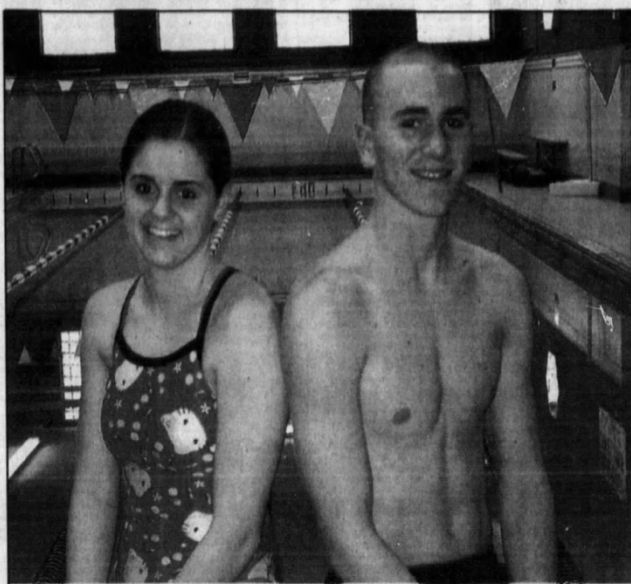


2003 State Meet...



FREMONT ROSS swimmers Brittany O'Connor, left, and Elliot Hogan prepare for the final practice before the state meet Wednesday at Fremont Middle School.

Canton: Quite a career capper

Seniors O'Connor, Hogan swim for finals

News-Messenger reports

Hundreds of miles.
Countless hours.
Years upon years.

It all comes down to seconds Saturday for Brittany O'Connor and Elliot Hogan, the two Fremont Ross swimmers competing at the Ohio High School State Championships at Brannin Natatorium in Canton.

They have been swimming together since they were 5-year-olds. They laugh at the old team pictures where they sit side by side on the pool's edge at the YMCA, skinny little three-foot tall wet munchkins. Even funnier are the home videos, where you can see the shadow of a parent walking along the pool's edge, thinking they were probably going to have to jump in and save a child who could barely swim a length.

For the O'Connors, swimming was a "family" thing.

"My oldest sister, Molly, wanted to swim. When the coach saw Molly had two younger sisters, she begged my mom to stick us in the water, too," Brittany said. "We had tried dance classes previously but ended up in a wrestling match with each other during our first recital. So my dad (John) decided that having each of us in our own lane, with lane lines between us, was a better idea. My mom loves to tell that story."

Hogan can't remember a time before he swam.

"When my parents found out they were having me, they got a bigger boat even before they got me a baby bed," he says. "I've either been in the water or on the water all my life. My mom (Andy) tells me I was the best darn dog-paddler in baby swim classes. I was jumping off the diving board

Pool report

Fremont Ross swimmers Brittany O'Connor and Elliot Hogan will compete at the state meet beginning with preliminaries at 9 a.m. Saturday at Canton's Brannin Natatorium. Following is a capsule look at each swimmer.

Brittany O'Connor

■ **Events:** 100-yard backstroke (seeded fifth) and 100 freestyle (seeded 20th).

■ **Previous state appearances:** 2. Finished 24th in 100 backstroke in 2000-01 and 12th in 100 backstroke and 12th in 50 freestyle last season.

■ **Last week:** Finished second in 100 backstroke and third in 100 freestyle at BGSU District.

Elliot Hogan

■ **Event:** 100-yard breaststroke (seeded 17th).

■ **Previous state appearances:** None.

■ **Last week:** Became the first Ross boys swimmer to win a district in 16 years by placing first in the 100 breaststroke at BGSU.

when I was 18 months old, so they kicked me out of the program. I came back to it when I was 5. My teacher told my parents I was somewhat hyperactive. My dad (Tom) decided I needed a regular outlet to take the edge off my energy level. So when our neighbor, Mrs. Penrod (Jennette), who was the YMCA coach, offered to take me to swim team practice, their problem was solved."

The two swimmers have boxes of ribbons, plaques and trophies weighing down the rafters in their

attics. They have the first heat ribbons they ever won and wonder why the mothers kept the rest.

"At one point in time, all the medals were on my wall, but when I painted my room purple and white about 4 years ago, I boxed them all up," Hogan said. "Now I just keep my district award and high school letters up there. Hopefully I'll have a place trophy to add to them next week."

Said O'Connor, "It's a good thing they put your name and time on most of those things, because it would be hard to figure out whose is whose."

