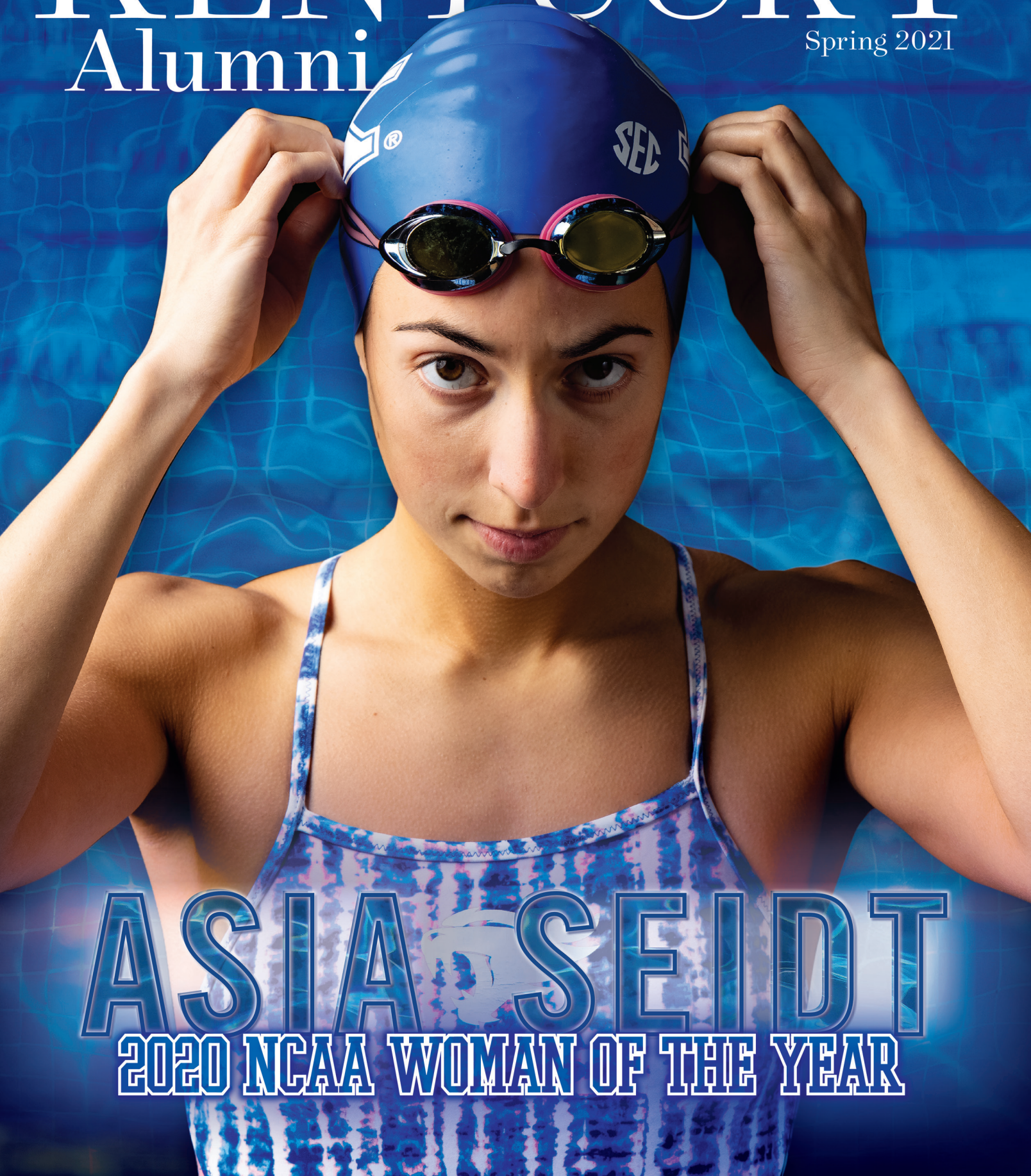


University of Kentucky Alumni Association

KENTUCKY

Alumni

Spring 2021



ASIA SEIDT
2020 NCAA WOMAN OF THE YEAR

ASIA SEIDT



Elliott Hess, UK Athletics

NAMED 2020 NCAA WOMAN OF THE YEAR

By Robin Roenker

Asia Seidt '20 ED is a self-described perfectionist. Put a task in front of her, and she tackles it with complete dedication and a drive for excellence.

