Spirited Lady Knight Swim Team Battles Low Numbers

Kristen Wehling
News Editor

The aroma of chlorine lingers in the humid air of the pool at Loy Norrix High School. Just before the start of afternoon swim practice, fifteen girls sing along to the popular Bowling for Soup song "1985," a chart-topper from a few years back.

The women's swim team is always looking for new participants, but more importantly they must show dedication and heart, whether or not they have swam competitively before.

The Lady Knights are demonstrating perseverance and commitment to the team despite a decline in participants, dropping from 30 swimmers in the 2006 season to only 15 in the 2007 season. Junior Martha Alves does not mind the small numbers.

"It's always nice to have more girls on the swim team. As long as everyone enjoys being on the swim team there's not much to change," said Alves,

Despite low numbers in participation this year, the Loy Norrix women's swim team is having a successful season, but they are measuring success in a different kind of way. The team has a motto this year, "Unity." With only fifteen participants on the 2007 team, the girls have spent a lot of time getting to know each other and are ditching the several cliques that formed during the previous swim season.

The Lady Knights are striving to become successful personally. Keeping this in mind, the swimmers are hoping to place higher in swim meets through more individual training. With fewer ladies swimming this year, there is more time to train in individual events. This is especially important for the new freshmen currently on the swim team.

The bond of the women's swim team this year is especially intriguing to newcomer, freshman Claire Jung, who was excited about the swim team's spontaneous trip to Cedar Point this year.

"Going to Cedar Point was a good way to get to know people outside of school. There's a team tradition to go to South Haven. We were on a walk and discussed how many of us had never been to Cedar Point, so we decided to go there instead," said Jung.

Jung is enthusiastic about meeting upper classmen on the swim team and getting to know all of the girls a little bit better. Incoming freshmen especially may find it intimidating and difficult to meet new students at a new school. Jung thought that joining the swim team would be a great way to make friends before the 2007-2008 school year began.

The dedication of this year's swim team is one of the primary foundations for the team. With morning practices beginning at 5:30 a.m., some students may find this early practice difficult and uninviting, losing the interest of prospective swimmers. However, the young ladies are looking past the early practice in order to improve their individual skills as they strive to become better athletes.

"Everybody has definitely improved a lot, especially our newbies. They're definitely showing a lot of heart," said senior Rebecca Dinges, a captain of the swim team.

In terms of seeking out new swimmers for the team, Dinges recommends it to "anybody who has got heart and dedication."

Swim coach Paul Mahar is open to taking in more swimmers, but only those who are willing to commit.

"Always, always, always, always. I will take anybody who is dedicated and has a beating heart," said Mahar.

The switch-over of sports seasons, effected by the Title IX ruling earlier this year, has affected the team, forcing some former swimmers to choose between swimming and golf for instance. Participation has decreased due to this change in the seasons, but valuable bonding experiences have emerged. The ladies hope that this time together along with more practice will help in preparation for conference in the fall. Alves is happy with the swim team's progress this year.

"We have good team unity this year," said Alves, optimistically. "We're not necessarily winning meets but everyone is improving their times and everyone is just having a lot of fun."

Coach Paul Mahar is extremely happy with the team this year. He constantly smiles at the swimmers and laughs at their humor.

"I'm just so happy with this team," said Mahar. "In terms of wins and losses this will probably be our worst season, but it will probably be one of the best seasons because of the attitude and dedication of the girls."

KRISTEN WEHLING/KNIGHT LIFE

Members of the women's swim team do pull sets to strengthen their arms. Pull sets are an exercise that involve the use of paddles which attach to the hands to help work the arms harder and define the stroke.

Norrix Sports Raises Academic Eligibility

ANGELO MURRAY/KNIGHT LIFE

Freshman, Cassandra Morales helps Hannah Flemming with math. The two often go to AAC for extra help.

