

Mercy dominates county swim meet again

BY JAKE SHARFMAN
Special to The Oakland Press

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LAKE ORION — The year was 2003.

Shannon Dunworth was in his first year at the helm of the Farmington Hills Mercy program and led his Marlins to a respectable, in what he remembers, second or third place finish in the Oakland County swim meet.

It was the last year that would happen.

Ever since Dunworth's inaugural season, the Marlins have won the county meet. And Saturday afternoon, Mercy claimed the title for the fourth straight year — and in dominating fashion.

Mercy capped off their four-peat recording 404 points in first place, Birmingham Marian finished second with 219.5 and Birmingham Seaholm came in third with 204.5.

"This is always an important meet for us and it's always a competitive meet, which helps us in our tough schedule," Dunworth said. "We really key in on this."

Dunworth attributes a lot of his team's success to the intensity his Marlins show day-in and day-out in practice. The confidence doesn't lie within finishing first place at a meet, or defeating a valiant opponent. The confidence, as Dunworth describes it, all comes from practice.

"The biggest confidence boost is that they know the hard work they put in every day," Dunworth said. "It's nice to perform well, but ultimately they push each other so much in practice. Our practices are as competitive as most meets."

The Marlins will need all the confidence they can muster when Mercy heads to Ann Arbor to take on powerhouse Ann Arbor Pioneer in two weeks, then on to league and regional meets.

Dunworth seemed surprised at the way his Marlins took the crown Saturday afternoon in Lake Orion. Since depth is the strength of the Mercy club, and they usually do well in the middle of the pack, it was odd that the Marlins had three first-place finishers.

Sophomore Nikki Barczak took first in the 200-yard freestyle with a stellar 1:55.70, Carley Sevald took the 1-meter diving, and the 400-yard freestyle relay team of Kaitlyn Jefferson, Megan Gegesky, Taylor Steffl and Barczak swam a 3:38.50 to take that heat.

However, Dunworth seemed most impressed with the swimming of freshman Sato Kakahara, who finished in second place in the 500-yard freestyle with a time of 5:12.21, only behind touted Rachel Johnson of Milford.

"She really came alive and swam well today for us," Dunworth said. "To be honest, I can't remember the last time we won three events here."

And speaking of surprises, the second place finish of Marian was just that — especially to head coach Bill Thompson.

Thompson has incorporated some new techniques and cycles into his Marian workouts and practices this season, and the second place finish is proof that something is working.

"We surprisingly swam very, very well. We started all these things at the beginning of the season and so far, so good," Thompson said. "I'm sure that this is the best we've done in a long, long time in this meet."

The highlight for Marian came in the 200-yard freestyle relay where Molly Schaefer, Jaynie Pulte, Meghan Jones and Maggie Brabbins finished in second place with an impressive 1:41.65 time, much to the smile of Thompson.

"I think our successes right now comes with the kids' attitudes and, in particular, our focus on this meet helps to see just where we are in our season. And also our new style of workouts," Thompson said. "It's a combination of things."

Last Updated: *10/4/2008 6:40:17 PM EST*