

November 19, 2008

Marlins coast to league swim crown

*By Dan O'Meara
Observer Staff Writer*

In a warm-up for what the Marlins hope will be consecutive championship weekends, Mercy High School won the Catholic League girls swimming and diving crown for the 18th straight year Saturday.

The Marlins won 10 events to outpace rival and perennial challenger Marian, which won the other two races, at the Livonia Community Recreation Center.

Mercy also is the defending Division 2 state champion and will attempt to repeat that feat Friday and Saturday at the Holland Aquatics Center.

"The league meet is certainly special, and the kids point toward it," Mercy coach Shannon Dunworth said. "It can be difficult. At this time of year, we've already swum every team in the league, so we know what to expect.

"There's a small tendency for kids to look past this meet to the state championships. As much as we try not to have the year revolve around the last meet, it does somewhat.

"I say that to qualify how proud I was of the girls and the way they performed, because I know those elements are out there."

Mercy's individual winners were senior Megan Gegesky, 200-yard freestyle; sophomore Maria Bargardi, individual medley; sophomore Taylor Steffl, 50 freestyle; senior Carly Sevald, diving; sophomore Nikki Barczak, butterfly; senior Kaitlyn Jefferson, 100 freestyle; and senior Gillian Staudt, 500 freestyle.

The Marlins also won all three relays with Steffl, freshman Sato Kakihara, Jefferson and Barczak competing in two apiece. Senior Alex Swies, junior Emily Reamer, Gegesky and Bargardi were on one relay team each.

"When you've got 24 kids going to the state championship meet, they're all champions in their own right," Dunworth said when asked about individual standouts.

"Megan won the 200 in a terrific race. She's been super competitive all year. Maria Bargardi is just a coach's dream; she hangs on every word. In the 50 free, Taylor stepped up and beat somebody she just lost to a couple weeks ago. When you beat somebody who beat you, that's a special effort.

"In the 100 fly, Nikki Barczak swam out of her event a bit and went there for the competition and won a close race. In the 500, Gillian Staudt had a poor swim on Friday and just had to be significantly and mentally tougher on Saturday; she was and won that event.

"We lost two great races in the 100 backstroke and breaststroke. My hat goes off to the kids who won and lost those events. I love great races because it brings the best out of kids in those circumstances. In both cases, our kids are better for stepping up and being competitive."

The league championship was Mercy's 42nd overall. The Marlins won their first title in 1960 and have won every year since 1967 with the exception of 1990 when Marian won by a point.

In regard to putting aside thoughts of the state meet and concentrating on the league championships, Dunworth also said:

“I tell the kids all time, ‘It’s like standing over a putt. You’re either focused on making it or hoping you don’t miss.’ It’s hard not to fall into that mindset and think, ‘Gee, I hope I do well.’

“With those things out there to be potentially detrimental, my kids exceeded my expectations, and I’m really happy with them.”