That drive is part of the reason Seidt was named the University of Kentucky's first-ever NCAA Woman of the Year in 2020. It's why she graduated as UK's most decorated swimmer — male or female — of all time.

It's why she was able to maintain a perfect 4.0 GPA while earning her undergraduate degree in kinesiology.

And it's why she found time, despite two-a-day practices and a full schedule of classes, to volunteer hundreds of hours at the Hope Center in Lexington and as a mentor to a local 10-year-old girl through Big Brothers Big Sisters of America.

"Coming in freshman year, I could not have told you in a million years that this is how my career would have gone," says Seidt, a native of Louisville who swam with Lakeside Swim Club and for her high school, Sacred Heart Academy, before becoming a Wildcat. "But I remember [UK Swimming and Diving Head Coach] Lars [Jorgensen] specifically saying, 'I'm going to make you the best you can be.' And I think that's so cool that he can see the potential in people."

FINDING A HOME AT UK

With five individual UK swimming records and nine overall under her belt — including top times for the 100-yard backstroke (50.68), 200-yard backstroke (1:48:65) and 200-yard individual medley (1:53.04) — there's no denying that Seidt is a uniquely talented swimmer. Her ability to go lighting fast in the water helped secure her love of the sport from an early age.

"I tried T-ball and other things, but nothing really stuck besides swimming," says Seidt, who started her swimming career at 4 years old. "I joke that I don't really have hand-eye coordination and am not that good on land."

In all her years in the pool, Seidt quit training only once, at age 11, feeling that she'd lost her enjoyment for the sport. After eight months, though, she knew she was missing her calling.

"I told my mom that I wanted to go back and that I missed it more than anything," Seidt says. After that, her training took off and she started breaking state records.

Throughout middle school and high school, Seidt's parents would leave home at 4:15 a.m. to drive her to 5 a.m. practices at Lakeside Swim Club before school each day. They'd often sleep in their car in the parking lot while she trained.

“I can’t give my parents enough thanks for all the things that they did,” Seidt says. “Half the reason I was able to excel in the sport was because of the commitment that they put in.”

When it came time to look at colleges, UK wasn’t initially at the top of Seidt’s list, since she had dreams of attending an out-of-state school. “I had goals of getting out and exploring something new,” she says.

But Coach Lars Jorgensen convinced her to take a look at UK and her visit cemented her decision to swim for the university.

“I went on my official recruiting visit to UK and ended up falling in love with it,” Seidt says.

Seidt was struck by the camaraderie of the team and by Jorgensen’s commitment to developing his swimmers as well-rounded people, not just trimming seconds off their swim times.

“One of the biggest things that stayed in my mind during my visit was that Lars talked about how he wanted to develop me more than just an athlete — including as a person and as a student in the classroom, as well,” Seidt says. “Over my four years at UK he often said, ‘If you come back to me in 10 years and say the only thing I did for you was help you in swimming, then I failed as a coach.’ And I think that’s such a cool thing because you don’t find that in a lot of coaches. Many of them are focused only on athletics.”

Returning the compliment, Jorgensen says: “Asia is a fantastic representative of what it means to be a student-athlete at Kentucky. She embodies greatness in the pool, in the classroom and in our community. She has fundamentally changed our program at both the conference level and the national level. But above all, Asia is an amazing person.”

Looking back on her career, Seidt credits her teammates, too, for always pushing her to be her best, even if that meant pointing out, supportively, when she wasn’t giving 100 percent in practice.

“I am going to be friends with the girls I swam with at UK for the rest of my life. They become your family,” says Seidt. “When I first came to this college team, if I wasn’t doing well in practice, upperclassmen would call me out. At first, I was a little shocked because that hadn’t happened on my club team. They would say, ‘Listen, I know you’re better than this, and that you have goals.’ It was great to see that they were holding me accountable and pushing me to become a better swimmer.”

