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Mats, Cougars prepare for 'highlight' of DAL swimming season

By Karl Buscheck

On April 21, some 200 to 250 athletes - half wearing green, the other half wearing red - will descend on the deck of the Soda Aquatic Center in Moraga for the marquee event on the Diablo Athletic League swimming calendar.

"Well, it's definitely the highlight of the season on many fronts," said Miramonte head coach Don Heidary, whose Mats will compete against Campolindo.

"It's the most competitive dual meet (of our season) and it may be the most competitive dual meet in North Coast," Heidary added. "Our two teams are pretty strong. A lot of the kids know each other. A lot of the kids train together and my brother (Ron) coaches Campolindo."

The meet marks the penultimate competition of the DAL schedule for both sides and provides the Mats and the Cougars with a chance to cheer on their teammates and provide one of the final sendoffs for this year's class of seniors.

"It's a classic rivalry meet and it's always high energy, high intensity," Heidary said. "And generally the best dual meet times come from that meet."

Campolindo's head coach agreed fully with his brother's assessment.

"I tell the kids we're fortunate," Ron Heidary said. "We're so fortunate to have such a competitive program a couple of miles away. The kids get up for the meet and it's almost like an event in and of itself."

Leading up to the showdown with the Cougars, the Mission Viejo Invitational - held in Irvine on March 25 - stands out at the high-point of the Mats' season. Miramonte brought 40 swimmers to the meet and Heidary was impressed with the athletes in and out of pool.

"It was successful, very positive and competitive from a team perspective," Don Heidary said, noting that the Mats showed spirit and camaraderie rooting on their teammates. "The women finished second overall and combined we were third (and) there were about 40 teams in the meet."

With the DAL Finals looming on May 6, the NCS Finals approaching on May 13 and State Finals running on May 19-20, Don Heidary singled out a particular segment of his squad that is poised for a impressive postseason showing.

"The women's freestyle sprint group is pretty strong and has a chance to do well at North Coast and the State meet," he said.

Over at Campolindo, Jolen Griffin, a senior who's headed to UCSB next year and who won the NCS 100-meter backstroke last spring, is the Cougars' preeminent talent.

"He's one of the faster swimmers, I think, in the country at the high school level," Ron Heidary said. "He's outstanding and has been for four years. He's been a leader, a role model and he's very good. So he's an important part of the program."

While the Cougars have enjoyed considerable success in recent springs, Ron Heidary also puts a heavy emphasis on making sure that his upperclassmen - like Griffin - set the tone for the younger swimmers who, in turn, are expected to grow into future leaders.

"Our philosophy is team is first and you're a good teammate," Ron Heidary said.

"We have team goals that we want to achieve," the coach added. "We've had a pretty impressive dual meet record over the past 10 years and winning the league and we've won North Coast 14 times - girls and guys - over the last 20 years."

Before the DAL trials arrive on May 4, the Mats will conclude the dual meet portion of the schedule by competing against their other rival - Acalanes - on April 26 in Orinda.

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