

SWIMMING

New coach, same talent, North seeks WLAA title

BY CHRIS MCCOSKY
STAFF WRITER

The new coach isn't much older than his swimmers, but he's been around long enough to know and appreciate the tradition of North Farmington swimming.

"That's one thing I'm really going to try and preserve," said Dan Knipper, a 1999 North Farmington grad who replaces Jon Teal as the Raiders' head coach. "We got away from the team concept for a couple of years there, but last year was a big change. We swam as a team; we cheered as a team. We were really together and I want that to continue."

The other thing Knipper wants to continue is the team's top 10 scoring at the Class A state meet. The team placed eighth last season.

"We have a little less this year, but I think it'll work out," said Knipper, a former All-Area breaststroker. "The rest of the area lost some good swimmers, too. I think we will be just as good, if not better, than we were last year."

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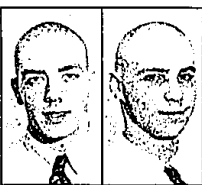
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Main men: North Farmington will again be led by all-stars Karl Kozicki (left) and Jon Kershaw.

The reasons the Raiders ought to be every bit as good: perennial All-Area and all-state seniors Karl Kozicki and Jon Kershaw. Kozicki was second in the state in the 200 individual medley (1:56.13) and third in the 500 freestyle (4:37.38).

"The kid is a machine," Knipper said. "He works so hard and just gets better and better."

Kozicki was the team's lone highlight Tuesday in the team's season-opening loss at Dearborn (63-33). He won the 200 IM (2:07.81) and the 500 (5:11.0).

Kershaw, who took second in the 50 free at Dearborn, placed fourth at the state in the 200 free (1:43.2) and sixth in the 100 free (47.23) last season.

"Those two, plus senior Drew Sophia and sophomore Jason Speer, ought to score at the state meet," Knipper said.

Sophia placed second in the 100 butterfly at Dearborn (57.78). With Sophia, Kershaw and Kozicki, North has three-fourths of its 200 medley relay team that placed eighth at state.

Other top returnees for North are senior Chris Drelles (butterfly, backstroke), juniors Ryan McKelley (breaststroke) and Charles Jacobs (freestyle), sophomores Phil Zaid (breaststroke), Jay Rands (distance free) and Brian Rajfil (backstroke).

Leading newcomers include sprinters Pat Duthie and Steve Durnell.

Falcons swimmers poised for a breakthrough season

BY CHRIS MCCOSKY
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ed team led by juniors Scott Brown (sprint, freestyle, backstroke), Jon Reed (distance, individual medley) and Steven Scario (all strokes).

Brown, an All-Area swimmer last year, placed fourth at the Western Lakes with a school-record 55.51 in the 100 backstroke. He also helped Farmington set records in the 200 medley and 200 freestyle relays.

Reed, who was voted the team's most valuable swimmer last year, was fourth in the conference in the 500 free (4:55.49) and seventh in the 200 free (1:50.32).

Scario scored in the 100 and 200 free.

Other top returnees are seniors Don Boyer (fifth in the 100 free), Chris Frump, Mike Enlburg and Mark Kurzer and sophomore Danny Belanger.

Bandy is also excited about a large freshman class that includes John Hawkins, Tom Sely, Chris Owen, Matt Crawford and diver Jeff Thomas.

"I think we are more solid and have more depth this year," Bandy said. "The kids are working hard. Something really good could happen for us this year."

Farmington Harrison

First the good news. Senior Mark Strohmater isn't at all the same diver he was a year ago. He's much, much better.

"He's really worked hard and come a long way," said fourth-year Harrison coach Lisa Collins. "I expect him to be right up there with the best in the league and he should qualify for the state meet."

Now the bad news. The Hawks only have 13 swimmers in their roster which means another lower-division finish in the Western Lakes.

"Being this small hurts in dual meets, but everybody is giving 100 percent," Collins said. "Hopefully, we will get some good individual results."

The top returnee is senior Nat Cnansவர் who qualified for state meet in the 100 butterfly.

Other returnees are juniors Mike Schaner and Mark Springler, sophomores Chris Baley, D.J. Connor and Chris Hoffee. Junior Mike Korby is out for the first time.

The Hawks also have a promising freshman class: Jesse Herman, Rob Trauer, Jeff Kohler, Mike Glassen, Aaron Bax and Dave Kupferer.

Season to open with a splash

There will be more at stake than one might think when Plymouth Salem hosts the annual Western Lakes Activities Association Relay Meet Saturday.

Co-sponsored by the Plymouth and Canton Rotary clubs, the relay meet is thought by many to be a somewhat fun event, with several events that will never appear in a dual meet. Swimmers are allowed to start the season racing in events in which they never get another chance to compete.

Like the crescendo relay, which consists of four freestyle legs of different distances: 50, 100, 150 and 200 yards. Or the 200 butterfly, the 200 backstroke, and the 200 breaststroke relays, or the 400 individual medley relay (each swimmer does a 100 IM).

In all, there are 10 relays (including diving, in which the top two divers from each school combine scores). Others that are more familiar are the 200 and 400 medley relays, and the 200 and 400 freestyle relays.

Still, as Salem coach Chuck Olson explained, there may be more up for grabs than anticipated.

"Whoever wins it puts a little pressure on their back," said Olson, whose team happens to be the defending relays champ. "I'd say that 99 percent of the time, whoever wins the relay meet wins the conference meet."

"But it's that other 20 percent of the time that worries you."

The Rocks followed that script last season, winning both. Olson

believes his team will be in the hunt for another WLAA title, but there are plenty of challengers: Northville, North Farmington, Canton, Livonia Stevenson and Livonia Churchill all have strong teams. Livonia Franklin's program has returned, and Farmington, according to Olson, has "its best team in a number of years."

Will it show this weekend? That's hard to predict, Olson said. "The meet is supposed to be fun, but some coaches like to make it really fun and not put that monkey on their back," he said.

That "monkey" is expectation. Who will bear it will be decided Saturday, starting at 1 p.m. at Salem's pool.

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