



TINA ROSSELL / Herald Staff

WELCOME BACK: After eight months, Mary Ellen Clark placed fourth in the three-meter.

Clark hungers for Olympics

DIVING, FROM 1D

It was vertigo. Clark knew it — she had two earlier bouts with it. Both times it went away, but this time it didn't. And Clark spent most of the next 10 months searching frantically for a cure.

She visited neurologists, otolaryngologists and acupuncturists. She tried EKGs, vision tests, Chinese herbs and anti-seizure medicine. She tried sleeping in a chaise lounge. She let doctors spin her around in a chair, and shoot hot air into her ears.

But nothing worked until October, when she visited the Upledger Institute in Palm Beach Gardens, where a therapy program of massage and chiropractic care called "CranioSacral therapy" took away all her symptoms.

Her 10-month bout with vertigo brought a lot of changes in Clark's life. She got a taste of what life after diving would be like. And that day is coming soon — Clark, who turns 33 on Christmas, will retire this summer.

But the battle also showed how hungry she is for one final run. That, of course, is the 1996 Olympic Games in Atlanta.

"Atlanta is it, the ultimate," she said. "That's where I want to finish my career."

But first she has to get there.

Her coach with the Fort Lauderdale Diving Team, Ron O'Brien, figures she is still a month away from being back to where she was before she developed vertigo. The national and international meets begin January, culminating with

the Olympic Trials in June.

Although she has already qualified for the trials, that's where things get tough. There are a slew of teenagers who have sprouted up on the national scene since 1992, including talented 17-year-old Jenny Keim, Clark's teammate with the FLDT.

And there's something else. About two weeks ago, Clark got into a small car accident, and later that day at the pool the vertigo came back. And this time, the CranioSacral therapy hasn't worked.

At least the dizziness isn't constant, like it used to be. She gets the feeling only in spells. But usually at the worst times — like in the middle of a 2½ somersault, which is when she felt it Sunday.

"It's frustrating because physically, I'm ready. I feel real strong," she said. "But I still have to deal with this thing. I have to work through it."

Whether she can work her way back to Atlanta, she can't say. But she knows this much: She won't be devastated if she fails.

"When I first started training again, I put a lot of pressure on myself," she said. "I was comparing myself to where the others were, and that wasn't fair to myself. I'm not putting that pressure on myself anymore."

"The nice thing is, I've done it before. I've fulfilled a dream, and I'll always be a part of that Olympic family. Now, I have another dream — to get back there."



STRETCHING OUT: Mary Ellen Clark takes part in her first diving competition since Jan. 18.

TINA ROSSSELL / Herald Staff

Clark's comeback a success

Results (a victory) not as vital as competing

By DAVE SHEENIN
Herald Sports Writer

The announcer called out her name and her dive, "Mary Ellen Clark, a forward 1 1/2 pike," and she raced up the ladder two steps at a time. She shook her arms to get loose, tossed aside her hand towel and took a deep breath.

"I had a little extra energy," she would say later. "My heart was pounding."

And then she

Clark



bounced twice on the springboard and dove — and it was mediocre. Her scores were 6s and 7s. But it was the greatest mediocre dive you'll ever see, because it was Clark's first dive in competition in more than a year and

it was free of dizziness.

What did it feel like to get up there and do it after all this time? That's what everyone asked her.

"It felt," she said, "like it was the first step to a new beginning."

Clark, the bronze medalist at the 1992 Olympics, finished fourth in the 3-meter springboard and won the 10-meter platform on her final dive Sunday in the Ted Keller Invitational at the International Swimming Hall of Fame in Fort Lauderdale.

But the results were not nearly as important as the fact that she was there, competing for the first time since Jan. 18, when she hit the water awkwardly during practice and emerged from the pool with a dizzy, foggy feeling that wouldn't go away.

PLEASE SEE DIVING, 3D