

A common goal

Riley Janes and Nik Tate take different paths to success

BY JASON LINCOLN
The Battalion

Riley Janes and Nik Tate are about as different as they come. The two are a stark contrast in both physical stature and background. About the only thing that Janes and Tate have in common is Texas A&M Swimming and an intense desire to win.

The 6-foot-7, 200-pound Janes came to A&M from a town called Saskatoon in Saskatchewan, Canada, as a backstroke with very little training background who got by on talent alone — a characteristic he said unfairly earned him an early reputation as a slacker.

The 6-foot-1, 190-pound Tate was completely the opposite. As a freshman from Grapevine, Texas, he was fairly new to swimming and relied on an intense work ethic to excel in the breaststroke. Tate had just one problem — despite all the training, he struggled to get faster.

But both made some big changes and improvements over the course of their freshman season — changes that the Aggies are anticipating to pay off big over the course of the next three years.

The two sophomores are now leading off one of the Aggies' most dominant relays, the 200 medley. It is a lead-off that A&M men's swimming coach Mel Nash said he has complete confidence in.

"With those two leading off your medley relay, it puts you in a position to have a fighting chance against almost anybody in the country," Nash said. "We're very pleased with what they have done as freshman and to know that we've got them for three more years — what a calming thought."

Janes and Tate make no effort to hide their belief that they are one of the most dominant leadoff duos in the country.

"There's not many people that can be ahead of us at the halfway point of a relay," Janes said. "Especially in the 200 medley, there's really nobody who can be ahead of us [halfway]."

When they entered A&M in 1998, many saw the talent and potential the two swimmers brought to the program. Yet the benefits would take some time to develop as both swimmers struggled to adjust to college swimming.

Tate came into the program with an intensity that was immediately respected by the team. His drive and determination earned him a reputation as a no-nonsense guy who, in others' eyes, set goals higher than he could possibly reach — at least at first. But soon it became apparent that his determination enabled him to achieve even his highest goals.

"Nik is a man focused on a mission," senior Devin Howard said. "He sets his goals really hard, and if he doesn't reach them he gets angry at himself. He is the type that gets a zone around him and you don't mess with him at all."

Tate had a problem that all of his determination could not fix. No matter how hard he tried, his performance had plateaued. The problem was immediately recognized by Nash, who would spend the season teaching the freshman how to break that limit.

"Nik had gotten to where he was because he was so tenacious and was such a fighter," Nash said. "His problem was we had to change his technique and revamp his stroke, because he had taken his old one about as far as he could go. He got a little better at it last year, but this

year it should help him move up to the next level."

While his coach may have known what was necessary, completely changing his stroke was a difficult thing for Tate to accept.

"Mel has really worked with me in improving my stroke," Tate said. "All of last year he had to sell it to me and I wasn't buying it. This year I let some of my pride go and let him coach and now it's a much better relationship and it improved me in the water."

Janes came to A&M with an impressive list of accomplishments. The backstroke swimmer for the Canadian national team and had a tremendous amount of talent. But despite his previous accomplishments, A&M would prove a big transition for Janes.

In Canada, Janes was forced to train himself without the background in swimming necessary for him to compete against the talent he was being compared to.

"Riley has done virtually everything he has done before [swimming at Texas A&M] on natural talent," Nash said. "He had very little training background. Over the course of the last 14 months he has developed into a solid worker."

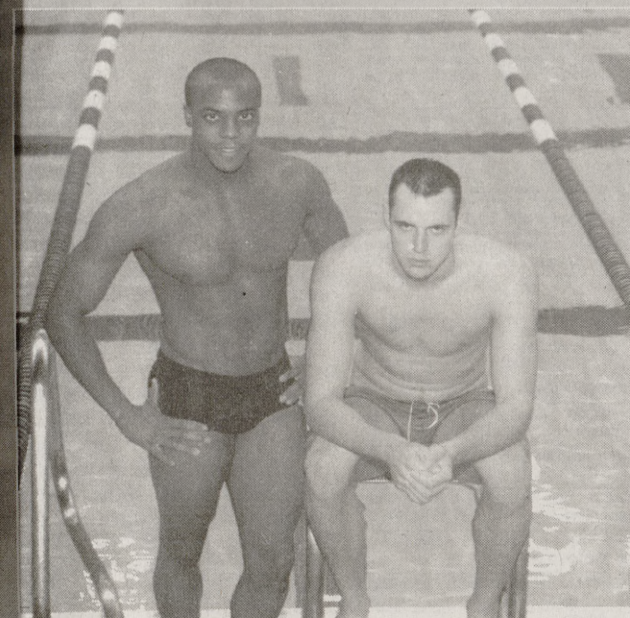
"That is going to pay dividends over the course of this season and into the summer with his olympic trials. He has a chance to be among the best in the world — there's no doubt about that."

