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Hundreds of swimmers converge at Lafayette Swim Conference Championship Meet

By Jon Kingdon

Arriving at 6 a.m., Aly Macalister, the Lafayette Swim Conference Championship Meet Director welcomed the start of the 11th annual championship meet last Saturday. With 200 parent volunteers and 497 swimmers competing, it took a great deal of effort to pull it all together. "The hardest thing has been coordinating all of the volunteers and getting everything set up," Macalister said. "There has been a lot of work over the course of the last 10 months in preparing for this event and the last two weeks, we've been particularly busy."

Macalister sees the opportunity for everyone to feel like a winner at this meet: "We host this championship meet as a way for our swimmers who have spent their entire summer working for a goal: to have something that feels extra special and extra fun. It's an opportunity for the swimmers that will be going on to the county meet next week to swim in the same pool where the county meet will be held and for those swimmers who are not quite at that level, to have a great day and to have fun and it's more about the experience of the day rather than the results in the afternoon."

SUN VALLEY

Jill Taylor, one of the swim team directors for Sun Valley (Lafayette) plans on 113 swimmers ranging in age from 4 to 18 to compete at the Lafayette Swim Meet.

"After starting our spring clinic in April, we had about fifteen meets and it's been a great season," Taylor said. "We don't score the dual meets in our league and what we are mostly looking for is the improvement of our swimmers while having a lot of fun along the way. We really look at how many times our swimmers have improved their times and so far, this summer we've had 1,000 pop (personal improvement) times. At the meet, we also do parent and coaches relays which they have a lot of fun with."

The Taylors first joined Sun Valley with their daughter in 2018 and this is the first year that she and her husband have served as the directors of the team. "When we moved here, we had no idea what rec swimming was all about and then we saw the minivans all decked out. Our daughter did the mini race program and loved it and wanted to join the team."

The leading swimmer this year for Sun Valley has been Cole Carlson who has broken the team's freestyle record in the 9-10 group three times this season. The team also looks to the senior members like Sophie McKay who will be swimming at UC Davis next year, Olivia Williams and Will Carlson and junior J.P. Rosenblatt for leadership and help in coaching the younger swimmers.

"I've been around the team since I was four and I've been on the team since I was six," Rosenblatt said. "I coach the four through eight-year-olds and I will compete in the meets as well. One of the traditions of Sun Valley is that we do "Tuck-Ins" where we go to their houses of our young swimmers and tuck them in and make sure they get a good night's sleep before the meets."

Sun Valley does not take a win at all costs attitude. "If any of our swimmers qualify for the county meet, it's a bonus," Taylor said. "What we want to see is every swimmer have their own individual growth that takes place in our team setting. For a lot of our swimmers, it's just seeing that growth or having our younger swimmers master a difficult stroke like breaststroke or butterfly to be technically sound in their technique." Assistant Coach Ava MacKay spoke of the unity of the team at the meet. "As a team, we showed a lot of team spirit together in our tents as usual," MacKay said. "We have a buddy system in our pool, so they were really supportive there. Individually, a number were able to pop all their times and really took what we gave them as critiques and proved to us that they could do that in the water so that was awesome and two that really stood out were Lena Taylor (8) in the freestyle, butterfly and Valentina Young (10) who did an amazing job. A bunch of our kids qualified for the county today and after winning a meet at the beginning of the season that we were not expecting to win, we've been progressing through the through the time I've been here in the summer."

RANCHO COLORADOS

After the coronavirus, the numbers of swimmers at Rancho Colorados (Lafayette) have climbed to 237 which is as high a number as the club has seen.

"We had 14 meets this year so we're back to normal after the coronavirus which really caused an epidemic of stroke flaws that took a lot longer than usual to of recover from, head coach Adrian Lohse, an Acalanes alumnus, said. "It as our goal is to develop complete swimmers as we spent much of the summer correcting strokes but I think we're almost there now. We had a chance to mix in some of the Invitational style meets, which was pretty good. We swam the pentathlon at Dana Hills in Clayton and that was a good meet. It's been fun though it's been cold this summer, so that's been a weird risk and it made our Wednesday night meets pretty tough but now that the weather's gotten back to normal, the swimming has gotten faster." The team has been particularly pleased with the progress of their six and under group. "We've had multiple swimmers improve by over a minute for one lap race which is kind of unbelievable," Lohse said. "When they started, it would take many of them a minute and a half to swim a lap and now most got that down under thirty seconds. They went from being barely able to swim to becoming quite proficient."

The leading swimmer on the team has been 14-year-old Lucy Kao. "Lucy has had a great season breaking four team records and several pool records along the way," Lohse said. "Clara Roggensack who just graduated from Campolindo and will be attending Indiana University has been a coach and spiritual leader all summer and has been our oldest, strongest and most proficient demonstrator of the strokes."

For Lohse, the highlight of the season had nothing to do with swimmers' times. "It came not from our individual performance but when we did a fundraiser in the water which we call the Rancho 500 because it's

designed to be like a NASCAR style race," Lohse said. "At this event, we were able to raise \$2,400 which almost entirely funds the fall season for the local East Bay Sea Serpents which is a swim team for the disabled swimmers, and we look upon that as a team accomplishment."

"Today was a great tournament in that we got a lot of new county qualifiers which is always exciting," Lohse said. Part of the excitement for us was getting a chance to swim a full lineup of events in three individual events. That was a fun experience for swimmers that don't typically get in a normal dual meet. Lucy Kao ended up breaking her fifth team record. All the individual events are her team records now. Our individual medley swimmers as a group did really well. They're kind of a reflection of our philosophy as a team to work on each of the strokes. It's a really challenging race to pull all those races together and we did well."

