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Little Giants feeling happy effects of Michael Phelps

News-Messenger reports

Ross Swimming kicks off its 15th season under head coach Phil Moran with plenty of experience and plenty of new blood.

"We have 28 boys and 25 girls out this year, making this the biggest team in my career," said Moran. "I call it the Michael Phelps effect. Every year after an Olympics, we get an influx of kids who want to swim. This was just a little bigger than average, thanks to Phelps."

How competitive they will be as a whole remains to be seen, Moran said. The majority of the new freshman have no experience, so turns, rotary breathing and the basics are the first order of business. "A lot will depend on how fast we get the new guys up and going," he said. "Once we're into the season, we'll find out what they're good at."

If bloodlines have anything to do with winning, Ross has a lot going for it. The Wasserman brothers, the Fisher, Miller and Overmyer sisters, and three Yugas siblings make up almost a quarter of the team.

Ross will also field a full contingent of divers this year, both new and seasoned. "Having depth on the dive team gives us a lot of added points, and I can't tell you how many meets we used to lose when we were down at the old pool and didn't have divers," said Moran, "or how many we've won since we moved to the new pool and had good divers."

Having more swimmers in more events has its advantages, but Ross has more than just quantity on its side. Four of the six 2008 state qualifiers in the men's free relays are back; Seniors Jordan Beck, Dexter Foes, Erick White and Kyle Wasserman, Moran is hoping that someone will step up and fill the hole that graduate Lincoln Fahrback left behind. Granted, that's a pretty big hole. Fahrback holds seven of the eight individual school records, and was integral to the boy's team qualifying two relays to states last year.

There is one complication that "The Phelps Effect" has created across the entire state. Ohio hit the magic number of 251 boys swim teams this season, which led the state to create two boys divisions for the first time in OHSSA history. Fremont falls into Division I, and that means when it comes time for state qualifying, only the winner in each event will get an automatic bid from the district meet, as compared to three qualifiers last year under the single division setup.

"In our Greater Buckeye Conference everyone except Napoleon is D-1," Moran said. "However, Northwest Ohio has the fewest D-1 teams in the state, and that's why we only get one automatic," said Moran. "There are more D-2 teams in Northwest Ohio than D-1, so the D-2s get more automatics."

There's state experience as well on the Lady Giants team. Taylor Waggoner and Christy Meggitt were part of the school record setting 400-yard free relay, and Courtney Gabel swam with Waggoner on the record setting 200-yard free relay. "The girls relays have the same issue as the boys, times 2," said Moran, referring to the loss of two record-setting graduates, Jessica Ickes and Jacque Fate.

"We just have to find our niche," said Moran. "Last year the puzzle fell into place, with three strong, experienced swimmers leading the way. This year we have to create a whole new puzzle."

Ross begins work on that puzzle December 2nd, with its first home meet against Sandusky.

SJCC

The Crimson Streaks look to build on last season, when Ashley Overmyer, Jenna Swint and Joy Risner return from two relay teams that were the first in school history to qualify to districts.

Fourth-year head coach Kevin Casey said that there are seven girls and a boy out as freshmen, a testament to the developing junior high program as well.

Overall, numbers continue to increase as Casey has 14 girls and five boys on the team.

Oak Harbor

The Rockets should be sitting pretty in the Sandusky Bay Conference this year, with 11 returning lettermen on the boys team and another 15 returning letter winners on the girls team.

Boys returning from last year's team, which finished fifth in the SBC, include Aaron Reichman, Bryan Winters and Ben Andryc -- all parts of district-qualifying relay teams -- and diver Adam Andryc.

Returning girls include district qualifiers Andrea Behm, Bethany McNutt, Danielle Franck and Marlee Carpenter, and state qualifiers Katie Bechtel, Jenna Diekman, Allie Reynolds, Samantha Reynolds, Olivia Porter and Brielle Hanthorn.

Margaretta

Polar Bears coach Joe Groscost said the boys SBC race will be for second place. Perkins, his old stomping grounds, is the favorite to win.

But after that, it's anyone's ballgame.

"Our boys have as good a shot as any for second or third," said Groscost, in his 11th year coaching at Margaretta.

All told, there are about 20 boys out, including a lot of freshmen.

"I'm going to be counting on them a lot," he said.

The Polar Bears girls team has 34 members, including Morgan and Sydney Craig, half of a state-qualifying relay team.

Groscost sees Perkins, Port Clinton and Oak Harbor at the top of the SBC standings.

"We're going to have some good young ladies, but we'll be going against some good ones," he said.
