

Greve beats cancer to swim for Lions

Written by Tom Fruehling

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A young man with a scientific mind, Linn-Mar senior Calvin Greve measures his life in millimeters and fractions of seconds.

As a swimmer, every fractional time drop gets him that much closer to the ultimate prize of the state swim meet for his Lions team. And in the even bigger race, success in the pool shows he's beating the cancer that could have killed or paralyzed him just two years ago.

Miraculously detected, a 40-millimeter tumor (about the size of a ping-pong ball) was growing under his inner ear and pushing against his brain stem. It was discovered only after a routine school physical in the spring of his sophomore year showed what he already knew - that he was losing the hearing in his left ear.

"I really didn't notice it. I'd just gotten used to it," the 17-year-old says matter-of-factly in the manner that befits a student scholar who already has a number of college credits under his belt. "But I felt perfectly fine."

A subsequent MRI to find a reason for the hearing loss revealed the life-threatening brain tumor on his auditory nerve. Within 48 hours, he underwent surgery at the University of Iowa Hospitals and Clinics. Removal of the cancerous mass left him permanently deaf in one ear and with a loss in balance that he's still working on to fully recover.

But he was alive and one of the first goals he set after four bed-ridden weeks was to get back in the pool. By July he was back training with his teammates in the Cedar Rapids Aquatic Association.

And while he says he "barely qualified" and finished far behind the pack at the state meet as a sophomore, last year Greve came in seventh in the 100 yard backstroke.

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He's listed as one of the "swimmers to watch" in prep circles this season and recently accepted a scholarship to swim at the Division I level with the University of Minnesota.

"Calvin has made just remarkable progress," says third year Linn-Mar Coach Tom Belin. "He's very determined and goal oriented. And he works hard. A lot of kids would have quit after a brain tumor, but he rose above it.

"He has all the mechanics down to be successful. All he needs are some refinements. And I think one of the things Minnesota liked about him is that his body is still developing."

At 5-foot-10 and 133 pounds, Greve acknowledges that he has work to do before competing in the high collegiate level. "I need to buff up," he admits.

But then it's only been in the last three years that he's taken a real interest in swimming as a sport. Growing up down the block from the Bowman Woods swimming pool, he joined the club team and the YMCA team as a little kid along with older brother Nate.

"But I was never really all that good," he says.

He took up the backstroke, he says, because he couldn't figure how to do the breaststroke and the butterfly "was too hard."

It wasn't until the summer between his freshman and sophomore seasons when he attended a swim clinic at Jefferson High School that he started to get serious about it.

"I began to see how much dedication it took to be good at it, and something just clicked," the soft-spoken and modest young man says. "I started putting in the hours that summer and just kept going."

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He dropped a full two seconds off his best time in the backstroke at the district meet that season and made it to the state meet. "That really surprised me," he says.

It also boosted his confidence and determination, both of which were crucial when he faced the cancer scare. "I wanted to put in every hour I could in the pool to get back to where I was."

He got even better and hasn't slowed down since.

In recent USA Swimming events with his CRAA squad, Greve posted his best times ever. As the high school season starts, he's ranked third in the state in the backstroke.

Greve is just as accomplished out of the pool. He's recorded straight A's all three years at Linn-Mar and has taken college courses in advanced math and physics at both Mount Mercy and Coe.

He's planning to major in computer science at Minnesota. Meantime, however, he has more immediate goals.

"I want to get on the podium (top six) at the state meet," he says. "Not just me, but as a team. That's the biggest thing. It's all about being a team."