

Friends and rivals

Macomb County swimmers, divers will meet Feb. 6-7 at LCN

By JON MALAVOLTI
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The top boys swimmers and divers from more than 20 high schools across Macomb County will compete in what is expected to be one of the more competitive county championships in recent years.

Diving preliminaries are scheduled to begin at 6 p.m. Feb. 6 at L'Anse Creuse North; the swimming and diving finals are slated to start at 11 a.m. Feb. 7 at the Crusaders' pool. Admission is \$5.

"The county meet is a great showcase for local talent," Warren Cousino coach Scott MacDonald said.

Last year's meet saw a close finish, as Romeo High held off Macomb Dakota and Warren De La Salle to take the crown. The Bulldogs recorded 263 points, while the Cougars finished with 255 and the Pilots with 253.

"Last year was probably the closest meet ever," Dakota coach John Samonie said. "This year, it could be even closer."

Crowding at the top of this year's standings wouldn't surprise many local coaches. Depth, not overwhelming individual talent, will likely be the deciding factor.

"A team that doesn't win any events may be the team that comes out on top," St. Clair Shores Lake Shore coach Tom Zalweski said.

"A big meet like this always has at least two teams that are in it until the end, so it makes it very exciting," MacDonald added.



Photo by Patricia O'Blenes

The Macomb County boys swimming and diving championships take place Feb. 7 at Macomb L'Anse Creuse North. Fraser High junior Brad Barry competes during a meet earlier this season.

Less than 50 points separated the fifth- through 10th-place squads last year.

"It will definitely be one of the closer meets the county has seen the past few years," LCN coach Mike Owensby said.

While a close meet could create stress for coaches as the competition comes to a close, it would make for an exciting event from a fan's perspective.

"The past couple of years have been a very close competition, and for the sake of an enjoyable meet, I hope it is close," Zalweski said.

Romeo and Dakota are again expected to battle it out for the title. Squads such as Clinton Township Chippewa Valley, Fair Haven Anchor Bay and Utica Ford II might also factor into the first-place mix.

"It should be very interesting," Chippewa Valley coach Jeff Lepler

said. "There does not seem to be any teams capable of domination, so it should go right to the end."

Swimmers in individual races and divers must achieve a qualifying time or score average prior to the meet to qualify, however, every team in the county can enter one relay team in each event without having to qualify.

A few coaches noted that heading into the meet, qualifying times were a bit slower than usual, but breakout performances are common at the county championship once the adrenaline starts pumping.

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"The level of competition at this meet has gradually increased during the past few years," Owensby said. "County records are continuously improving."

Striving for top times, rather than focusing on beating an opponent, is one of many unique factors on display at the county meet each year, as camaraderie seems to be the main sentiment.

"The athletes truly support each other, no matter which team a

person competes for," Owensby said. "I always see the athletes wishing each other good luck and then congratulating them at the conclusion of an event."

Samonie noted that much of the camaraderie stems from familiarity because athletes from different schools train together in the offseason on club teams.

"It always gets their competitive fires going a little more," Samonie said. "However, it seems that it also increases the support for members from opposing teams."

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