



Shelbi Ragsdale works toward Olympic swimming goal

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Shelbi Ragsdale signing her letter-of-intent this Monday to attend Rice University in Houston.

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Life as Shelbi Ragsdale knows it has been pretty sweet lately and if it continues on the same path will get even better. Last month, the 17-year-old Lantana resident was named to USA Swimming's Scholastic All-America team. Monday, she signed her letter-of-intent to accept a swimming scholarship at Rice University. And next year, she hopes to achieve her ultimate goal at the 2012 Olympics.

Not bad for someone who has only been swimming competitively for less than six years.

"I went to a class where I learned the strokes and my friends and I jumped in the pool every day in the summers," said Ragsdale, a senior at iSchool High, a charter school in Lewisville. "I liked the water and saw some people swimming competitively and it popped into my mind.

"It's interesting that nobody in my family was a swimmer but one day I said I wanted to go to the Olympics in swimming. It's been one of my life's goals so my parents said if I want to do that, let's get you on a team."

Ragsdale joined her first team at age 12 in the summer of 2006 in Colleyville where she and her family lived at the time. After moving to Lantana the next year, she joined the Lantana Lightning program for which she swam for two summers. Then in 2008, she moved up to the Lakeside Aquatic Club that features about 600 swimmers and 100 coaches and trains year-round.

Lakeside worked well for Ragsdale since her small high school has no athletic programs but great academics as evidenced by her 3.5+ grade-point average. She continued improving her times each year to where she finally exceeded the Academic All-American qualifying standards in eight events – 400-meter and 200-meter individual medley long and short course, 200 IM long and short course and 100 and 200 short course breaststroke.

"It was really exciting," she said of learning of her USA Swimming achievement. "Achieving the times for All-American was the biggest thing for me."

Her strong showings in meets in which the Lakeside Aquatics Club participated earned her attention from multiple college swimming programs. She chose Rice over such schools as Vanderbilt, Florida, Towson State and the University of North Texas.

"I really loved the school when I visited in September," she said. "I liked the environment of a smaller school with more one-on-one individual attention. And it's closer to home. I like the idea of being able to drive home in the summer."

"I'm really looking forward to that. I really can't wait to be part of Rice where swimming and studying will go together."

Before moving to Houston, Ragdale has plenty of time to train and participate in meets with Lakeside to prepare her for the U.S. Olympic Swimming Trials on June 25-July 2 in Omaha, Neb. The goal is to swim well enough to qualify for the 2012 Olympics which start July 27 in London.

She'd ideally love to compete in her favorite event, the 200 IM long course but would be thrilled to make it in any others.

"This is the closest I've been," she said. "Because it's an Olympic year, a lot of swimmers are working hard and swimming faster. If I make it, it would be amazing."

It would add another chapter to Shelbi Ragsdale's swimming success story.