



LOCKPORT GIRLS SWIM & DIVE



By Randy Whalen

When the girls swim season started, veteran coach Grant Ferkaluk spoke to his Lockport Township team.

"After our first home meet, I talked to the girls about how fortunate we are that we have a season," Ferkaluk said of the meet on Thursday, Sept. 3 against Andrew. "We are the only indoor sport that the IHSA (Illinois High School Association) has allowed to happen."

Indeed, with the coronavirus pandemic going on since March, all the other IHSA sports this fall (boys and girls cross country, boys and girls golf, girls tennis) are all outdoors. But not only are the Porters able to compete in the pool, but their home fans are also allowed to come and watch them.

"Most other schools aren't allowing any spectators for swimming," Ferkaluk said. "The integrity and support from our athletic department and school are second to none."

Many parents were on hand for the Porter's most recent meet. That was on Thursday, Sept. 24, and was a 158-50 over SouthWest Suburban Conference rival, Stagg, in Lockport.

There the Porters (3-2, 3-1 in the SWSC) not only captured 11 of the 13 events, but they also placed the top two in those 11 events and the top three in 10 of them. Because of COVID-19 concerns, there are no relays or JV competitions in meets this season. That allows swimmers to be in up to four individual events. Junior Hayley Bogdan took full advantage of that by winning all four of hers.

Those were the 200-yard freestyle (2 minutes: 06.62 seconds), with senior Alyssa Wengel (2:09.59) finishing second. The 50-yard freestyle (27.05 seconds), with freshman Erin Svoboda (:27.53) second, the 100-yard freestyle (57.77 seconds), ahead of junior Alyssa Bates (:59.63), and the 100-yard breaststroke (1:14.61) with junior Grace Christopher (1:23.96) second.

"It's my first time winning all four events and it does feel really good," Bogdan said. "Just going into the season and knowing you can achieve something if you put your mind to it."

Last year Bogdan went to State in the 100-yard freestyle and as part of the Porter 200-yard medley relay and 400-yard freestyle relay. There is no State Tournament slated for this season and having sectionals is still up in the air. But Bogdan is happy there is a season.

"We didn't think it would happen," she said of having a swimming season, "We are really thankful, especially with a young team. It's nice to bond and gets everyone ready for next year."

Just like Bogdan, junior Monika Mikuckas has been on the varsity all three seasons. Mikuckas won a pair of events against Stagg. Those were the 200-yard individual medley (2:32.64) with sophomore Madeline Yehling (2:39.05) placing second, and the 100-yard butterfly (1:07.31) with Yehling (1:12.65) second there as well.

"It's neat that we're like the older ones and we've taken that experience to be more of a leader," Mikuckas said of her and Bogdan having the varsity experience to step to the forefront. "I am hoping (there is a sectional). I'm always really excited at that time and love that feeling of having your best race at the end of the season and seeing how much you have improved."

Wengel is the only senior on the actual varsity roster. Against Stagg, she captured the 100-yard IM (1:10.05) with Bates (1:14.12) second, and the 500-yard freestyle (5:52.45) by 41 seconds over Yehling (6:33.45). Not bad for someone whose favorite event is the 50-free.

"The 50-free is my favorite and last year I was in three of the relays," said Wengel, who was also part of the Porter 200-yard medley relay and 400-yard freestyle relays at State last season. "Being the only senior has its ups and downs. But Hayley and Monika have stepped up and we all want to teach the younger swimmers what it would be like to have a normal season even without us having a normal season,"

Also winning events for Lockport was Bates (:32.80 seconds) over junior Maryam Ajibola (:33.18) in the 50-yard backstroke. Sophomore Abigail McCarthy (:36.93) with freshman Sofia Reyes (:38.94) second in the 50-yard breaststroke, and Yehling (:29.90) over Svoboda (:31.34) in the 50-yard butterfly.

Stagg won two events. Senior Lizzie Gbabiri (224.75) established a new 6-dive career-high score in the diving competition for the Chargers. Lockport senior Kaycee Sears (188.45), who is in her second season diving and Ferkaluk says is "working hard and doing a great job," was second for the Porters.

Freshman Olivia Ciszek (1:09.01) won the 100-yard backstroke for the Chargers. Bates (1:12,00) was second.

"With the relays out we've added the 100-yard IM and some of the 50-yard stokes," Ferkaluk said of the expanded event lineup for the dual meets. "We don't know if there will be a sectional or not this season. Our drive and focus have always been on that (the Porters have a current streak of 5 straight sectional titles and have won 6 in 7 years).

"But we are working hard, setting goals and going after them."