DANA HILLS

The Dana Hills Swim Team (Clayton) is making their initial appearance at the Lafayette Swim Conference Championship meet. They started out this year with 180 members and by mid-June they were up to 284 which was a higher-than-normal number.

Head Coach Nikki Palmer who began swimming at Dana Hills in 2002, has been coaching there since 2010, lives in Lafayette is welcoming the opportunity to compete at Acalanes, after competing in their traditional big meet at the Concord City Meet Championships. "We don't know what to expect but we know the Lafayette area has had some great swimmers," Palmer said. "We're excited for the opportunity to swim at Acalanes prior to the county meet because it's an opportunity to be in a pool with overflowing gutters which makes it a fast pool and we normally don't get the opportunity to swim in pools like that and this is where the County Meet will be next week."

The Dana Hills team has swimmers as young as two but its competitors range from three to eighteen years old. It's been a successful season for Dana Hills in their sixteen meets. "We've won all of our big meets and all but one dual meet," Palmer said. "We'll probably put about 100 swimmers into the county meet next week."

The leading swimmers for Dana Hills have ironically been groups of siblings, Shawn and Maya Canada, Chooch Branich-6 and under, Charley Branich-7 and Cole Branich-10. It's also been a strong group of 11-12-year-old boys led by Ian Meyer, J.J. Westbrook, and Preston Forney.

The senior group that has taken on the leadership role for the team have Dom Vines, Logan Meyer, and Thea Jeffres.

Dana Hills is a team that stresses proper strokes. "We're very technical as compared to some other summer rec teams and a number of our swimmers will enroll in our technique clinics in the fall and spring along with kids from other teams," Palmer said. Our youngest group are the Junior Otters and by the time they're six years old, they're hitting all four strokes - butterfly, breaststroke, back stroke, and free style."

"This was a great meet for our kids to be in a big pool in this type of setting to get their nerves out before the county meet and I was pretty happy with the performances we had today," Palmer said after the meet.

"I think we picked up about 16 qualifiers for the county meet and with the relays, we will be close to 180.

Our relay teams were a real highlight for us with all of them finishing in first or second. We have some really good swimmers in our younger ages and we our 5-year-olds got their third county today.

Standouts, according to Palmer, were Maya Ahluwalia (12) in the breast stroke and Charlie Branich (7) and the Jeffres sisters, Mila (8), Elsa (11), Ada (14) Thea (16), who all qualified for county.

PLEASANT HILL

With 300 members in the Pleasant Hill Club and 250 individual swimmers, things are back to normal. "For most swimmers and dolphins that I have been coaching the last two years and in years before that, the goal for most has been to just improve their own times, skills and sets," Assistant Coach Joe Kaput said. "Some of them already know that they will be going to the Contra Costa County meet which is the big end of the year meet for them but for most of our swimmers, it's a matter of improving their strokes, being with friends that they don't see very often and making new friends. In other words, just having a good time and having a blast over the summer."

This season the team has moved to College Park High School since the Pleasant Hill Middle School has been getting reroofed and the team has not missed a beat. "Our meet schedule has been on Wednesday nights and Saturday mornings with a couple of two-day invitationals sprinkled in there on weekends and we even had our own invitational called The Battle of the Ages," Kaput said. "To have our own invitational with about a dozen teams, which is an annual thing, is always a highlight for us."

Leading the team has been Airi Seiv who has been a top leader on the team the past few years and is also a fast swimmer that has stepped up the last couple of years.

Kaput has taken his most satisfaction in watching the constant improvement of the swimmers. "It's especially good to see the older swimmers having everything start to come together," Kaput said. "Many of them are getting really close to County Times which most are shooting for. It's really nice to see them get close and even surpass the level to qualify for the county meet, especially those swimmers who have never made that meet before."

What did Aly Macalister do after the last race? "I began looking forward to the next swim season as soon as the meet concluded."

Sidebar:

LAFAYETTE SWIM MEET RESULTS

GIRLS TEAMS

DANA HILLS 3,147.50

RANCHO COLORADOS 1,930

SUN VALLEY 1,630.50

PLEASANT HILL 1,574

BOYS TEAMS

DANA HILLS 2,591.5

SUN VALLEY 1,995.5

RANCHO COLORADOS 1,934

PLEASANT HILL 1,449

LAFAYETTE MEET NEW RECORDS

BOYS 50 FREE STYLE RELAY - DANA HILLS

D. Vines, S. Canada, J. Parker, D. Van Famos 1:20.25

BOYS 50 MEDLEY RELAY - DANA HILLS

D. Vines, S. Canada, J. Parker, F. Van Famos - 1:38.87

GIRLS 25 BUTTERFLY - DANA HILLS

Channing Branch (7) - 17.81

BOYS 50 FREE - DANA HILLS

Jack Parker (18) - 22.63

RANCHO COLORADOS TEAM RECORD

GIRLS 50 FLY

LUCY KAO (14) - 26.85

SUN VALLEY TEAM RECORDS

9-10 BOY 50 FREE STYLE RELAY

C. Carlson, A. Stein, A. Mura, L. Parks - 2:04.03

15-18

15-18 BOYS 50 FREE STYLE

Alexander Butler-Kurimai (17)- 23.12

Reach the reporter at: sportsdesk@lamorindaweekly.com

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