

Watkins Memorial swimming up school's record boards

Kurt Snyder, ksnyder@newarkadvocate.com 12:07 a.m. EST December 3, 2014



(Photo: Sara C. Tobias/The Standard)

NEWARK The Watkins Memorial swim teams have been on a steady ascension much of the past decade. For it to continue this winter, a few critical spots need to be filled on both the girls and boys top relay teams. The good news for coach Heidi Williams is she is working from an area of strength.

The program continues to grow and no longer are swimmers simply used in relays to fill spots. Now, they compete on a daily basis for those opportunities to be a part of relays that have consistently been lowering school records.

"Coming off last year, we only have two spots that are taken," said Williams, whose team travels to New Albany on Saturday to compete in Northridge's Viking Splash. "It has brought us some intrasquad competition, which is good. It is really pushing them to that next level."

Seniors Shelby Seas and Kayla Fenimore are the holdovers for the girls, who broke several records a year ago. Many of the younger Warriors swam in varsity meets a year ago, and more are coming that have experience in club programs through the Pataskala Porpoises and Licking County Family YMCA.

Senior Jayna Hulse, junior Chelsea List and sophomores Gracie Gessner and Abby Jarvis formed a district-qualifying 400 free relay a year ago. Williams added freshmen Kelsey Seas and Sarah Dieterich also have shown the potential so far to contribute in varsity meets.

"They are pushing really hard for those spots. There is an awful lot of competition," Fenimore said.

The boys roster continues to be light, but that is likely to change during the next few years. Boys participation is way up at the youth and middle school levels.

Many of the current varsity swimmers have multiple years of experience, led by juniors Skylar Chapman, Marshall Grady and Jacob Sloan, who were on the district-qualifying relays a year ago.

"They were holding the team together and pushing strong last year," Williams said. "We also have a couple new boys that show a lot of promise and just need some help with technique. That is something we have always focused on in practice anyways is drilling that technique. Already they have shown vast improvements."

Developing a consistent boys program typically takes more time. Swimming in the winter usually is overshadowed by basketball and wrestling.

Many boys do not competitively swim for the first time until they are in high school. That has made it virtually impossible for the Warriors to catch up to the established powers in central Ohio.

"In a couple years, we have a posse of like 20 guys coming up," Williams said. "Next year, we are getting like four guys, and the next year we will get another five. The key especially with the guys is building them at that younger age to get them early, and they can keep that love for the sport."

ksnyder@gannett.com

740-328-8556

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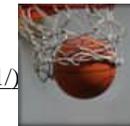
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