

Ryo Ueno a revelation for Warriors

Written by Tom Fruehling

Saturday, 12 January 2013 22:05 - Last Updated Saturday, 12 January 2013 22:29



Washington senior swimmer Ryo Ueno's meet results Saturday sort of mirrored his brief career as a Warrior.

He's gone from an outsider to the faster middle lane at the speed of clicking stopwatch.

In his first race of the 18th annual Jim Voss Invitational in the Washington pool he placed fourth. He then took third, was on a second-place relay team and finally climbed the winner's stand with teammates after a blowout victory in the meet's premier event, the 400 freestyle relay.

For Ueno, a 17-year-old foreign exchange student from Japan, it's been a similar season of sudden success.

When he showed up without fanfare for the first practice back on Nov. 5, no one (himself included) knew how good he was.

Now, as the team prepares to peak for state meet competition, he's become one of the top swimmers on a traditionally top-flight team.

"It's been very good," the reed-thin bundle of joy said Saturday as he joined in the celebration of a better-than-expected runner-up team finish in the power-packed eight-team field.

Ryo Ueno a revelation for Warriors

Written by Tom Fruehling

Saturday, 12 January 2013 22:05 - Last Updated Saturday, 12 January 2013 22:29

"Everything is good. I love my teammates. They are all my friends. Everybody is my best friend."

Fellow freestyler Josh Hughes, the team star who marvels that Ueno is always right with him even on grueling 8,000-yard practice laps, says Ueno's English has improved as rapidly as his race times.

"At first, we were like, " 'What?' every other sentence. We thought for a while that he said his name was 'Yo.'"



For his part, Ueno says it's Coach Chris Cruise that he can't understand. "He talks too fast. I never know what he's saying."

Learning to master English was the reason he wanted to come to the United States as an exchange student in the first place. He says when he returns home to Japan, he intends to study to become an international businessman.

His host family, Dawn Stephens and Greg Young of Cedar Rapids, only found out the day before that he would be living with them this year. They had hosted another Japanese student two years ago when their daughter Lucy was at Washington.

And no one knew what kind of a phenom he would be in the pool.

Ryo Ueno a revelation for Warriors

Written by Tom Fruehling

Saturday, 12 January 2013 22:05 - Last Updated Saturday, 12 January 2013 22:29

"I read an article in the Surveyor (student newspaper) that said he wanted to go out for the swimming team," said Hughes. "I thought, 'That's cool.' "

Cruise, meanwhile, didn't have a clue.

"We had no times to go on," he explained. "So we had absolutely no idea of how good or how bad he was.

"But after his first 10 minutes in the pool, we very quickly realized how fast he is. And he's such a good kid, that his swimming ability is just icing on the cake."

In Japan, Ueno swims on his school team. But he's also a trained lifeguard. And in Japan, lifeguards are on competitive teams that swim in the ocean.

He figures his experience battling huge waves helps him with his endurance. But he also enjoys hard work.

"I love practice," he said. "I'm very satisfied to practice. And I appreciate how hard my teammates work."

Hughes, who plans to enter Johns Hopkins University next year to study medicine, also suspects Ueno's love for Mountain Dew soda pop also boosts his energy level.

"Addicted, yes," his friend admits. "In Japan, we only have the small. Not the big bottles."

Cruise says the foreign newcomer has been a breath air to his close-knit, family-style Warrior squad.

Ryo Ueno a revelation for Warriors

Written by Tom Fruehling

Saturday, 12 January 2013 22:05 - Last Updated Saturday, 12 January 2013 22:29

"He's kind of a goofy kid, in a nice way, sort of silly for sure. But he's always happy. And he fits in perfectly with the kind of supportive team culture we've always had at Washington," Cruise said. "Everybody loves him, and he's just a great teammate."

JIM VOSS INVITATIONAL

At CR Washington

Team scores

1. WDM Valley 336, 2. CR Washington 284, 3. (tie) Bettendorf and Ankeny 161, 5. Cedar Falls 111, 6. Waukesha South 106, 7. Waukesha West/Mukwonago 76, 8. DM Lincoln 67

200 Medley Relay

1. WDM Valley 1:40.97
2. Washington (Saulnier, Kopec, Thorson, Durin) 1:41.70
3. Cedar Falls 1:44.51
6. Washington (McElree, Scheetz, Barnes, Kehoe) 1:46.34

200 Freestyle

1. Josh Hughes (CRW) 1:46.77
2. David Wright (Wauk West/Muk) 1:47.12
3. Chandler Cox (Ankeny) 1:49.70
4. Ryo Ueno (CRW) 1:50.61

200 IM

1. Alec Carlson (Wauk South) 1:59.57
2. Alex Bodin (WDM Valley) 2:03.20
3. Jaden VanDike (WDM Valley) 2:03.68
6. Nick Saulnier (CRW) 2:09.19
8. Matt Jackson (CRW) 2:14.12
9. Ian McElree (CRW) 2:15.72

50 Free

1. Sam Gorham (WDM Valley) 22.51
2. Nick Durin (CRW) 23.15
3. James Entwistle (Bett) 23.41
4. Jakob Kehoe (CRW) 23.43

100 Butterfly

1. Jared Thorson (CRW) 53.74
2. Derek Yu (WDM Valley) 57.60
3. Hunter Haws (Ankeny) 57.69
9. Matt Jackson (CRW) 59.12

Ryo Ueno a revelation for Warriors

Written by Tom Fruehling

Saturday, 12 January 2013 22:05 - Last Updated Saturday, 12 January 2013 22:29

10. Logan Barnes (CRW) 59.23

100 Free

1. Alex Bodin (WDM Valley) 49.18
2. Sam Gorham (WDM Valley) 49.43
3. Ryo Ueno (CRW) 50.49

500 Free

1. Josh Hughes (CRW) 4:52.77
2. Chandler Cox (Ankeny) 4:56.54
3. David Merriman (WDM Valley) 5:03.93

200 Free Relay

1. WDM Valley 1:29.25
2. Washington (Durin, Ueno, Hughes, Thorson) 1:30.99
3. WDM Valley 1:33.97
4. Washington (Kehoe, Zalesky, Kopec, Scheetz) 1:34.21

100 Back

1. Alec Carlson (Wauk South) 53.56
2. Conner Clements (CF) 55.59
3. Cole Plumber (CF) 58.64
6. Ian McElree (CRW) 59.61

100 Breast

1. Jaden VanDike (WDM Valley) 1:01.81
2. Tanner Nelson (Bett) 1:04.04
3. Nick Michels (CF) 1:04.73
5. Nick Durin (CRW) 1:06.23
8. Sami Scheetz (CRW) 1:06.76
9. John Kopec (CRW) 1:07.49

400 Free Relay

1. Washington (Hughes, Ueno, Saulnier, Thorson) 3:20.10
2. Waukesha South 3:23.64
3. Ankeny 3:25.88