

Muller hitting stride in senior season at NU

By Brian Christopherson
Staff writer

Helene Muller got on an airplane in January 1997 knowing only that it was supposed to land in a place called Lincoln, Nebraska.

Once she got there, she hadn't a clue what was to happen, other than that she was supposed to swim for a university for some coach she had met at an Olympic Trial named Cal Bentz.

"I didn't know where I was going to live or what I was going to do," Muller said. "I just knew that if that plane didn't land in Lincoln, Nebraska, I was in trouble."

Muller knows her way around Lincoln now.

And the South African also knows quick routes through the pool - she has been engulfing the competition

this season in the 50-, 100- and 200-meter freestyle events.

The swimming pool has also given Muller the opportunity to garner friendships from teammates, serving as a "family away from home."

"Senior day (on Saturday) was very emotional for me," Muller said. "These are the people that support me and who are my friends," she said, looking on as her teammates work out.

Despite the love for Nebraska and her teammates, Muller is forced to have more on her mind than just the task of helping the team do well at the NCAAs.



Muller

Muller is talented enough to be a force in the 2000 Olympics as well, and trials for her South African team will approach very quickly in the rear-view mirror after the collegiate season.

However, Muller doesn't see it as a problem and is hungry for a high finish at the NCAA meet this year. She even has her parents flying in to watch her swim at the meet in Indianapolis.

"After all the coaches and teammates have done for me, I owe it to them to do all I can to win at NCAAs," Muller said. "If I do well at NCAAs, I should be fit enough and should do really well at the Olympic Trials."

She has all the admirable traits, and just the pure skill, to do some damage in the coming months, according to Assistant Coach Keith Moore, who works with Muller on a

daily basis.

"She's very talented and very strong, and she puts everything she has into it and has the competitive drive that forces her to do whatever it takes," Moore said.

Right now, Muller admits that she is about a second off the pace she will need to qualify for the South African Olympic team in the freestyle events. Muller swims 26.11 seconds in the 50-meter, 55.9 in the 100 and 2:02.12 in the 200.

"Since Christmas, the workouts have been the hardest, and it's been like hell, but I think I'm at a good point to be where I need to be by Olympic Trials," she said.

She swam the butterfly leg for the South African 400-meter relay team that finished just off the medal stand in fourth place at the 1996 Olympics in Atlanta.

Muller says she was in awe of the Olympic atmosphere and the athletes around her, which may have detracted from her focus in the various events she raced in.

"I didn't do what I set out to do there," she said. "I was a bit flabbergasted, and I felt inadequate."

As Muller walks pool side, she jokes around with teammates and coaches, very comfortable with her surroundings three years after stepping on that airplane.

"I had no idea what this conference and NCAA stuff was that everyone was talking about when I first got here."

She knows now. "I want at least a top-three finish at NCAAs," she said. "I really think I can do that."

And maybe after that, she can hop on a plane again heading towards Sydney, Australia.

Mike Tyson goes international, gets global fighting gig offers

Mike Tyson is no longer the world champion, but he's still a world attraction.

As he prepares for British heavyweight Julius Francis in Manchester on Saturday, Tyson is getting offers to fight from all corners of the globe.

His boxing adviser, Shelly Finkel, said calls have come from Germany, France, Russia, Austria, South Africa, Japan, China, Wales and, of course, England.

First, he has to beat Francis, a 16-1 underdog. Francis, a former kickboxer, is undergoing hypnosis and has also sold the sole and heel of his boxing shoes to *The Mirror*. The London newspaper expects such a purchase to come in handy when Francis lands flat on his back from a Tyson punch.

Tyson has been hounded whenever he steps from his five-star Park Lane hotel across from Hyde Park.

"It became like Beatlemania and just escalated from there," said Finkel, recalling mob scenes in Brixton, a chaotic airport reception and wild shopping trips for jewelry and cars.

Somehow Tyson managed to train despite the threat of being arrested for jogging at 3 a.m. in Hyde Park. And he's looked sharp enough to talk about getting his undisputed title back.

On Tuesday, Tyson went through his final London workout before heading to Manchester. He pounded combinations into the girde-protected midsection of trainer Stacy McKinley and treated familiar footwork like new dance steps.

"I was working on my balance, my feet. Going through repetitions," Tyson said. "If you don't remember the little things, you'll never remember the big things. Because the little things add to the big things."

Tyson said he's not yet ready to

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Jay Larkin
Showtime

fight for the title.

"I have a little ways to go," he said. "I wish I felt as good as everyone says I look. But I'm on my way."

"Sometimes I do things better than when I was champ," he added. "It's just all about getting my head together and believing I can put it all in perspective. ... I move better, I'm faster and I punch harder."

McKinley, who calls his job of getting hit by Tyson "the hardest a man could have," said Tyson has been buoyed by the British fans.

"This reception ... has made him feel good and really super great," he said. "Now when a fighter feels great and he's straight about everything around him, you're going to see Mike Tyson get his title back."

After Francis, Tyson might fight Shannon Briggs or Lou Savarese in late March in New Jersey. That's contingent on a number of things. Among them, Tyson must beat Francis, get a New Jersey boxing license and stay out of trouble.

Finkel also wants a June or July bout to keep Tyson sharp and fighting every three or four months.

Then there's the matter of undisputed heavyweight champion Lennox Lewis.

"Tyson and Lewis is the only other fight out there," Finkel said.

But it might not happen. Lewis is under contract with HBO and Tyson

with rival network Showtime.

Jay Larkin of Showtime said Tuesday there were no negotiations with HBO. Basically, he said it's Showtime or nothing.

"Lennox Lewis needs Mike Tyson," he said. "Mike Tyson doesn't need Lennox Lewis."

Larkin said the offers for Tyson bouts have been competitive, and he would consider a world tour.

"Oh, what a circus or what a show that would be. ... Hopefully, it's a giant step towards getting Mike back to the center of public attention in the States," Larkin said.

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