

SPORTS LAMORINDA'S LOCAL SPORTS NEWS

Not Afraid to Swim With the Fishes

Orinda Girl Wins First Place at Sharkfest

Submitted by Jack Reid



Kendall Hemming (middle)

Photo Greg Hemming

As a Christmas present to her dad, nine year-old Kendall Hemming, of Orinda, proposed swimming an open water race in the Bay together.

When she committed to swimming Sharkfest, water temperature and possible "wildlife" encounters were her biggest fears -- and come race day, neither disappointed. Hemming and her father trained all year, swimming ever longer continuous distances to-

gether, often in the Bay or Lake Tahoe.

On Saturday August 15, Hemming competed in Sharkfest, a 1.5 mile race from Alcatraz to Aquatic Park in San Francisco. Hemming was the youngest of the 800 participants and won the 10-and-under female group in one hour, 22 minutes. While braving the cold was a challenge, the scariest part was a large harbor seal which breached within ten feet of the father-daughter team.



A happy winner, Kendall Hemming

She Swam Again!

Maddy Spiering swims Sharkfest, this time with brother



Spencer, Michael and Maddy Spiering

Photo submitted

Upon the conclusion of the Sharkfest last summer Maddy Spiering, now 13, told Lamorinda Weekly she was not sure if she would swim the race again. Well, a year later she decided to take the plunge into the icy Bay once more--this time bringing along her

ten-year-old brother, Spencer, on the swim from the waters just off Alcatraz Island to San Francisco.

Maddy finished third in the 13/14 female group with a time of 58 minutes, five minutes faster than last year. The race also differed from her first experience because she

swam it alone after swimming ahead of her father and brother. "In the beginning I had gone ahead of them but not more than 20 yards. I could turn around and still see them. Then I must have gotten too far ahead and I couldn't find them," Maddy said. Not only was Maddy separated from her father, she could not see the ship or the finish line. However, she problem solved quickly, "I just stuck to large groups and followed them." Maddy said she enjoyed this race much more than the last just because she knew what to expect.

Spencer finished second in the ten and under males group with a time of one hour and 13 minutes. "It was really fun and exciting," said Spencer. Although it was his first Sharkfest, Spencer said the hardest part was getting started, "I was a little nervous about jumping off the boat but otherwise I was confident." And unlike Maddy who might have been a little hesitant to commit to another year after her first race, Spencer was on board, "I really want to do it next year!" C. Graveson



Spencer in front of Alcatraz island

Photo Michael Spiering

Flag Football the Way to Play

MOL Celebrates 40 Years

By Lou Fancher



MOL 3rd graders with their youth coaches at the Mini Camp held at JM field

Photo Ohlen Alexander

Football brings football and while the sport is fun to watch, the intensity of tackling is not for everyone. The alternative is flag football, where fans can become players without the violence. The opening weekend of the Moraga-Orinda-Lafayette (MOL) flag football program starts September 19th, filling the fields at Joaquin Moraga Intermediate School with 570 Lamorinda kids. "It's a sea of jerseys on Saturday mornings," says League Commissioner Bill Fraser.

The local league, established in 1969 by a group of guys who loved the game, has grown tremendously. Each year, players in third-eighth grade from Moraga, Orinda, Lafayette and Canyon pack the fields with talent and the sidelines with volunteers from all four communities.

Make no mistake: this is not a backyard-type operation. Despite its grassroots origin, the league runs with efficiency, starting with online registration. There is a mini-camp for first-time third graders, an evaluation day, draft days and preseason games. "The kids love it because they have one practice a week, games on Saturday, and it's real football to them," Fraser explains.

Parents volunteer for coaching positions. Many played in the league themselves, meaning dads and grandpas fill the staff roster. This year, there is even an energetic sports mom coach and a few girls setting a precedent for the future.

The draw of flag football is the emphasis on speed, deception, and fun, instead of violence. "You can teach kids about football without having them colliding all day long," says Fraser.

Finding a league without the bangs and brawls was a relief to parent Peter Zolantakis, who recalls succumbing to peer pressure and playing tackle football. "All my friends joined, and I was worried about being left out," he admits. Pop Warner and high school football left him with one clear memory: "I was terrified," he says.

Free from the obligation to overpower each other, kids can relax and concentrate on developing the basic skills and confidence of well-rounded athletes. Relying on a broader range of skills allows all players to stand out, not just the taller, bigger guys. "For everyone who's not the star, it's more enjoyable," says Zolantakis.

Andrew Zolantakis, age 13, has participated in MOL for five years. He's played wide receiver, running back, and quarterback - living proof of the league's equal opportunity profile. "My brother was playing and he seemed to like it," Andrew says of his starting days. "And it wasn't too intense, it was just fun." Still, winning is on his mind, especially because "it gives me certain bragging rights at school." But losing is also a part of competition and when disappointed, he tells himself, "You can come back next week," and his team mates, "You'll get it next time." This is the last year Andrew is eligible to play. He already helps with the mini-camp and plans to referee during the 2010 season.

Due to the efforts of Bill Fraser and others like him the league is booming, with coaches lining up, the player roster full and a waiting list established. Fraser hopes to celebrate MOL's long history with a 40th anniversary celebration on October 10th. Past players, coaches, referees and fans are welcome. Information and registration is on the website at <http://www.molfootball.org/>.



MOL 3rd graders in action

Photo Ohlen Alexander

Send sports stories and ideas to:
sportsdesk@lamorindaweekly.com
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For up to date schedules see: www.smogaels.com	
Fri, Sep 4 MSOC Alabama A&M 4:00 PM	Wed, Sep 9 VB San Jose State McKeon Pavilion 7:00 PM
Sat, Sep 5 VB Texas A&M McKeon Pavilion 6:45 PM	Thu, Sep 10 VB Eastern Washington McKeon Pavilion 7:00 PM
Sun, Sep 6 WSOC, Texas A&M Saint Mary's Stadium 9:00 AM	Fri, Sep 11 WSOC SMU Saint Mary's Stadium 4:30 PM
Sun, Sep 6 MSOC Sacramento State vs. Alabama A&M 12:00 PM	Sun, Sep 13 WSOC California vs. SMU at Saint Mary's Stadium 12:00 PM
Sun, Sep 6 MSOC UC Riverside 3:00 PM	Sun, Sep 13 WSOC Portland State Saint Mary's Stadium 2:30 PM
Mon, Sep 7 VB San Diego State McKeon Pavilion 12:00 PM	Fri, Sep 18 WSOC California Saint Mary's Stadium 4:00 PM

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Correction, issue date August 19, 2009,
 "Look Out for Highway 24:" Nicholas Inserra, of Springbrook Swim Team, set an additional record in the boy's 11/12 free style at 23.57.