Written by STEVE OSTERMANN
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With most of their state qualifiers back and new coach, Grafton girls set sights on high honors in swimming, diving

There's a bounty of talent on the Grafton girls' swimming and diving team this season.

There's also a new poolside leader.

John Douglass, a longtime coach for the University School/Brown Deer co-op team, has taken over the head coaching job. He succeeded Adan Burgos, who stepped down after last season.

Douglass, who most recently served as an assistant swim coach at the University of Wisconsin-Milwaukee, is enthused about taking over a Grafton team that last year placed eighth in the WIAA Division 2 state meet.

Bolstered by the return of most of its state qualifiers, including sophomore standout Sam Senczyszyn, the Black Hawks should again be among the area's top Division 2 squads.

"I'm very excited. This is a very talented team with a terrific group of young ladies," Douglass said.

Senczyszyn is one of five returning state qualifiers for Grafton, coming off a second-place finish in the 100-yard breaststroke and a fifth in the 50 freestyle. She has participated in the U.S. Olympic trials and recently competed in the Junior Nationals.

"Sam is solid in the breaststroke but has the versatility to do well in a lot of events," Douglass said.

The Hawks' other returning state individual qualifiers include juniors Stephanie Haebig (500 freestyle) and Paige Schommer (diving) and sophomore Rachel Hauer (breaststroke, 100 butterfly). Besides competing in individual events, each participated on state relay teams, as did senior Kaitlyn Brooks.

Among the team's other top performers will be seniors Anna Hauer, Ally Sandoval and Katelyn Gallun, sophomore diver Gabby Kraus and freshmen Natalie Keshemberg, Lily Kaplan and Katherine Bordetskaya. Kraus has returned to her specialty after missing last season due to a knee injury.

Hauer and Sandoval are the Hawks' co-captains.

"We have some very talented young swimmers who are going to make an impact on the program," said Douglass, who had about 25 girls come out for the sport this fall.

Strong finishes to start season

Grafton opened the season with a 95-85 win over Shorewood in a nonconference dual meet Aug. 22.

The Hawks got first-place finishes from Keshemberg in the 100 butterfly (1 minute, 1.13 seconds) and 100 backstroke (1:01.08), Rachel Hauer in the 200 individual medley (2:19.14) and breaststroke (1:12.63), Schommer in diving (155.5 points), the 200 medley relay of Haebig, Rachel Hauer, Keshemberg and Gallun (1:56.35) and 400 freestyle relay of Haebig, Rachel Hauer, Anna Hauer and Keshemberg (3:54.08).

Last Saturday, Grafton placed third out of six teams in the Wild Falconcat Invitational at University School. The Hawks scored 407 points, trailing champion Whitefish Bay (676) and runner-up Divine Savior Holy Angels (415).

Grafton was led by Rachel Hauer's victories in the individual medley (2:18.62) and breaststroke (1:11.0).

Placing second for the Hawks were Haebig in the 200 freestyle (2:04.16) and 500 freestyle (5:27.52), Keshemberg in the butterfly (1:02.47), the 200 medley relay of Haebig, Rachel Hauer, Keshemberg and Brooks (1:57.61) and 200 freestyle relay of Brooks, Bordetskaya, Anna Hauer and Gallun (1:51.5).

Taking third were Bordetskaya in the breaststroke (1:17.6) and the 400 freestyle relay of Haebig, Anna Hauer, Rachel Hauer and Brooks (4:01.67).

Douglass said his team entered the meet with a strong shot at second place but was hurt by the loss of Keshemberg, who had to withdraw midway through the competition because of an injury. The Hawks were also without Senczyszyn and lost points because diving was not an event.

"I was kind of planning on taking second, but all things considered, I was really pleased with our performance," he said.

This week, the Hawks faced a tough test in a Tuesday dual meet against Cedarburg, the defending North Shore Conference champion and one of the state's top Division 1 teams.

On Sept. 4, Grafton will host Germantown at 6 p.m.

Pirates, new coach tackle challenges

The Port Washington girls' swimming and diving team is leaping into a new season with a new coach and young talent in a bid for improvement.

Melissa Hoogester has taken over the head job from Maureen Jajtner, who resigned after last season.

Hoogester, who has coached swimming at West Bend East High School and is the director of the Port Washington-Saukville School District Aquatic Center, inherits a squad that will have to overcome a numbers shortage with steady performances.

"My first impression is that this group is a great, close-knit team," Hoogester said.

"Our goal is to get the girls to continue to improve, lower their times and enjoy themselves."

The Pirates, who are coming off a seventh-place finish in the North Shore Conference, will again be led by several outstanding divers. The group includes junior Kristen Smith, who placed 15th in last year's WIAA Division 2 finals as one of Port's three state-qualifying divers.

Bolstering this year's diving corps will be seniors Madeline Walls and freshman Becca Murray.

Among swimmers, Port will be led by senior Kelsey Zeman and junior Kelsey Brockman, who Hoogester said have looked strong in the backstroke and breaststroke, respectively.

Other team members include senior Madeline Binsfeld; juniors Brittany Heinen and Sarah Lesniak; sophomores Hanah Castillo, Alex Leiviska, Anne Leiviska and Abbey Schemenauer; and freshmen Elisa Anderson, Mikayla McBride, Breanna Grady and Alyssa Laabs.

Assisting Hoogester with coaching duties is Jessica Shupe.

This week, Port opened the season Tuesday with a dual meet against Milwaukee Lutheran.

On Sept. 4, the Pirates will host Homestead at 6 p.m.

Image Information: JUNIOR STEPHANIE HAEBIG is one of several state-meet qualifiers who will lead the Grafton girls' swimming and diving team this season. Photo by Sam Arendt