



Jim Gabriel North Farmington Devin Hopper Farmington Harrison Eric Lynn Plymouth Salem Brad Buckler Livonia Stevenson Chris Totten Garden City Joe Bublitz Livonia Stevenson Brandon DiGla North Farmington Brian Mertens Plymouth Salem Adam Farber North Farmington

A fast splash

Observer swimmers rank with state's best

By C.J. RIBAK Sports Editor crjribak@home.com.net

Some things just don't change: spring weather, the excellence of Detroit PSL basketball teams, and Plymouth Salem's dominance over the Western Lakes Activities Association in boys swimming.

The Rocks won their eighth-straight championship, and they did it with a lot of good young swimmers — which hardly brightens the future for the rest of the WLAA.

But that doesn't mean the rest of the league, or Observerland, is lacking in talent.

Livonia Stevenson's Joe Bublitz placed in the top five in two events at state meet, North Farmington's Brandon DiGla won both the 100-yard and 200-yard freestyle at the WLAA finals, and the Raiders' Adam Farber won the 100 breaststroke at the WLAA meet and placed third in the event at state.

That's just some of what the area had to offer. For more, read on.

Event	Place	Name	Team
200 freestyle	1	Devin Hopper	Farmington
200 freestyle	2	Justin Ketterer	Livonia Stevenson
200 freestyle	3	Eric Lynn	Plymouth Salem
200 freestyle	4	Brad Buckler	Livonia Stevenson
200 freestyle	5	Chris Totten	Garden City
200 freestyle	6	Joe Bublitz	Livonia Stevenson
200 freestyle	7	Brandon DiGla	North Farmington
200 freestyle	8	Brian Mertens	Plymouth Salem
200 freestyle	9	Adam Farber	North Farmington
200 freestyle	10	Chris LaFond	Catholic Central

Wayne Invitational this year, his score of 474.00 was the highest-recorded score in any division of the Mega-100. "Everywhere he went, he either set records or broke his own records," Cougars coach Don Sweet said. "It happened at Trenton, Redford Union, Wayne and Taylor Truman in the (Mega White) meet."

Hopper qualified for state in three events: the 200 free, backstroke and 200 free relay. He finished 14th in the backstroke, breaking his own school record with a time of 55.49.

He previously swam for Farmington High before that team merged with Harrison High. He was a team MVP and high-point award winner the last two years.

"Devin has been a tremendous asset to our swim team in the last four years and, as a captain this year, has made a dedicated effort in leading this new consolidated team," coach Ross Bandy said. "He will truly be missed by his teammates."

Eric Lynn, 200 IM, Ply. Salem: Lynn was a major reason the Rocks captured the WLAA championship. At the WLAA finals, the sophomore finished second in both the 200 individual medley (2:01.87) and the 100 backstroke (53.33).

At the state finals he placed 16th in both the 200 IM (1:59.67) and 100 back (55.67). He also swam on Salem's 200 medley and 400 freestyle relay teams.

"Eric really stepped up this year," said his coach, Chuck Olson. "He made a big impression on the WLAA as well as the entire state."

With another two years of high school swimming ahead of him, the future looks bright.

Brad Buckler, 50 free, Liv. Stevenson: The senior, who had his senior season cut short because of knee surgery, won the WLAA title in the 50 freestyle (22.42). The Spartans' team captain was also a member of the second-place 400 freestyle relay and took second in the individual 100 freestyle (49.81) and 200 medley relay squad.

"Brad is one of the most competitive athletes I have coached," said his dad and coach Doug Buckler of the four-year letter winner. "He always stepped up in big meets and was our leader when it came to firing up our team. He is what all teams need when it comes to big meets. He will be missed and hard to replace."

Chris Totten, diving, Garden City: Totten proved to be the area's top diver and one of the best in the state. The senior qualified for the state meet in his four seasons in Garden City, finishing 15th both this year and 1998. "Totten was also tops in the Michigan Mega Conference too — winning Blue Division titles his first two seasons and White Division titles his last two. At the

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meets and placed 18th. Bradunas holds the CC record for 11 dives. It was the third straight year he qualified for the state meet.

"Greg has provided inspirational leadership for the whole team and given the team a lift with his diving," said Shamrock coach Jeff Baker.

Brett Meacola, 100 fly, Redford CC: This sophomore holds the CC record for the single point registered by the Shamrocks at the state meet, finishing 12th in the 100 butterfly in 53.56 — his best time of the season. He also swam on CC's 200 medley and 200 free state-qualifying relays.

