

Stanford 'poster boy' Rob Andrews hopes to make big splash this week

Published: Tuesday, August 02, 2011, 8:00 AM

By Nicole Watkins | Kalamazoo Gazette



PALO ALTO, Calif. — With just one more year of collegiate swimming left, Stanford University senior Rob Andrews said it will be time for a spot on the couch after he wraps up the sport that's consumed much of his life.

Well, maybe for a week.

"We all make jokes that we're just going to stop swimming and get fat," quipped Andrews, a Hackett Catholic Central alumnus. "But I really do enjoy the sport and to do it this long, you kind of have to.

"I don't think I'll ever be able to just stop; I'll maybe stop competing, but I'll never stop. So wherever I am, I'll be at the Y swimming several mornings a week. ... Being in the water is just something I'm not going to be able to get away from."

For now, the three-time NCAA All-American has plenty left to accomplish as he prepares for the USA Swimming National Championships Tuesday through Saturday in Palo Alto. The event is the highest-level meet that will take place on U.S. soil this year, with Olympic gold medalists Jason Lezak, Ryan Lochte and Peter Vanderkaay set to lead the field.

With the 200-meter freestyle his best event, Andrews also plans to compete in the 100 and 400 free as well as the 200 butterfly.

After he swam an Olympic-qualifying 200 freestyle time of 1:53.17 in the Los Angeles Open last month, Andrews' goal of a top-eight finish in the event appears within reach.

"That's the goal right now, to (advance to the) final," said Andrews, a former Great Lakes Aquatics member, who in four nationals appearances has yet to accomplish that feat.

Not that success in the water hasn't been abundant for Andrews at Stanford, where he's earned All-American honors as a member of three relay teams (400 free, 800 free, 200 medley). As a junior, he helped earn a Pac-10 title in the 800 free relay. Andrews also sits in the Stanford record books in the 200 free with the 12th-best time (1:34.96), which he swam in 2009.

"It's been amazing," Andrews said of his college career. "I've gotten the chance to compete at the NAAs all three of my years; I've gotten to be an All-American each year, which is an honor; and I've just gotten the chance to train with, honestly, some of the best athletes in the world.

"It's really been great."

Stanford coach Skip Kenney said that Andrews has been nothing short of a "poster boy" for athletes while competing for the Cardinal.

"He's an outstanding team guy," Kenney said. "He's really been one of our leaders this last year and I expect so this next year as well. He brings his 'A' game to practice every single day, and unless he's really sick, he doesn't miss.

"When he's there, he's giving 100 percent, and you never have to question his effort. He's such a motivation for the other guys."

He isn't finished yet. With two new high-profile recruits, Andrews hopes Stanford (winners of 29 straight Pac-10 titles) can earn its ninth NCAA championship, something the Cardinal have not

accomplished in his tenure. Stanford finished third in 2011. The last title came in 1998.

Andrews also hopes to qualify for the NCAAs in the 100, 200 and 500 freestyle events.

"If you look at our incoming freshman class and the kids we have returning, especially the senior class, we really do have a solid chance to win the NCAAs," Kenney said. "Everyone on the team is going to have reach deeper and contribute a little more, and Rob will fall right into that."

Life after swimming looks pretty bright, too, for the biomechanical engineering major, who has plans of medical school (orthopedics) after graduation.

"That's the dream," Andrews said, while noting he will most likely move closer to home. "It's very different. I say the same thing to everyone. I love it out here, but I could never live out here. I feel tremendously blessed to be able to go to a really beautiful school, but I'm planning to move back to the Midwest after I've completed my degree.

"If all things go well, I'll go to med school somewhere in the Midwest."

Not that the California life hasn't treated Andrews well.

"I love it — I meet interesting people ever day, I've found friends that I never in a million years would have found anywhere else and they've changed my life for the better," he said.

"I love the curriculum ... All in all, I've really loved it here, and I don't regret a minute of it."

*Contact Nicole Watkins at
nwatkins@kalamazoogazette.com or 269-388-8400.*