

Hawks eager to make waves again

Written by STEVE OSTERMANN
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With bounty of state-level performers on board, Grafton girls set their sights on top honors in Div. 2 swim battles

If you thought the Grafton girls' team finishing third at the 2012 WIAA Division 2 state swimming and diving meet was a surprise, get ready for another eye opener.

Armed with talent up and down their lineup, the Black Hawks are poised to make a bigger splash this fall.



"We are really looking forward to this season. We did pretty well at the state meet, but we think we could do even better this time," said coach John Douglass, who enters his second year at Grafton.

"We lost a few seniors to graduation and some from our 200 freestyle relay, but other than that, we've got everyone back. We're excited."

The Hawks had 11 individual performances and three relays qualify for last year's state meet in Madison, where they trailed only champion Shorewood and Milton in the Division 2 final.

All of Grafton's individual qualifiers are back, led by junior Sam Senczyszyn, who placed second in both the 50-yard freestyle and 100 breaststroke and was a member of a first-place 200 medley relay.

Senczyszyn continued to excel in high-profile meets during the off-season, most recently participating in the Junior Nationals.

"Samantha is a really talented young swimmer," Douglass said. "She's good enough to compete in any event and any of the relays."

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“Wherever we put her is going to depend on where we can score the most points.”

Senczyszyn heads a group of juniors that Douglass called “a major strength of our team.” The group also includes state qualifiers Rachel Hauer (breaststroke, individual medley) and Gabby Kraus (diving).

Kraus, who placed third at state, “is returning with some lofty goals,” her coach said. “She believes she can win it all.”

Among the Hawks’ top seniors are state qualifiers Stephanie Haebig (backstroke, 200 freestyle) and Paige Schommer (diving), along with Ari Sparapani, a transfer student from Brown Deer who didn’t participate in high school swimming last year but is expected to contribute in the individual medley, 200 freestyle and relays.

At the state meet, Haebig’s best individual finish was a seventh in the backstroke, and Schommer was sixth in her specialty.

Leading Grafton’s sophomores are two state qualifiers, Natalie Keshemberg (backstroke, butterfly) and Katherine Bordetskaya (individual medley), along with Lily Kaplan, who battled illness last year but is expected to bounce back as a contributor in the individual medley and 50 freestyle.

Keshemberg was slowed by a back injury and illness last year but recovered enough to shine at state with a sixth in the backstroke and seventh in the butterfly.

She was also a member of the state-champion medley relay along with Senczyszyn, Haebig and Hauer.

Further bolstering the Hawks’ attack will be two freshmen who have made their marks in age-group club swimming: Emma O’Brien and Autumn Haebig, Stephanie’s sister.

O’Brien has the versatility to participate in a variety of events but is likely to excel in the breaststroke and sprint freestyle races, Douglass said. Haebig, a state club champion who has competed at the national level, is impressive in the butterfly, backstroke and distance freestyle, he added.

“I think Autumn will be one of the top swimmers in Wisconsin,” Douglass said. “She’s simply that good.”

Despite being slowed by ailments for much of last season, Grafton showed its mettle by finishing second to perennial Division 1 power Cedarburg in the North Shore Conference meet and trailing only Shorewood in the Plymouth Sectional.

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“We had some problems staying healthy last year, and we still did pretty well. If we get around the sickness bug this time, it could be a special year for us,” Douglass said.

Douglass believes Cedarburg will again be the NSC title favorite this fall but expects his team to be a strong contender for at least runner-up honors. Last year, he noted, Grafton defeated Homestead for the first time in a dual meet.

“It used to be Cedarburg, Homestead, Germantown and Whitefish Bay at the top and all the rest of the teams at the bottom half,” he said.

“I think that’s changing. We have a chance to be right up with the best.”

The Hawks will make their 2013 season debut Saturday, Aug. 24, at the Brown Deer Invitational at 10 a.m. and then travel to Shorewood on Aug. 28 for a 6 p.m. dual meet.

Image Information: SOPHOMORE NATALIE KESHEMBERG is one of seven individual state qualifiers who have returned for the Grafton girls’ swimming and diving team this season.

Photo by Sam Arendt