful. She's an unbelievable swimmer and athlete."

Karnes began her fearless aquatic journey at the age of 10 as a member of the City of Shreveport Swim Team at her parents' urging. It ranked as one of many sports that the youthful Karnes would participate in before concentrating on swimming when

she reached high school.

"I was the only girl in the Dixie Boys Baseball League," Karnes said. "It was a neat experience. I just went to tryouts and was the only girl. I pitched one game and played first and second base. I was never made fun of."

But the choice was simple. She was too good at swimming.

"My parents put me in it when I was 10 years old," she said. "I really didn't want to, but I guess I was forced. Swimming took over as the favorite after a while."

Karnes proved she was one of the top swimmers in the country last year when she posted an automatic bid in the 200-butterfly. Karnes enters the water with a focused attitude to achieve her success, but teammates say breaking up tension in practice and before events seems to be her speciality. Before a conference event last season, sophomore Tracy Evans said Karnes entertained other Big 12 swimmers in the ready room with her performance

of "fat guy in a little coat" from the movie *Tommy Boy*.

"We joke around in practice," she said. "Other people wouldn't know. We have little jokes and comments under our breath that keep us going during our workout. We make fun of them (the coaches), little do they know. They don't know what's going on down in the water."

One thing Coach Don Wagner said he does know is Karnes has been the example he wants others to follow in the pool.

"I think she has been a great example for her team in many of the competitions we've had in the past two years," Wagner said. "This year she's having the best year she's ever had. She's very directive in training and very centered."

Karnes has enjoyed a successful career in all respects at Texas A&M and it is beginning to sink in that her time in college swimming is winding down. This weekend's Big 12 Conference meet will be the last one in which she will have the op-



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Senior Stacie Karnes will lead the Aggies into the Big 12 Championships.

portunity to participate. "I'm excited," she said. "I'm nervous, but I'm also sad because it's our last conference meet. It might be the last time I swim a relay with them. Ever since I was 10 years old, I've been with a group of people every day in the water doing stuff and it will be totally different." "The best feeling in the world when you're in a race and you're like hell, but when you look at the time and you dropped it, all the goes away right then. It's right there that everything you've done in your party you've missed, even if you've gone to bed early is all there. It has to be."

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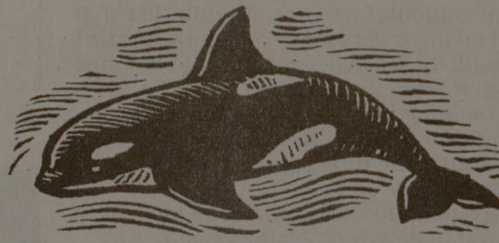
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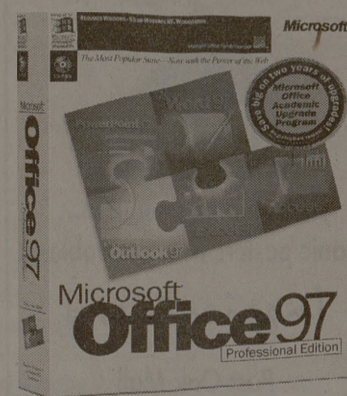
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