Both of O'Connor's sisters, Molly and Morgan, have previously qualified for the state meet. This is Brittany's third trip to Canton.

"My sophomore year, I went all alone and I was so nervous I finished 24th," she recalled. "Last year, the relay teams made it, and Morgan competed individually, so my nerves calmed a lot. I was more prepared for what the meet was. My sophomore year was just a learning experience."

O'Connor finished 12th in the 100-yard backstroke and the 50 freestyle last year. This year, she'll compete from the fifth-seed position in the 100 backstroke.

"That is a great seed, I never could have imagined that I would be seeded that high," she said. "I guess all the hard work paid off."

O'Connor will also compete in the 100 freestyle as the 20th seed.

"I've been seeded around that place before, so hopefully my experience will help me push through to finals," O'Connor said.

Twenty-four swimmers qualify in each event at states. The top 16 from morning preliminaries come back to swim in the finals at night.

See ROSS, B2

Ross seniors swim at state on Saturday

Continued From B1

Hogan is hoping to make the finals in his 100 breaststroke event.

"Right now, I'm the guy on the bubble, seeded 17th," he said. "I have to move up to make finals, and that's my goal. I swam a 1:00.62 at districts, and my goal for the year has always been under a minute. Under a minute should put me there."

All week long the two swimmers have been receiving high fives from teachers, fellow students and "people I don't even know," Hogan said. "I got a note from the Mowrys wishing me good luck. Their son, Mike, won at districts in 1980 and '81. I guess once a swim family, always a swim family."

"My neighbors showed up at districts, and she told us she was hollering so loud someone asked if she was my mom, which is funny because no one hollered louder than my mom that day."

Joked O'Connor, "I just wish someone would teach my dad how to shoot videos. 'At sectionals, he videotaped almost a whole 25 yards of the girl in the lane next to me. I mean I can see it with the guys because with their shaved heads they look pretty much alike, but I was wearing a cap that said ROSS in big letters."

Speaking of parents, both swimmers wondered out loud what their parents would do next year. Both families will be "empty-nested" after this year.

Actually, four seniors are the last of their swim families, including Wendy Farrell and Brandon Spicer. Farrell and Spicer also started swimming at

young ages, so the four families have spent hours upon hours outside the pool, waiting for practice to end, and weekend after weekend camped out in gymnasiums waiting between events.

"We've spent more time with swim people than we have our real families over all these years," Hogan said.

"It's crazy, but I think of most of these people as family," O'Connor said. "When something bad happens, swim families are there with food and transportation. You name it. I know I'll miss all the team next year, I've spent so much of my life with them; they are just like family."

"One thing I don't think they'll miss is the money-raising. Collectively, our families have sold more pizzas, organized more craft fairs, run more swim invitations than you can ever imagine. Parents bought our lane lines, the starting blocks, the timing system, and training equipment."

It doesn't sound like the state meet will be the end of swimming for either family.

"I'll be swimming in college," said O'Connor, who is still mulling where to go.

Molly O'Connor finished up her fourth year of swimming eligibility as captain at the University of Kansas last spring, and Morgan's in the water as a freshman at Ohio State.

"As a matter of fact, my mom will be at Purdue this weekend for Morgan's Big Ten Champs. So it is just my Dad and Molly watching me this weekend."

Hogan's not sure about his plans, either.

"I have a letter of assurance from the Merchant Marine Academy and have been in close contact with the swim coach there. A few more things have to be resolved before that can happen. If not, I've applied to Michigan to study Naval Architecture/Marine Engineering. Problem is, their team's way out of my league. They carry mostly Olympic swimmers, and half are from foreign countries."

While they may have just a few laps to go as Little Giants, Hogan and O'Connor have a lifetime of shared memories to pack up and take off to college with them.

"But our moms can keep those boxes of ribbons," O'Connor said.

Margaretta's Orwig places 12th in diving

CANTON — Margaretta's Kendra Orwig moved up the standings Thursday in her return trip to the state diving championships.

Orwig, a junior, finished 12th in Division II competition with a score of 331.10. She finished 24th as a sophomore last season.

Emily Hunter of Cincinnati Indian Hill won the competition with a score of 463.75. Teammate Ann Kenny finished second.

Huron's Lauren Barbour placed 15th at 322.45.

Margaretta's other state qualifier, senior Liz Bodner, will compete Saturday in the 100 breaststroke.

—News-Messenger reports

O'Connor fourth at state

Senior turns in best finish; Hogan 16th in breaststroke

News-Messenger reports

CANTON — They say the third time's a charm.

