

Improved endurance could take Watkins swimmers deeper

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(Photo: Sara C. Tobias/The Standard)

NEWARK – The idea of adding more distance to practice frequently can send swimmers reaching for the ladder.

Watkins Memorial seniors Shelby Seas and Kayla Fenimore, however, say bring it on. That duo is the latest among a string of Warriors during the past decade to shatter school records.

“You can get started in enhancing endurance and conditioning for faster swims,” Seas said. “It is making it so that your taper at the end of the season is a huge improvement. You have so much more time to get better.”

Each was a part of the record-setting 200 medley relay a year ago, and the Warriors also have begun this season on the cusp of the 200 free relay record. Seas also broke a record in the 100 free that had stood for 10 years.

Watkins has confidence it lower its marks and take another step up the ladder in central Ohio because of where the Warriors are starting. In past years, Watkins used the winter break to add distance, but it left them behind

the more established programs.

“Since we do have so many returnees, there is not a whole lot of teaching that has to happen,” coach Heidi Williams said. “We are just fine-tuning the techniques right now, which is amazing. It is really bringing us to the point — and it is a good problem to have — where who are we going to have swim what because we have so much versatility amongst everybody on the team?”

Fenimore said she already is seeing a difference in her races. She qualified for the Division I district meet in the 100 butterfly and 100 breaststroke as a junior, and more endurance should allow her to finish strong on her final lengths and set personal bests.

“I think it is so much better that we are starting off with the distance instead of having to go through drills,” Fenimore said. “Getting a bunch of yardage is just going to improve the endurance. I die on my last lap of the 100 butterfly every time. I am pretty positive that because I have been training so hard I am not going to die. I am actually going to make it.”

In a season-opening meet against Northland and Eastmoor Academy on Dec. 3, Williams highlighted the performances of T.J. Miller in the 50 free and Jacob Sloan in the 100 free and 100 backstroke who had strong times behind Skylar Chapman for the boys.

For the girls, freshman Kelsey Seas in the 100 free and senior Jayna Hulse in the 500 free shined. The Warriors have been looking for a consistent performer in the longest event.

Meanwhile, both Kelsey Seas and Hulse could find themselves in the mix for the coveted relay spots during the postseason. The Warriors have lowered school records each of the past few years, and they expect to do it again this winter.

“It would be cool to see how close we could get to that this year,” Shelby Seas said. “I think there is a lot of potential with the team.”

The Watkins girls showed that potential, earning the title in Northridge’s Viking Splash this past Saturday at New Albany. Gracie Gessner and Kelsey Seas earned the call to join Shelby Seas and Fenimore on the 200 medley relay, and they produced, swimming to a championship time of 2:04.19.

The Warriors also had a bevy of runner-up finishes from Shelby Seas in the 100 free (1:00.00) and 100 breaststroke (1:17.63); Fenimore in the 100 fly (1:10.76); Hulse in the 200 free (2:26.68) and Gessner in the 100 back (1:12.24).

Shelby Seas and Fenimore are off to strong starts in their signature events. Of course, that is all subject to change. The swim season can be a long winding road.

“Last year, we both came from behind and made second heat at districts. That is always awesome, especially when it is events you don’t expect,” Seas said. “My 100 free I came out of nowhere. They ended up being our best events, and those aren’t even our best strokes.”

Chapman won the 200 free (2:14.11) to lead the boys. He also had a fourth-place finish in the 500 free (6:11.13), and Jacob Raver was fifth in the 100 breaststroke (1:20.07).

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