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01/22/1982 - Tom Hussey Great Swimmer

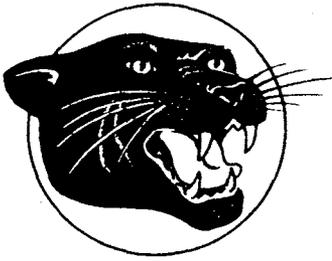
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Panther Sports News

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FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

CHARLESTON, IL--The last may be the best.

Tom Hussey (Charleston), youngest of seven children from an athletic family, has developed into an outstanding swimmer at Eastern Illinois University.

A senior from Charleston, Hussey has earned eight All-American awards specializing in the 200 backstroke. He was fourth in the NCAA II national meet last spring.

Ironically his success on the collegiate level has been achieved without the usual competition in a strong prep program. Charleston, like most downstate communities, does not have a high school swimming team.

How, then, does someone with Hussey's background do so well against competition spawned most often in metropolitan area prep powerhouses?

Credit the family, Hussey says. Older brothers Dan and Kevin played for EIU's football team, Pat and Kelly were active in intramurals and physical education majors as were sisters Kathy and Erin.

In addition, his father, Bob, a physical education instructor, coached several sports at Eastern during the 50s and 60s.

"As a family we got involved in the Charleston Swim Club . . . started swimming together in the lab school pool on weekends. I was about six or seven at the time . . . because my family was athletic oriented it was natural to enjoy it," Hussey explained.

"When I was a freshman in high school the Swim Club started competing with about six teams in the area on an age group basis . . . that's when I really became interested on a competitive basis."

EIU coach Ray Padovan enters the scene. During their sophomore year he invited Hussey and a couple other Charleston high schoolers to work out with Eastern's team.

"We don't normally do this," says Padovan, "but Tom had some potential and had outgrown the swim club age group. There's nothing illegal about it and if he was

interested, we thought it would be a good opportunity."

Indeed. Practicing on a semi-regular basis his junior and senior years "had to help me . . . especially swimming with guys a few years older," Hussey says.

"Ray would let us swim sets with the team and then we competed in a couple exhibitions before a regular meet. I did swim in the high school districts but didn't qualify for state although I was close."

Actually Hussey believes the lack of a pressurized prep program may have been beneficial. "I didn't burn out in high school . . . swimming with Eastern just gave me a good background for college."

Hussey holds school records in both the 100 and 200 backstrokes (53.6 & 1:55.1) and 200 individual medley (1:56.7). He prefers the 200 backstroke.

"My family mostly swam the breaststroke . . . I couldn't do that very well when I was young so I had to pick another stroke and the backstroke came out on top . . . probably simply because I was better in that than anything else."

Currently he swims between 7000 and 10,000 yards a day depending upon the number of workouts. "The ultimate goal is to compete at nationals," he says, realizing that will be difficult since Eastern's program progressed to Division I this winter. The qualifying times are much more stringent.

"I need to chop about three seconds off my 200 time. If I make it, fine . . . if not, I won't lose any sleep over it. Realistically I'm shooting for conference . . . to win these three events."

There are still plenty of opportunities left as the Panthers have just reached the halfway point of the season.

The Mid-Continent Conference meet is not until Feb. 25-27 hosted by Southwest Missouri State in Springfield.