Fremont Ross senior Brit O'Connor couldn't agree more after finishing fourth in the 100-yard backstroke at the 2003 Ohio High School Swimming and Diving Championships on Saturday at C.T. Branin Natatorium.

She became the first Little Giant to qualify for the finals in the girls backstroke in school history. She also finished 22nd overall in the 100 freestyle.

"My sophomore year, I barely made states in the 100 back and 50 free and finished DL (dead last) in both. I was just



HOGAN

glad to get there," O'Connor said. "Last year, I was 12th in both events. Not bad, but not good enough. This year, fourth in

the back, and I'm really happy with that.

"When I looked up at the (results) board after the race, I was really surprised. I wasn't just happy for myself. I had two good friends in this race with me, Susan Johnson (champion from Toledo Notre

Dame) and Courtney Jablonski (seventh place from Perrysburg), so we all did great. This is one of the few times I swam better in the finals (59.56 seconds) than in the preliminaries (59.89). I know that's how it's supposed to work, but it's really hard to hold that edge between the morning and night sessions. Finals just seem like they're never going to get here."

Senior teammate Elliot Hogan will join O'Connor in the record books as the first Fremont Ross state qualifier in the boys 100 breaststroke and the first to score points in

the breaststroke at the state level. Hogan finished 16th.

"I swam in the second heat during preliminaries, and it's just not possible to keep track of the times in the heat ahead of you," Hogan said. "So I saw where I placed in my heat, sixth, and knew our heat times were really fast. I watched the final heat, and knew that six guys beat me there. I looked up in the stands to where my family and the O'Connors were sitting, and by the look on their faces I thought I was out if it."

See O'CONNOR, B2

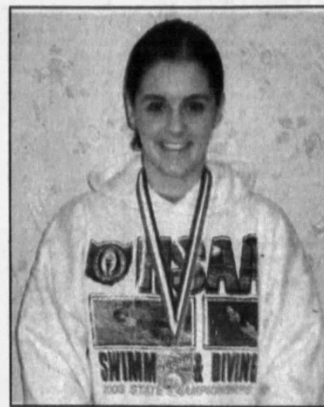


Photo courtesy John O'Connor

BRIT O'CONNOR of Fremont Ross poses with the fourth-place medal she won Saturday at the Ohio High School Swimming and Diving Championships in Canton.

O'Connor caps third state swim by placing fourth

Continued From B1

Sixteen of the 24 preliminary swimmers qualify for the finals at night, eight in the consolation round and eight in the championship round. Swimmers may only move up or down within their round, so a swimmer in the finals may finish with a slower time than someone in the consolation round, but that swimmer will finish no lower than eighth on the records.

"I stayed behind the blocks for a few minutes after my preliminary heat talking to a friend, Jake Randall from Lima Shawnee, who'd gotten DQ'd (disqualified) for flutter kicking off one of the turns," Hogan said.

"Just about the time I was walking back around to talk to coach, they announced the final results, and mine was the first name. I was 16th. I looked up and the Fremont people were all screaming and everything. Mr. (John) O'Connor told me later someone miscounted the guys ahead of me in heat one, and that's why they thought I was 17th."

Hogan's prelim time was just off his district record at 1:00.90.

"The 17th-place swimmer was a 1:00.91, so I made finals by one-hundredth of a second. God must love me," Hogan said. "I fell off the pace a little in the finals, with a 1:01, but between districts and states, I put together three of the best races of my life and that I'm happy with. The kid who won, Chris Ash (Akr. Firestone) swam an unbelievable 55.74. He won it last year as a freshman, too. That's how hot the field was this year."

O'Connor and Hogan also will go down in the record books as the first girl and boy individual state qualifiers to score points at the same state meet. O'Connor was awarded 15 points for her fourth-place finish and Hogan one for 16th.

"One of our swim parents did a little research on the Web," Ross head coach Phil Moran said. "There are 17 sectional competitions in the state. There were a total of 588 girls who swam the backstroke, so Brit is the fourth-fastest girl in the state out of 588. There were 663 who swam the 100 free, so she beat 641. And in the boys 100 breaststroke, Elliot beat 640 of the 656 guys who started out in his event."

"Ohio ranks among the top three or four states in the country in swim times after all the various state results are posted. Last year, I think Ohio was number two. So these two really are among the best of the best."

When asked which was her favorite state meet, O'Connor said, "Last year was the most fun, because I had my sister Morgan and the other girls on the relay teams there with me. But this year was a lot more satisfying, obviously, because I did better."

