

Granville seniors mentoring younger swimmers

Kurt Snyder, ksnyder@newarkadvocate.com 12:03 a.m. EST December 24, 2014

The idea of coaching is a bit foreign to Maggie McGonagle.

McGonagle, a senior on the Granville girls swim team, has given swim lessons to younger kids, but helping her peers is a new experience for her. New coaches Brandy Frias and Kaylissa Brooke Ault have implemented more opportunities for the Blue Aces to help each other within the team.

"I have done swim lessons, and I really enjoy it," McGonagle said. "I try to not to tell them what to do but mostly give advice because we are all like the same age, so it is kind of awkward. It's definitely something new. We have never really done anything like this before, and I think it is working out really well."

The approach works in multiple ways. It gives athletes more of an ownership of their team and might find that perfect person to bring out the best in another swimmer.

With smaller teams than in past years, both the veteran Granville boys and girls understand their success hinges on how fast they can get less-experienced competitors up to speed.

"Since I was a freshman, I have always had older kids that were faster than me at practice," said Grant Stahl, who joins fellow senior Timmy Spichiger as the top boys this season.

"Now being the oldest person here, I feel like I am a bit of a role model. I have been through it. I have had the experience of state for three years now, and I think it is good to see them develop. I ask the coaches if they need me to demonstrate turns, starts, finishes."

Spichiger and Stahl each have excelled in individual events, but team success this season is uncertain. Their standing in the Division II sectional and district meets down the road largely will depend on how many other Blue Aces move to the forefront.

"When it comes to sectionals and districts, there will be teams that have a couple good kids, but teams that win those are teams that have depth," Stahl said. "It is those points from kids getting fifths and sixths."

Frias said the athletes suggested a mentoring program within the teams. Young athletes sit with their mentors on the bus for away meets, and they have exchanged gifts.

Freshman Sarah Martin has enjoyed having a chance to connect and bond with her older teammates. She was among the Blue Aces to contribute to an impressive showing during the Ned Reeb Memorial on Dec. 13.

"I was really nervous," Martin said. "All of the upperclassmen really made it fun. They helped me with getting a feel for the meets. It is a little different from club, but they made it easy because you are swimming with people you haven't before, but they can tell you what to expect."

Finding time to work together can be a challenge. With pool availability limited, some of the Blue Aces miss portions of practice because they are with their club teams. Those are simply nuisances for a team building a cohesive unit.

"Between all of the freshman boys, they are all competing against each other," Stahl said. "They all want a relay spot. Of all of the meets we have been to, their times have been flip-flopping. That adds a really good aspect to their swimming because it is competitive for them. They know if they want to be on a relay at the end of the year they are going to have to train their butts off all year."

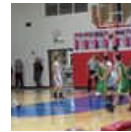
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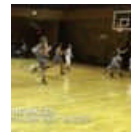
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