Making the transition from swimming for Canadian club teams to the rigorous schedule of an American collegiate program was not easy for Janes. Besides adjusting to a new training regimen, he was forced to adjust to a new culture and the disapproval of his former Canadian teammates.

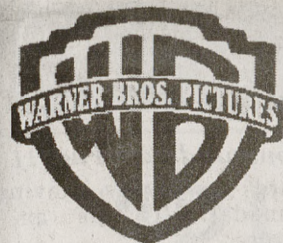
"You're kind of seen almost as a traitor," Janes said. "Obviously, they don't want to lose people to the United States to swim in college, but you come down here and the competition is so much better. It is really

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Texas A&M Men's Swimming Team sophomores Nik Tate (left) and Riley Janes lead off the 200-meter medley relay.



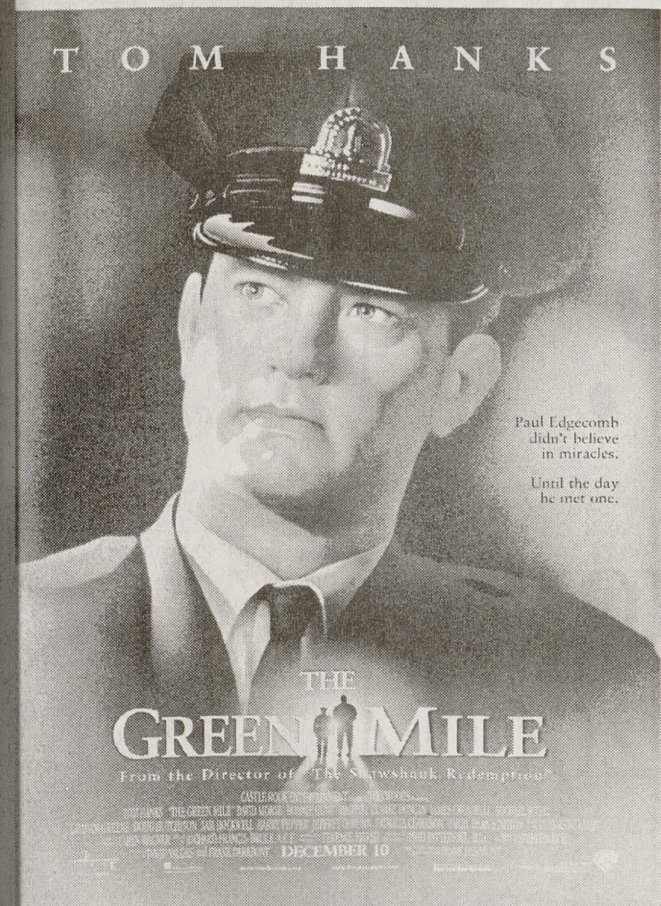
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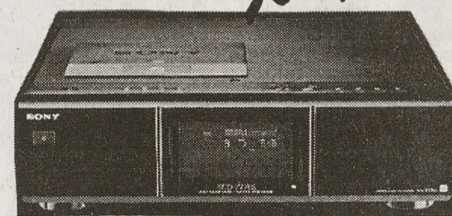
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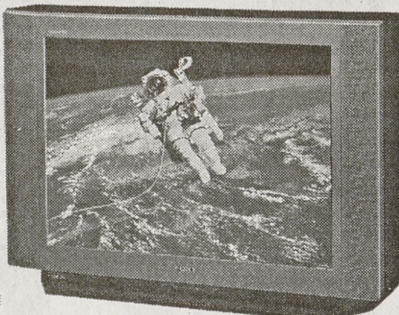
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