



October 28, 2008

A swim meet to remember for Mercy, Pioneer

Oct. 17 was a memorable day for both Ann Arbor Pioneer and Farmington Hills Mercy's swim teams.

That was the day Pioneer, eight-time defending state champion in Division 1, lost to Division 2 contender Mercy, 111-75, in a dual meet.

It had Pioneer scrambling to find out when was the last time it had lost a dual.

"I really don't know," Pioneer co-coach Dennis Hill said Monday night. "I think the last time we lost a dual meet was in 1997 when we opened our new pool against Livonia Stevenson and they beat us; so it must be about 11 years ago. Stevenson's coach Greg Phill still hasn't let me forget it."

Mercy's feat and Pioneer's loss almost went undetected until I was contacted by some swim fans.

"Of course, we hated to lose, but the girls took it well," said Hill. "They whacked us pretty good. Our thing is to win the Division 1 title. We knew the Mercy meet would be difficult, but we swam some of our best times of the year ... each meet is a time trial where you are trying to get your swimmers qualified for the state meet. We expect to have more qualified. We have our conference meet in two weeks and two weeks after that is the state meet.

"So far we've qualified 12 swimmers for the state meet and four divers."

Mercy has 21 swimmers qualified for the Division 2 finals, and Coach Shannon Dunworth is optimistic, especially after his team's performance against Pioneer.

"Ann Arbor Pioneer has a great deal of pride in their swim team," said Dunworth. "They work extremely hard and that's why they're so extremely successful. We're a very proud group too, so that meet was a lot of fun.

"Ann Arbor Pioneer is always on our schedule because they are always terrific and we want to swim against the best. It's not so much a rivalry like Ann Arbor Huron and Pioneer; it's just a good opportunity for great swimming from first place to eighth place. We didn't focus on their streak at all."

Dunworth didn't know his team's record, but said "We haven't lost any."

"You really focus on how many kids have qualified for the state championship or the league," he said. "In football getting to the playoffs is about your record. I think we've had 11 meets with tournaments and we've won them all."

Some of Mercy's leaders are senior diver Carley Sevald; Maura Nicholson, who swims individual medley and breaststroke; Kaitlin Jefferson, a sprint/freestyler and Megan Gegesky, a butterfly and freestyler.

"Swimming isn't always about the best swimmer in the event because it's such a long grind to our season; it is three months long, which isn't tremendously long, but they all practice twice a day," said Dunworth.

“When you start in the water at 6 in the morning and leave somewhere between 5 and 7 at night it becomes long, so you look to your older kids who have been that route to let the younger kids know there’s no griping; that this is just part of it. So those are the people that really lead the way for us.”

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