

# Swimming overseas: NU's recruiting search

## Men's Swimming

By JOHN PASCHALL  
THE DAILY NORTHWESTERN

Recruiting for swimming has some similarities to online speed dating.

The University has to woo the athlete with an offer he or she can't refuse, usually a large scholarship, while the athlete must flaunt his talents to the University in hopes of getting a call back. And that pool of prospective matches has gone international.

The "lucky bachelor" getting to pick from the pool of swimmers is Kyle Schack, the associate head coach. Recently promoted from recruiting coordinator, Schack has been able to sign consecutive top-25 recruiting classes at NU.

Schack has been looking at swimmers overseas for years. He said foreign swimmers approach him at international events asking him how they could land at an American university. But Schack said because of his roots with USA Swimming, the organization that governs American swimming, he tends to look at American swimmers first.

"(Coach) Jarod (Schroeder) and I have been a part of the development of USA Swimming even in the grassroots," Schack said. "It's hard to turn your back on those kids when you're now in the position of a college recruiter."

Though selling international swimmers on NU isn't the easiest, Schroeder said NU has much to offer.

"We want to make sure they understand the prestige of Northwestern University," Schroeder said. "It's a global degree when they come to a place like Northwestern, whereas if they go to a state school or something like that, it could only be regional."

During recruiting, Schack places an extremely high emphasis on this team-oriented element, a new concept for the international swimmers.

"There are many international kids who are fast," Schack said. "But you can tell they are not going to see the benefit of having a high team GPA. They are potentially not going to understand what a mandatory meeting or practice means. It can be troublesome when you got kids who are messing up your team's GPA or who are a little more self-focused."

Schroeder makes sure these swimmers have strong English skills in order to make coaching them easier.

"If they can't hold a conversation in English very well, I know this isn't the place for them," Schroeder

said. "They have to score a 100 on the TOEFL test. Most English-speaking kids can't score a 100 on the TOEFL. We have guys who speak great English but it takes them three or four times to get the scores they need to get in."

### Down to the 'Finnish' line

"Finnsanity" almost didn't happen.

Freshman Uula Auren and the NU coaching staff were waiting eagerly to find out his TOEFL score, the last hurdle for him to come to Evanston.

It wasn't until late July that Auren found out his score. If Auren didn't score better than 100, he most likely would not get into NU.

And his backup option?

"I never had a plan B," Auren said. "I kind of counted on things going well."

Then, Schack got the call from Auren.

"We were actually at a swim meet in California when we found out," Schack said. "He said, 'I got my score.'"

The result was a 105. He had passed.

Auren's reason for coming to NU was pretty simple in his eyes.

"In Finland, it's often kind of a choice between studying or swimming unless you're Matt Hong/The Daily Northwestern at a very high level,"

Auren said. "I'm not at that level yet. In the US, even if you aren't at that top level yet, it's easy to combine studying and swimming."

Schack was instantly convinced that Auren was made for NU when talking to him.

"What really swayed me on him was when he communicated to me that he's looking for four years to get a great education and his ultimate goal is for 2016," Schack said. "His pressure happens later on, and he's going to be focused on academics. I knew we had a special athlete, but now we have a motivated student."

Auren said he didn't even know about NU until

Schack got in touch with him. So the Finnish star decided to ask one of his former coaches who lives in California about NU.

"She said it was the bomb," Auren said.

### Valcic's voyage

Toni Valcic didn't initially make it to NU straight from Slovenia. He chose to swim at the University of Bridgeport because it was near his uncle's house. But that marriage with Bridgeport didn't last long. Valcic wanted out after two years.

"I was a bit more ambitious than the team was," the junior said. "When I came here on a recruiting trip, it was an instant click. There was no doubt in my mind this was the place to be for me."

Though he wasn't used to it, the switch to a team concept for Valcic was no issue.

"It was easy for me," Valcic said. "I'm willing to do whatever my team needs me to do. Back home, we don't keep the team's scoring. It's every man on his own."

Schack saw this dedication to the team instantly when Valcic came to visit.

"One of the things that was important to him when picking out a school was he needed to know he was going to be able to contribute to the team," Schack said. "He didn't want to go somewhere where he might reap all the benefits of being in front of the program but the team wouldn't feel like they would get anything from him."

### Mark Ferguson: International Man of Mystery

Mark Ferguson was excited about going to school outside of Australia. He was recruited by six schools including NU, but the Cats had the edge over the others.

Ferguson at one point lived in Evanston. His step-

father had a fellowship at NU for a few quarters when Ferguson was young. He lived in Evanston Place, 1715 Chicago Ave.

"It was always in the mix," Ferguson, a freshman, said. "It was just a process of eliminating schools one by one."

"He was seriously looking at McGill University in Montreal," Schack said. "He wasn't sure if he could gain his Canadian carding. He had lived in Canada previously."

Ferguson's friends at home were stunned when he broke the news he was going to the US.

"A lot of the reaction was shock," Ferguson said. "They kind of knew I was planning on it, so when I told them I was finally deciding to go, there wasn't too much drama. But everyone was very excited."

### The British invasion

Schack and NU had set their sights on some of the top American recruits in the country a few years ago, but they struck out on most of them. So they looked across the Atlantic to England and found Ross McAuliffe. Schack spoke with some of his coaches and was convinced that McAuliffe would be right for the program.

"We happened to talk to a whole bunch of people over in the UK, who said his program was a very strong program," Schack said. "His coaches thought that he could really fit well academically, and he was definitely into the sport enough to do it here at NU."

When McAuliffe, currently a sophomore, was deciding between Wisconsin and NU, his decision became much easier when Schroeder and Schack reached out to him.

"Our coach here took the time to build up a good relationship with me as opposed to Wisconsin, which just flew in, offered me something, and tried to get me that way," McAuliffe said. "It was a pretty different method. I actually felt pressurized when the Wisconsin coach came and visited me. Having him there felt like I was being forced to make a decision quicker than I'd like to."

Though admitting he was nervous about fitting in with the American culture, McAuliffe said he doesn't regret his decision coming to the US at all.

"It's nice to stay on the British swimming set-up, and culturally, it's very different coming here," McAuliffe said. "But I don't think there's anything I regret about coming here."

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International swimmers on men's roster, clockwise from top: Valcic (Slovenia), Hanulik (Czech Rep.), McAuliffe (U.K.), Ferguson (Australia), Auren (Finland).

## CONGRATULATIONS TO Laura Venn

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This fall I have been involved in numerous service projects through my service fraternity Alpha Phi Omega. I've volunteered with the boy scouts, assisting them in their cubmobile races. I also volunteered at Northwestern's annual Project Pumpkin, which is a Halloween festival we put on every year for children and teenagers in the Chicagoland area. In addition,

I have worked well over 20 hours this quarter on my own service project, The Bracelet Project, which I founded about 4 years ago.



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*Bon voyage, readers!*

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