A typical UK day for Seidt went like this: wake up at 5 a.m. and head to Lancaster Aquatic Center for a two-hour morning practice. Grab some breakfast and head to classes for four to six hours. Then, head back to the pool for afternoon practice. Finish up by 4:30 or 5 p.m., grab dinner, and head to the Center for Academic and Tutorial Services for homework and studying. Repeat.

Seidt maintained this grueling schedule without making a single B in a class during her four years at UK. While she originally enrolled as a biology major, one particular course made her realize that degree wasn’t for her.

“I kind of had a crisis moment where I freaked out about what I was going to do,” she says. Seidt worked with her academic counselor to take some career interest tests. During this career exploration, she shadowed a Lexington-based physical therapist and found her calling and a new major: kinesiology, the study of the mechanics of body movement in the UK College of Education.

“I realized kinesiology was the best path to prepare me for physical therapy school,” she says.

Many times, her athletic training meshed with what she was learning about the human body in her kinesiology classes, including a class on biomechanics taught by UK professor Michael Samaan, which was one of her favorite courses.

While her UK experience may not have been filled with the socializing and free time that many students enjoy, she has no regrets.

“There were definitely times when your alarm would go off at 5 a.m., and you’re thinking ‘Why am I doing this?’” Seidt says. “My freshman year was the hardest, adjustment wise, but once I got into the routine, you just don’t question it anymore. It just becomes second nature to you.”

Still, Seidt says she feels being so driven to excel both inside the pool and out was sometimes a double-edged sword.

“I think one of the best things about me is that I’m a type-A personality. It’s also one of the worst things about me,” she says. “With swimming and within the classroom, if I wasn’t doing well, I would be so hard on myself. And that was never fun. Sometimes, I had to come back to Earth and realize there are bigger things in the world than getting a B on a test.”

A DIFFERENT KIND OF ENDING

Thanks to her impeccable work ethic and distinct talent, Seidt’s UK swim career was stellar from the start. In 2017, she became the first-ever UK freshman to win an SEC swim title, snagging first place in the 200 backstroke, her signature event, at the SEC Swimming Championships. Seidt repeated the title in 2018 and 2019.

She made the USA Swimming National Team in 2017-2018 and 2018-2019 and the U.S. World University Games Team in 2018 and 2019.

In 2019, Seidt placed third at the NCAA Championships in the 200 backstroke and first in that event at the Phillips 66 National Championships, a summer event sanctioned by USA Swimming.

As one of the country’s top backstrokers,

Seidt had hoped to compete for a national title in the 200 backstroke at last year’s NCAA Championships, scheduled for March 2020. She had also qualified for the 2020 Olympic Trials, originally set for June 2020, and had a real shot at making the 2020 U.S. Olympic Swim Team.

Then came COVID-19.

The 2020 NCAA Championships were cancelled, and the Olympic Trials were pushed forward to June 2021 due to the pandemic.

It was a bittersweet way to end an exceptional career.

Throughout her UK senior season,



Connor Trimble

Seidt had been training diligently toward the NCAA championships, learning just three days before the event that it was to be cancelled because of the coronavirus.

“NCAAs are what you work toward all year long,” she says. “We were days away from leaving, and so it was definitely difficult news to digest. I think that is probably one of the hardest things I have had to go through as an athlete.”

Following her graduation from UK last May, Seidt was faced with a difficult decision: delay her entry into UK’s Doctor of Physical Therapy graduate program to train another year for the delayed U.S. Olympic Trials or retire from competitive swimming and turn her full focus toward graduate school.

Seidt chose graduate school. She’s now about to complete her first year in the program and is looking forward to a career as a physical therapist after two more years of study.

Still, putting aside her competitive swim career was difficult, especially under such challenging circumstances.

“After March, when NCAAs were cancelled, I took four or five months off,” she says. “I didn’t want to get in the water at all.”

During her first semester of graduate studies, Seidt eventually returned to the UK pool during open swim hours — not to train, but rather simply for love of the sport.

“I just love swimming so much,” she says. “I love that I’m still able to do it and have it as an activity.”

completed. It was like, ‘Wow, how am I even in this field with them?’ because they’ve done such incredible things.”

As the NCAA Woman of the Year, Seidt was singled out from among all graduating female student athletes nationally in 2020 for her excellence in athletics, community service and leadership.

