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2022 Northwest Herald girls swimming team preview capsules

By Michal Dwojak

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Crystal Lake South co-op's Avery Watson swims the butterfly during 200 IM at the Woodstock North co-op swimming invitational on Sept. 18 at Woodstock North. Watson will be one of the top returning swimmers this fall. (Tony Gadomski/Tony Gadomski for Shaw Media)

Fox Valley Conference

Cary-Grove

Coach: Scott Lattyak (13th season)

Last season: Third in FVC

Top returners: Kelsey Harmsen, sr.; Maggie Bendell, jr.; Delaney Lentz, jr.

Key newcomer: Ella Urbates, fr.

Worth noting: Bendell returns after making school history last season by becoming the first diver from Cary-Grove to qualify for the state meet. Bendell finished seventh after her three final dives on the second day with a score of 434.95, only 1.1 points behind sixth-place finisher Taylor Cekay of Lake Forest (436.05). The junior was the first C-G swimmer/diver to win a medal in 16 years. Bendell can compete with C-G only in invitationals and the sectional and state meets because the school doesn't have a diving program. ... The Trojans graduated 10 seniors from last season's team and took in three freshmen to the program this season. Lattyak is trying to prepare his newcomers as much as possible for the tough jump from JV to varsity swimming. "I'm getting a good group of strong JV girls who are really embracing the challenge and want to be the best athletes that they can be," Lattyak said. "It's fun and very motivating right now with their mindset. They're excited to see what they can do." ... Harmsen earned the third-best area time at last season's Barrington Sectional in the 100-yard backstroke (1:03.02), in which she finished 10th overall, and the 50 freestyle (25.98 seconds), in which she finished 17th overall. ... Lentz finished 14th in the 100 breaststroke (1:12.23) at the Barrington Sectional.

Crystal Lake South co-op

(with Crystal Lake Central and Prairie Ridge)

Coach: John Valentine (sixth season)

Last season: Second in FVC

Top returners: Abi Zelikman (PR), jr.; Avery Watson (CLS), jr.; Maddy Uhl (PR), sr.

Key newcomers: Isabella Fontana (CLS), fr.; Emely Rudsinski (CLS) fr.; Penny Brereton (PR), fr.

Worth noting: Watson continued her growth last season by qualifying for the state meet as a sophomore for the Gators. She won the 100 backstroke at the Barrington Sectional (57.78) to qualify for state but didn't advance to the finals. Watson also just missed out qualifying in the 200 individual medley (2:09.63) by 0.68 of a second. The junior will be adding races this season and has spent the offseason working on her backstroke. ... Zelikman finished 12th in the 100 free (56.34) and 13th in the 100 breast (1:12.14) at the Barrington Sectional. Valentine is looking forward to watching Watson and Zelikman develop and make an impact on the younger swimmers. "They've both matured physically as well as their training styles," Valentine said. "Looking toward the end of this season, not only do I think they'll qualify for state this year, I think they can help two or three of our newer kids succeed as well." ... Uhl returns for her senior season after finishing sixth in the 200 IM (2:13.80) and seventh in the 100 back (59.95) at the Barrington Sectional, both the second-best local times. ... The Gators will have a deep group this season with 10 swimmers breaking 28 seconds in the 50 free and a few faster than 25 seconds. ... Brereton will give the Gators a true IM swimmer, something the coach said the program hasn't had. ... Valentine is looking forward to giving his swimmers an opportunity to compete as a team, something many don't get in club swimming. "I truly believe it is more fun for some of our kids who more or less compete as individuals most of the year," Valentine said.

Dundee-Crown

Coach: Amy Field (seventh season)

Last season: Sixth in FVC

Top returners: Ali Fitzgerald, sr.; Olivia Allendorf, sr.; Mia Dzik, so.

Key newcomer: Maggie Turek, fr.

Worth noting: Fitzgerald has continued to improve each season for the Chargers and barely missed out on the state meet when she finished fourth (1:07.11) in the 100 backstroke at the St. Charles North Sectional last season. She also finished 12th in the 50 free (26.0) at the sectional and took part in two relay teams, the 200 free and 200 medley. ... Field is excited for

Turek's prospects as a freshman after coming up in the Dundee swim club. "Jumping in and keeping up with our more experienced girls, I'm anxious to see what she's going to be able to do," Field said. ... D-C will have 18 swimmers in the program between the varsity and junior varsity teams. With a smaller program compared to others in the FVC, Field is "really focused on individual goals and achievements. I'm excited with some of our seniors."

Huntley

Coach: Jenna Gaudio (fifth season)

Last season: First in FVC

Top returners: Jillian Cherwin, sr.; Julia Smitendorf, sr., Cora Chesney, sr., Ashley Garrard, sr.; Rebecca Rocks, so.; Kate Gribbens, jr.

Key newcomer: Greta Young, fr.

