

Watkins Memorial boys have talent to defend LCL swim title

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(Photo: Sara C. Tobias, Sara C. Tobias/The Advocate)

GRANVILLE - The Watkins Memorial boys swim team had quite the breakthrough season a year ago, and the fun might just be beginning.

The Warriors return a lot of young talent from the team that won the Licking County League title, and more talent is coming through the pipeline. It is an exciting time to be a part of the program.

"I love the sport, and I love the people that do it," junior Jacob Raver said. "Honestly, they are great kids, and we just keep growing. Last year, our boys team was really small, and it's almost doubled in size this year. We are just going to get more and more people."

Watkins shattered several school records, and Raver is one of the three returning from the district-qualifying 200 medley and 200 free relays, the Warriors' top relays.

Raver was joined by now-sophomores Spencer Kleeh and Ian Jarvis and the graduated Skylar Chapman. Junior Justin Mohler and sophomore Ethan Ness also return from the district-qualifying 400 free relay.

"The goal is to build off what we did last season," said coach Fay Barry, whose team opens the season Saturday at New Albany for Northridge's Viking Splash. "The boys want to take down a lot of records like they did last year. Certainly, the boys want to defend their LCL title."

For several years, Watkins scrambled to have enough boys to simply fill relays, often asking beginning swimmers to compete against central Ohio's best. The Warriors now have depth thanks to a strong working relationship with the Pau Hana swim club, sharing practice time at Denison University and the Pataskala Porpoises, who compete in the Tri-County Aquatic League during the summer.

Most of the Warriors have several seasons of experience before they reach high school. It should help them at least be on even footing when they step to the edge of the pool for the sectional and district meets.

"We have a really good community program going with the Pataskala Porpoises, and it's been getting younger kids into the sport," Raver said. "They find out the high school has a swim team, and they want to do it."

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