

Linn-Mar swimmers go the extra miles

Written by Jim Ecker

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The dedicated members of the Linn-Mar High School girls swimming team put in long, long days.

The morning workouts at the Coe College pool near downtown Cedar Rapids begin at 5:30 a.m. and last until 7, and then the girls return to Linn-Mar by 7:45 for their regular schedule of classes.

The afternoon workouts, also at Coe, last from 4:15 p.m. until 6:15, and they get back to Linn-Mar about 6:45. Then they go home, eat dinner, do their homework, fall asleep and do it all over again the next day (except when there are meets).

Somehow, the Lions managed to have the highest GPA of all the teams at Linn-Mar High School last year.

Coach Chad Derlein credits the swimmers, especially the seniors, for overcoming the obstacle of not having an on-campus pool of their own.

"The leadership of our senior class as a collective whole is a rarity and proves to be a great asset for our program," he said. "They are very well respected and looked up to by all.

That is something a coach looks for every year."

The girls swimming season in the Metro area begins Tuesday with Kennedy, Jefferson and Washington all having dual meets. Linn-Mar starts on Tuesday, Aug. 30.

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There have been some changes in Metro girls swimming this year that could alter the landscape, with big changes for the swimmers from Prairie and Xavier.

Prairie had been swimming with Williamsburg High School in recent years, but that ended and the Hawks are now competing with Jefferson High School. There are 14 Prairie athletes on the Jefferson team this season.

Xavier had its own team last year, but there were not enough girls for a squad this year. Two Xavier girls are swimming for Kennedy and two others are competing with Washington. McKenzie Asplund, who finished 21st and 22nd at two events at state last year for the Saints, is now swimming for the Warriors.

Linn-Mar has swimmers from neighboring schools as well, including four from Mount Vernon High School and one apiece from Anamosa, Springville and Marion. Some of the girls who attend the other schools are excused from morning workouts, due to the extra time and distance, but otherwise the Lions are in the pool or working out.

Linn-Mar finished 17th at the state meet last year, which was the second-highest finish among the Metro schools. Kennedy placed 16th and Washington finished 22nd.

"This year I think it's going to be Linn-Mar's best year, other than 1998 when we finished fifth," Derlein said. "I'm saying top 10."

The Lions have eight returning state qualifiers, giving them a good nucleus. Emily Berg qualified in four events last year and placed ninth in the 100 breaststroke, 12th in the 200 freestyle relay, 13th in the 200 medley relay and 19th in the 50 free.

Nicole Larson and Alex Dunn swam in three events at the state meet for Linn-Mar, while Lauren Dalecky and Samantha Fitzgerald participated in two events. Sam Wagner (ninth in 1-meter diving), Jessica Arebaugh and Bailee Seger all appeared in one event at state.

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The Lions have a blend of experience and youth.

"We have a great incoming freshman class that will add to our already deep team," Derlein said. "And not to forget diving, we have two returning state qualifiers (Wagner and Seger) as well as five other divers wit