

## GETTING TO KNOW



Travis Heying/The Wichita Eagle

# KARA WHEELER

## WICHITA INDEPENDENT SWIMMING

Wheeler, a senior diver for Independent, has won two meets this season, finishing third in another – and it's her first full season diving. She has signed with Denver to dive and plans to study psychology. Wheeler also enjoys working with glass, she sings and was the lead in Independent's "Beauty and the Beast."

**You started doing gymnastics when you were 4. Was the sport important to you?**

"I love everything about gymnastics. It's one of my favorite things about my life, it's something that everyone kind of knows me for. I've always had lots of energy. I tried doing ballet when I was little, but it was too boring. I wanted to run around and do flips and stuff. . . . Ever since I've been going every day, four hours a day, five or six days a week. I love flipping and being in the air."

**You were a Level 9 gymnast and about to go Level 10. What changed?**

"I broke my back (falling off the parallel bars), so I never went 10. It was really hard (not competing). I'm still kind of fighting it. I still, every once in a while, I'll go in to see the girls. I have a cubby at the gym. I can't get myself to clean it out. I've been there since I was 4. . . . It was killing me to quit the sport I was passionate about."

**How did you turn to diving?**

"I was out for a really long time and wore a back brace. My friend from school asked (last year) if I wanted to try diving. I couldn't do any twisting dives (initially), but I could flip because I was landing in the water. . . . I went back to gymnastics, but I kept doing private lessons with my diving coach. . . . My back wasn't doing very well in gymnastics, so I decided I should switch to diving completely."

**Do you enjoy diving?**

"Diving has helped me a lot. It helps me continue gymnastics, but in a way that doesn't injure my back. My body was kind of falling apart, my ankles, knees and hands. . . . The flipping part is the easy part. It's the board work, learning how to use the board is the hard part."

**There is some pain in diving, though, right?**

"It's a lot of fun, but it can be frustrating because you smack a lot when you hit the water. I've become used to it, so it's not that big of a deal. But getting over that fear and going for it. . . . it's not even the fear as much as I'm not sure of what I'm doing. It can get frustrating if I can't do the dive perfect. I'm very much a perfectionist with being tight and going into the water correct. Smacking, it kind of hurts and you get a bunch of bruises."