Worth noting: The Red Raiders won their third straight FVC title last season and finished fourth in the St. Charles North Sectional. ... The 200 free relay team of Rocks, Gribbens, Garrard and Smitendorf set the program record at the sectional (1:42.87), and all return to try to compete for a spot at state this fall. "Seeing the potential that they have and all the upcoming things that they have for them this season is exciting," Gaudio said. ... Rocks finished fifth in the 50 free (25.28) and 11th in the 100 back (1:05.71) at the sectional for a strong end to her season. ... Cherwin finished eighth in the 200 free (2:04.84) and ninth in the 500 free (5:35.31) at the sectional, Cora finished seventh in the 100 breast (1:12.13), Garrard finished 11th in the 200 free (2:06.78) and Julia Smitendorf finished 11th in the 50 free (25.98) and 13th in the 100 butterfly (1:04.04). ... Huntley has plenty of representation from each class on the varsity team, something Gaudio enjoys. "To see a good mix of ages, mix of talent, it's been fun," Gaudio said. "I've loved watching the juniors and seniors step up into a leadership role as they show the underclassmen."

Jacobs co-op

(with Hampshire)

Coach: Rebecca Dziubla (second season)

Last season: Seventh in FVC

Top returners: Katelyn Mumper (Jac), jr.; Carly Pierzchalski (Jac), so.; Melanie Ng (Jac), so.

Key newcomer: Elena Rezabek (Hamp), sr.

Worth noting: Mumper finished eighth at the St. Charles North Sectional in the 100 back (1:01.89) and 10th in the 100 free (56.74) for the Golden Eagles. She also helped the 400 free relay finish seventh and the 200 medley relay finish ninth. ... Mumper, Pierzchalski and Ng were part of the 200 medley relay, and Dziubla is optimistic about what they can do with another season under their belt. "I'm excited to see where they can take that and seeing what our older girls can do as seniors," Dziubla said. ... Dziubla has spent the past couple of seasons growing the program and trying to find its identity by bringing in new swimmers from Jacobs and Hampshire. The coach is excited to watch the progress the Golden Eagles have made this season and how it will translate to success over the next few years. "I'm looking forward to continuing to build our program, especially after having a couple years of having to limit how many girls we could take on, just getting girls from different schools and seeing where we can build them up," Dziubla said.

McHenry

Coach: Sharon Lesniak (fourth season)

Last season: Fifth in FVC

Top returners: Andrea Avila, sr.; Victoria Sadowski, jr.; Campbell Bitterman, so.; Reilly Byron, jr.; Emma Blanken, so.; Jenna Harris, so.

Key newcomers: Emma Story, fr.; Jaycie Finch, fr.; Haley LaForme, fr.; Aurora Dunwoody, fr.; Zuzanna Padizior, fr.

Worth noting: Blaken returns after earning McHenry's best finish at the Barrington Sectional last season. She finished 11th in the 100 back (1:03.92) and also earned an 18th-place finish in the 200 IM (2:28.62). ... Byron finished 12th in the 50 free (25.74) and 15th in the 100 breast (1:12.66). ... Lesniak is confident in her group of returning swimmers that they can turn on their best when it matters the most toward the end of the season. "I believe they can push forward toward the end of the season and do really well," Lesniak said. ... The Warriors bring in an impressive group of freshman year-round swimmers that the coach thinks can make an impact not only this season but in the next few years. "I really think they're going to be hard workers and do really well toward the end of the season," Lesniak said.

Woodstock North co-op

(with Woodstock)

Coach: Renee Walker (ninth season)

Last season: Fourth in FVC

Top returners: Addison Walker (WHS), jr.; Bella Borta (WN), jr.

Worth noting: Borta returns for Woodstock North after she finished 15th in the 50 free (25.80) at the Barrington Sectional and 16th in the 100 free (57.81). She also helped the 200 free relay earn a sixth-place finish at the meet. ... Walker finished 20th in the 100 back (1:09.74) and 21st in the 200 free (2:13.81). The junior also took part in the 200 free relay and 200 medley relay. ... Woodstock North will try to replace Hannah Blaksley and Haley Halsall, both of whom competed in the state meet last season and graduated. Walker is looking for Borta and Walker to step in and impress this season. "Both of these ladies should represent Woodstock very well in the Fox Valley Conference championship meet and will forward on to sectionals," Walker said. ... Woodstock North is bringing in a large number of swimmers who are new to the sport, but Walker is confident in their ability to grow. "Our team is growing," Walker said. "They are new, but they are eager to learn, compete and become stronger athletes."

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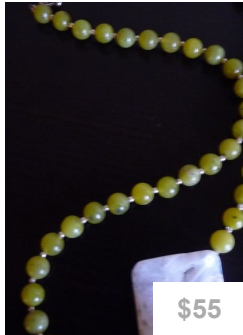
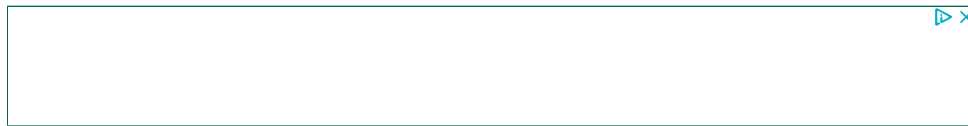


Michal is an award-winning sports journalist based in Chicago. He most recently served as the sports editor of The Glenview Lantern and Northbrook Tower and is a graduate of the College of Media at the University of Illinois, Urbana-Champaign.



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