

By Joe Henderson

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Growing up in Oil City, the sport of swimming was a family affair for Penn State Behrend sophomore Kallie Smith.

Not only did Smith have her father, Eric Smith, as her head coach with the Oilers' program, but her aunt, Stacia Fennick, also served as a coach with the team.

"It was my favorite thing to have my dad be my coach and getting that extra support," Kallie said. "My aunt was also the assistant coach, so I had my whole family there."

After a stellar career with the Oilers in which Kallie was a multi-time qualifier for the PIAA Championships and a school-record holder in the 100 backstroke, she decided to attend Penn State Behrend, and her career has really taken off in her second season with the program.

"Kallie just loves everything Behrend. She loves the coach, she loves the team, she loves the atmosphere and she loves the campus, but she doesn't quite like the weather so much," Eric Smith said. "Her head coach, Jen Wallace, has been there for like 20-25 years and she runs a great program. I knew she was going to have the best teammates because of the way Jen runs that program. I knew she was going to love it from the moment she said she was going to go to school there."

Kallie performed well during the regular season this year, but she seemed to step up her game in the State University of New York Athletic Conference (SUNYAC) Championships.

In her favorite event, the 200 individual medley, Kallie repeated as conference champion with a school-record time of 2:10.17, erasing an 11-year-old mark. She also placed second in the 400 I.M., finishing at 4:40.53, which was .09 off her school-record time, and she finished fourth in the 200 breaststroke.

“You get a little mix of every stroke and it’s a sprint type of event, so it’s definitely my favorite by far,” Kallie said.

But she did even better in the relay events as she swam legs on the winning 800 free, 200 medley, 400 medley and 400 free relays while helping to set new team records in the 800 free and 200 medley relays.

“It really feels awesome to have all the hard work I put in through the offseason really pay off,” Kallie said of her success in the conference championships. “I just kept working hard, I lifted a lot more in the offseason and that really helped me to stay strong.”

The success that Kallie has had in her first two years is especially impressive since she decided to change her primary stroke in an effort to help the team.

“When Kallie decided to go to Behrend, her specialty was the backstroke, and when she arrived at Behrend, they already had someone faster than her in the stroke, so they asked her to switch to the breaststroke,” Eric Smith said. “She has kind of evolved into

a breaststroker over the last two years, and she's fine with it. She says whatever is best for the team she will do and she is 100 percent a team player."

A big key to her success at Behrend has been her dedication to lifting weights.

"I am really excited for Kallie. She's such a hard worker. She swims most of the sets with the guys at Behrend and she's religiously in the weight room," Eric Smith said.

"She loves to train and she loves working out. That's one of the bigger hurdles at that level is that you have to love it. You really just can't fake it at the college level. She has really seen her times drop since lifting weights has become as important to her as it is now."

Eric Smith, who built a Hall of Fame career as a head coach at Franklin High School before returning to his alma mater to coach the Oilers, is known for his dedicated preparation on his team's opponents before every meet. Apparently, the apple didn't fall far from the tree with his daughter.

"She enjoys the competition, and when she gets to the championship meets, she knows every kid's times across the conference. She knows what they did last year, she knows what they did up to that point and she knows their strengths and weaknesses," Eric Smith said. "I was that way when I swam back in high school. If you wanted to know what someone went, I was the one scouring all the heat sheets. You could ask me about what any kid across the state went when I was in high school and I could tell you. Kallie is similar to that."

But Kallie's success really started when she was a kid swimming with the YMCA program.

“I started swimming as soon as I could walk, but I think I was officially swimming on a team when I was six years old,” Kallie said. “I started at the Franklin YMCA, and when I was 10, we switched to the Oil City YMCA. I would say that the kids that start at the YMCA learn to have the work ethic and they understand swimming on different levels because they were already on a team prior to being in high school.”

Kallie is majoring in early childhood education. She hopes of becoming a teacher and coach, just like her father.

“I really think if Kallie could be a college coach somewhere, that would be her ultimate goal, but teaching and coaching at the high school level or YMCA level would be fine, too, as she just likes working with kids,” Eric Smith said. “Kallie is helping coach at a YMCA in Erie, and when you see kids excel under your tutelage, it’s a very rewarding position to be in.”

But before she moves on to the next stage of her life, she has some more goals she’d like to reach before she’s done at Behrend.

“I would like to get a few more individual school records. This year, I got the 200 and 400 I.M. records, and that was a huge deal for me, so I’d like to get a couple more before I graduate,” Kallie said. “I would definitely love to make nationals also before I graduate. I’ll definitely work towards that, so we’ll see what happens in the future.

She is grateful to all her teachers and coaches since leaving high school. “It’s been different going from being coached by my family to someone other than my family, but it’s been an awesome experience so far.”