Jana Graudins
Copy Editor

Seasons are not the only thing to change for Loy Norrix sports this year. Along with season changes, new academic eligibility policies have been introduced. Norrix now requires a 2.5 grade point average to participate in sports, up from 2.0. Eligibility has been modified in the hopes of raising the GPA for student athletes involved in high school sports.

These changes are an initiative made by both of the Kalamazoo Public School's high school athletic directors and the KPS director of secondary education, Timon Kendall.

Andrew Laboe, LN's Athletic Director, believes the eligibility change will help students get ready for graduation and college.

"[The decision was made] in order to prepare students to be ready to use the Promise," said Laboe.

He also hopes to see an improvement in grades. "Especially with the freshman class...we expect it [GPA's] overall to be higher," said Laboe.

Although some athletes may benefit from these new policies, others feel that the Academic Achievement Center, the after school tutoring program, is more of a nuisance than a help.

Freshman Lauren McGlinn is disappointed with the mandatory AAC tutoring. "[It's] like getting punished for not doing anything wrong. They should take into consideration our middle school grades," said McGlinn, a varsity cross country runner. She also critiqued the AAC requirement. "We don't get a lot done in an hour."

AAC creates a disadvantage for athletes who practice right after school, and it causes them to lose valuable practice time. "We have three freshmen," said McGlinn, "We don't get the same workout as the team."

> "[It's] like getting punished for not doing anything wrong."
> -Lauren McGlinn

There are positives and negatives to the new policies enacted this year. According to Laboe, the program is too new to judge whether it is working or not. Tutoring is likely to help students raise their grades and focus more on academics. However, for some it seems unnecessary to have AAC mandatory for all freshman athletes.

Peak Performers in Sports

Jocelyn Hillard
Guest Writer

Name: Mark Denenfeld
Grade: Senior
Sport: Tennis

Mark Denenfeld is a four year varsity tennis player and has been competing since he was a young child. He plays the top position, won singles, and has only lost four matches this season. The Loy Norrix's team record for this year is 7-3-2 which Denenfeld is very proud of.

"We've done surprisingly well," Denenfeld said, "we lost a couple of key members from last year," he added.

Denenfeld does not play any other sports so he is able to dedicate most of his time towards tennis. In the spring he competes in many USTA competitions, always trying to better his game. Denenfeld plans to continue his tennis career in college but as of right now he is unsure of where.

Name: Sydney Kelpin
Grade: Junior
Sport: Golf

Junior Sydney Kelpin plays the number one spot on Loy Norrix's varsity golf team. This is her third year participating and she has high goals to achieve before she graduates. This year Kelpin placed seventh in Central Division.

"I want to make all-conference next year," Kelpin said.

She hopes to follow in the footsteps of her older brother, senior Barrett Kelpin.

Kelpin enjoys playing on the golf team and even though the team doesn't win often she still has a lot of fun.

Kelpin's favorite part of being on the golf team is riding in the vans to and from matches and making jokes with her best friends, who are also on the team. Despite all the jokes and fun at practice she still manages to get down to business.

"You're not going to improve if you don't practice, so I try to play as much as I can," said Kelpin.

With all of her efforts and commitment to the team Kelpin hopes that she'll improve for next year and will be very successful.

Name: Derrick Scott
Grade: Senior
Sport: Football

Derrick Scott, a senior at Loy Norrix, is a star on the football field. He has played on Loy Norrix's football team for four years, two on varsity, and is a starting wide receiver this year. Scott is very dedicated to the team and doesn't have much free time. Whether it is going to practice, doing schoolwork or helping out around his house, Scott is always busy.

To prepare in the off season he runs track to keep in shape, lifts weights and works on his fundamentals. Scott hopes to continue to play in college by starting off at Grand Rapids Community College and working his way up to Michigan State . He encourages LN's team to continue to grow and get stronger.

"If you don't play [on the team], come out and try, especially if you have some talent. For the kids who do play just keep working hard and get better," said Scott.

Scott admits to being very aggressive on the field and has already made two touchdowns this season