

A Reunion Relay By Pete Benda

Four alums from Sanderson Highschool's class of 1982, Chris Stevenson, Boyd Wilson, Mike Bitzenhofer and Todd Dudley, were together on the pool deck again on Sunday, April 29 at the 2012 USMS Spring National Championships. The former Sanderson teammates, now the "B" medley relay for North Carolina, had submitted entry times that ranked them as the second fastest relay team from their home state. They were about to do battle with 17 relays competing in their age group, 45 to 49 years old. The four had agreed several months earlier to risk their pride to see if they could, once again, achieve something memorable together. Family, friends, former coaches and teammates lined the stands of the brand new Greensboro Aquatic Center to offer support . . . and to hope that, after so much time had passed, these four talented, dedicated athletes could again reach their goals.

Left to right: Chris, Mike, Boyd and Todd



The moment had arrived to put their daring determination to the test. The team swam in lane 6. Chris swam a backstroke lap which gave the Sanderson friends an early lead. Boyd's breaststroke leg and Mike's butterfly, terrific personal performances, could not hold off the hard charging North Carolina A team in lane 5. Todd entered the water a half body length behind the anchor swimmer on his right. With his signature powerful strokes, Todd caught the in-state rivals at the flip turn and reached deep on the homestretch to bring his team to a stunning victory in 1:42.48. They had won by just one quarter of a second! (For the record, their split times were: 23.96, 30.55, 25.81, and 22.16.)

In 1982, exactly 30 years ago, the Sanderson boys won the North Carolina high school state team swimming championship. The four alums were then senior classmates who had swum together on the 200 Yard Medley Relay. This relay also won the state championship, posted a time among the fastest in the nation for that year, and earned the four boys their certificates as High School All American Swimmers.

"Chris is a world record holder in the masters 200 back, and Todd was on the U.S. national team and won a gold medal in the Pan Am Games in 1987," Wilson said. "We had two studs."

All four swam in college. Dudley was a standout at N.C. State. Stevenson was the most valuable swimmer in the Atlantic Coast Conference championships while at the University of North Carolina, and Wilson was an All-ACC selection at Clemson. Bitzenhofer swam at UNC-Wilmington.

"I was really surprised we went that fast," said Dudley, who had trained about once or twice a week during the last four months. "The thing that surprised me most was how competitive we were once we got there. It just all came back."