Both swimmers also shared in a family surprise. O'Connor's older sister, Molly, flew in from Kansas to see her little sister swim, as did Hogan's older brother, Graham, from New Orleans.

"O'Connors aren't good at keeping surprises, so I found out right after Districts that she was coming in," O'Connor said.

Hogan, on the other hand, was totally surprised by his brother's attendance.

"I was bent over the sink at 6 o'clock on Saturday morning, finishing shaving my head," he said, "when I looked up in the mirror and Graham was standing behind me. All that way for two one-minute swims."

As for today, both swimmers will repack their swim bags and be back doing practice laps after school as usual. Their season is not over yet.

"Elliot and I are both planning on swimming at the USS Senior Championships in Kentucky in early March," O'Connor said. "We both hope to make a few more qualifying times for the USA Sectionals at Miami University late in March."

Said Hogan, "Two more chances to break a minute," said Hogan about his high school career goal.

Then maybe he and O'Connor can hang up the suits and goggles for at least a few weeks, until they start back into summer training for college.

Where no one is saying yet, but for both, their swim careers are far from over.

Swimming High School Boys

State Results

DIVISION I

Team results

1, Cin. St Xavier, 316; 2, Cols. Upper Arlington, 194; 3, Cin. Wyoming, 160; 4, Cols. St Charles, 124; 5, University School, 108; 6, Akr. Firestone, 108; 7, N. Can. Hoover, 84; 8, Cols. Academy, 78; 9, Westerville N., 67; 10, Youngs. Boardman, 58; ... **60, Fremont Ross, 1**

Ross Results

100 breaststroke

1, Chris Ash, Soph., Akr. Firestone, 55.74; 2, Andrew Bergren, Jr., Beaver Creek, 57.57; 3, Dan Schrider, Sr., Cin. Wyoming, 57.65; 4, Steven Helmuth, Sr., Louisville, 58.17; 5, Jared Wagster, Soph., Cin. Xavier, 58.45; 6, Justin Green, Sr., Kings Mills Kings, 58.58; 7, Will King, Jr., Akr. Firestone, 58.85; 9, Nick Ivey, Sr., Fairfield, 59.57; 10, Hart Williams, Sr., Upper Arlington, 59.63; 11, Peter Wolf, Sr., Can. Cent. Cath., 59.77; 12, Brian Streng, Sr., Springboro, 1:00.14; 13, David Waite, Soph., Germantown Valley View, 1:00.23; 14, Aaron Celik, Sr., Akr. Firestone, 1:00.33; 15, Nick Frankle, Sr., Canfield, 1:00.79; **16, Elliot Hogan, Sr., Fremont Ross, 1:01.21.**

High School Girls

State Results

DIVISION I

Team Results

1, Cols. Upper Arlington, 259.5; 2, Cin. Ursuline, 254; 3, Centerville, 210; 4, Tol. Notre Dame, 173; 5, Cin. St. Ursula, 138; 6, Cin. Anderson, 116; 7, Akr. Firestone, 105; 8, Cin. Sycamore, 91.5; 9, Rocky River Magnificat, 90.5; 10, Worthington Kilbourne, 80.5; ... **29, Fremont Ross, 16**

Ross Results

100 backstroke

1, Susan Johnson, Sr., Tol. Notre Dame, 55.79; 2, Erin Forster, Jr., Centerville, 55.91; 3, Elaine Ferritto, Sr., Cols. Upper Arlington, 55.92; **4, Brit O'Connor, Sr., Fremont Ross, 59.56;** 5, Whitney Hooley, Jr., Wooster, 59.79; 6, Kelsey Cooper, Soph., Spring. N., 1:00.32; 7, Courtney Jablonski, Jr., Perrysburg, 1:00.33; 8, Emily Cass, Sr., Cols. Upper Arlington, 1:00.72; 9, Laura Harp, Jr., Westerville N., 1:00.57; 9, Jennifer Nemeth, Soph., Mayfield, 1:00.57; 11, Heather Bradford, Jr., Groveport-Madison, 1:00.58; 12, Megan Nunn, Jr., Loveland, 1:00.62; 13, Caitlin Seed, Fr., Hudson, 1:01.11; 14, Katie Busse, Sr., W. Chester Lakota W., 1:01.18; 15, Elaina Suba, Fr., Rocky River Magnificat, 1:01.82; 16, Melissa King, Soph., Mason, 1:02.46.