Seidt admitted the honor has made for “a pretty cool couple of months” and helped take a bit of the sting off the cancelled NCAA Championships.

“What Asia Seidt has been able to accomplish is nothing short of amazing,” says UK Athletics Director Mitch Barnhart. “Her all-around excellence in academics, swimming, leadership and service was reflected in her selection as NCAA Woman of the Year. Asia’s name will be listed in numerous places in our all-time lists of records and honors — an inspiration for Wildcats who know her now and an example for future Cats of what is ‘Wildly Possible’ at the University of Kentucky.”

Earlier this year, in January, the NCAA again honored Seidt by naming her a 2021 NCAA Today’s Top 10 honoree. The award is given to recent graduates, male and female, in recognition for their successes in the field, in the classroom and in the community.

In addition to her NCAA accolades, Seidt also feels especially proud to have been named the Arthur Ashe Female Sports Scholar of the Year by *Diverse: Issues in Higher Education* magazine in 2019, since that award “incorporates everything, especially your work within the community,” she says.

Encouraged by her swim team’s focus on community outreach, during her junior and senior years Seidt carved out time to serve meals weekly to the homeless at the Hope Center in Lexington. “I got to see a different side of Lexington,” she says. “I enjoyed the people that I met there. I loved hearing their stories.”

Seidt also became a Big Sister to an elementary school girl in Lexington, a role she continues to cherish even as she pursues graduate school.

“Before COVID, I would go to her school once a week, and we would just talk about things,” Seidt says. “Now, we’re staying in touch on the phone. Every day is different with her. She’s just so awesome. That relationship gives back to me, more than I give to her.”

In honor of her perfect academic record, Seidt was also named the H. Boyd McWhorter Scholar-Athlete of the Year, the SEC’s highest award for student-athletes, in 2020. The award came with a \$20,000 post-graduate scholarship, which she is applying toward her physical therapy studies.

In “Dear Swimming,” a personal letter Seidt wrote to her sport, which was broadcast nationally by the NCAA as part of her 2020 Woman of the Year ceremony, Seidt wrote that swimming taught her that “it was OK to be a strong female leader in the world of sports. Finding my self-confidence through you has allowed me to thrive in so many other aspects.”

She also acknowledged her overall path in swimming. “I honestly can’t sum up our 20-year relationship in a couple of sentences, or even a couple of pages, but I’m going to give it my best shot,” she read. “It’s been quite the journey — a journey full of memories I never could have dreamed possible. It only seems right to thank you for this experience of a lifetime, because it’s the greatest thing that has ever happened to me.” ■



Noah J. Richter, UK Athletics

Throughout her athletic career, Asia Seidt was rewarded with many assorted trophies, including taking third place in the 2019 NCAA Division 1 Women’s Swimming & Diving 200-Yard Backstroke.

A ROLE MODEL FOR HER SPORT

Last November, Seidt watched from a couch at home, with Jorgensen and her parents by her side, as her name was called as the 2020 NCAA Woman of the Year during a socially distant, livestreamed award ceremony.

“I was so nervous during that award ceremony,” she says. “I got the news toward the end of October that I was a Top 10 finalist, which was such an honor. Just being in the Top 10 was so incredible. I was so happy with that — and the girls that I met through that experience, seeing everything they’ve ac-

NCAA

2020 NCAA Woman of the Year

2021 2021 NCAA Today's Top 10 Honoree

8 First Team All-American Honors

5 Honorary All-American Honors
(due to cancelled 2020 NCAA Championships)

SEC HONORS

2017 SEC Freshman Female Swimmer of the Year

2019 SEC Scholar-Athlete of the Year

2020 H. Boyd McWhorter Scholar-Athlete of the Year

4 SEC Championship Gold Medals

UK

ATHLETICS

2018 Female Athlete of the Year

2019 Miss Wildcat

2020 Miss Wildcat

2020 Frank G. Ham Society of Character Inductee

9 School Records

NATIONAL

HONORS

2016 & 2020 Olympic Trials Qualifier

2017 - 2018 USA Swimming National Team Member

2018 - 2019 USA Swimming National Team Member

2018 & 2019 World University Games Team Member