"I swam well all year in my best event," said Baker. "We expect great performances from him in the future."

Mike Johnson, 100 free, Ply. Salem: Johnson was one of Salem's top scorers at the WLAA meet, placing second in the 50 free (22.71) and third in the 100 free (50.00). He also swam on the 200 medley and 200 free relay teams.

A sophomore, Johnson just missed scoring at state meet in the 50, placing 13th in 22.40 — his best time of the season. He also swam on all three Salem relays. His best time in the 100 for the season was 48.37.

"Mike has had another outstanding season and continues as one of the area's best freestylers," said Olson. Johnson also carries a 3.7 GPA.

Ben Dzialo, 800 free, Ply. Salem: Dzialo is part of what appears to be a very promising future for Salem swimming. A freshman, he was the rock's only first-place finisher at the WLAA finals, winning the 100 butterfly in 55.13. He also placed second in the 500 free in 4:59.21.

At state meet, Dzialo placed 24th in the 100 fly in 54.85. He also swam on Salem's 200 medley relay team and 400 free relay team at state.

"Ben had an outstanding freshman year," said Olson, noting that Dzialo was Salem's leading point scorer and the third-leading point scorer at the WLAA finals. "He trains as hard as he competes."

Brad Nilson, 400 back, Ply. Canton: Nilson reached the state meet in the 100 back, qualifying with a varsity record of 55.89. At state, he placed 20th in 56.07.

A sophomore, Nilson was versatile. He placed sixth in both the 200 IM (2:07.45) and the 100 free (51.39) at the WLAA meet.

"Working with Brad has been a pleasure," said Canton coach Ed Weber. "He's a hard worker and a team leader. I've been real proud of how well he's done his sophomore year, but I'm more excited about the season to come."

Chris LaFond, 100 breaststroke, Redford CC: A senior, LaFond had a solid performance at the state finals, placing 20th in 1:02.01. Another of his fondest memories of his senior season is his swim in the 100 breast in a dual meet against Livonia Stevenson. His comeback behind victory assured CC's 104-82 victory.

"Chris has been an excellent competitor and leader," said Baker.

200 free relay team: (clockwise from bottom) North Farmington's Jon Zald, Brandon DiGla, Chris Clayson and Adam Farber.

200 medley relay: (clockwise from bottom) Stevenson's Brandon Truscott, Mike Nemer, Brad Buckler and Joe Bublitz.

400 free relay team: (clockwise from bottom) Stevenson's Justin Ketterer, Robert Cambridge, Kevin Van'iem and Joe Bublitz.

200 freestyle, Ply. Salem: Junior Aaron Shelton, sophomore Mike Johnson, and seniors (and team captains) Mark Withhoff and Dan Jones placed second at the WLAA conference finals in 1:30.08, then went 1:28.75 in finishing 10th at the state finals.

"The freestyle sprinters made a statement of what teamwork is about, and they had a couple of great swims at state meet," said Olson.

400 freestyle, Ply. Salem: Mike Johnson, Mark Withhoff, Ben Dzialo and Eric

200 medley relay:

(clockwise from bottom) North Farmington's Jon Zald, Jim Gabriel, Adam Farber and Chris Clayson.



200 free relay:

(clockwise from bottom) Salem's Dan Jones, Aaron Shelton, Mike Johnson and Mark Withhoff.



400 free relay team:

(clockwise from bottom) Salem's Eric Lynn, Mike Johnson and Mark Withhoff (Ben Dzialo not pictured).



2ND TEAM RELAYS



200 medley relay: (clockwise from bottom) Stevenson's Brandon Truscott, Mike Nemer, Brad Buckler and Joe Bublitz.

200 free relay team:

(clockwise from bottom) North Farmington's Jon Zald, Brandon DiGla, Chris Clayson and Adam Farber.



400 free team:

(clockwise from bottom) Stevenson's Justin Ketterer, Robert Cambridge, Kevin Van'iem and Joe Bublitz.



Justin Ketterer Livonia Stevenson



Mike Nemer Livonia Stevenson



Aaron Shelton Plymouth Salem



Greg Brazunas Catholic Central



Mike Johnson Plymouth Canton



Brett Meacola Catholic Central



Brad Nilson Plymouth Canton



Chris LaFond Catholic Central