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Seton strong in pool despite enrollment

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With an enrollment of about 350 students -- 245 if you don't count seventh- and eighth-graders -- Manassas' Seton School hardly seems equipped to compete against schools with nearly 10 times the student body.

But, riding the momentum of 10 straight Delaney Athletic Conference championships and employing plenty of parental support, the Conquistadors have done just that, in addition to remaining at the top of the DAC. Seton's girls have beaten both North Stafford and Battlefield, while both the boys and girls post times that compare with the best in Prince William County's big schools and will send swimmers to the Catholic National Championships Jan. 29-30.

Some of Seton's toughest competition, however, is also the friendliest.

At what third-year swim coach Jim Koehr calls a definite "basketball school" during the winter, just getting student-athletes to swim is tough enough. With 57 swimmers, including 22 boys, Koehr's got a team larger than many of his local public school counterparts, not to mention one that's exciting the small private school's student body.

"Swimming's becoming a really big thing, partly because we're having so much success," said Koehr, who has about one in seven students at the school on the team.

For the first time, he notes, students with talents both on the court and in the pool are choosing swimming.

"Katie Planchak is an awesome basketball player," he said. "Jessica Dunn is an awesome basketball player. It kind of shows me that Seton is deep enough in both sports to have that and keep having success in both."

Seton's boys sit atop the DAC standings after defeating Fredericksburg

Academy and Fredericksburg Christian School this past Saturday. But it's the Seton girls, with much of its talent in the sophomore year or younger, that's in the midst of a dominating season.

The Conquistador girls beat Battlefield by 71 points, and defeated North Stafford -- Stafford's largest high school, with an enrollment of more than 2,000 -- for the first time this season. They've at least doubled the scores of the rest of their opponents.

"There won't be a team in the DAC that scores half of what our girls will score," said Koehr. The DAC championships are Feb. 5 at the Freedom Center in Manassas.

A week prior, Seton will send 13 of its best swimmers to the Catholic Nationals at Villanova University in Philadelphia. Koehr expects strong finishes from Planchak in the 50- and 100-yard freestyles, Kevin Koehr in the backstroke and freshman Nevin Cook in the breast stroke. Koehr and Cook also lead off Seton's medley relay, as they do during the year-round season for QDD.

At nationals, the girls will swim all three relays, while the boys are entered in the medley and 200 freestyle relay.

Following the DAC Championships, Seton will compete in the VSIS State Championships Feb. 18-19 at Hargrave Military Academy in Chatham. To date, Dunn, Planchak, Melissa Dunn, Caitlin Harris, Lea Mazzocoli, Meg Seale, Hailey Moya, Mary-Kate Kenna, Kimberley Melnyk and Meghan Morch have qualified from the girls team. Cook, Koehr, Bryan Morch, Andrew Davis and Sean Koehr are Seton boys who have qualified.

As good as they are now, the future at Seton looks brightest.

"My girls team is going to be out-of-control good in the next few years," Jim Koehr said.

What's most impressive, perhaps, is how Seton has been able to reach their level of success. As with many of the best high school swim teams, parents are a big part -- maybe even bigger at Seton.

"One way Seton is unique is that the parents are so involved," Koehr said. "We don't go to meets in a bus. We go in parents' cars. When we go to nationals, it's almost like a family affair. Everyone has at least one parent there."

Koehr and his four assistant coaches have also helped build Seton's depth by focusing on teaching the swimmers who aren't year-rounders proper technique. The Conquistadors then focus on personal records for every swimmer,

regardless of whose times are fastest.

"People are attracted to excellence," Koehr says. "When they feel themselves improving, being excellent, it's fun."

Koehr believes getting each swimmer to push for his or her best has a lot to do with Seton's success.

"By emphasizing that, the winning takes care of itself," he said.

TIGER WATCH

Brentsville's second-year program will take to the water tonight at the Freedom Center in the Northwestern District Championships. The meet gets underway at about 6:10 p.m.

Fauquier, which will join Osbourn, Osbourn Park, Stonewall Jackson and Battlefield in the Cedar Run District next season, is among the favorites. John Handley, Millbrook, Liberty, Sherando and James Wood round out the field.

Highlights from the last meet

- **FOREST PARK:** The Bruin boys needed every last point for the second week in a row, coming from behind to defeat Gar-Field. Behind 30 time improvements, Forest Park rallied from behind after their "A" relay was disqualified in the opening event. They whittled away the deficit over the next six events to draw within five points. Key events for the Bruins were double wins by Thomas Scovel in the 50 and 100 freestyles, and their performance in the 100 backstroke (Jamie Way was first, Brian Leslie third, Stephen Schorn fifth and Jonathan Hilliard sixth) and 100 breast stroke (Jameson O'Brien was first, Daniel Moore second and Gary Merrell fifth).

For the girls, Forest Park took first (Amanda Hauck, Kate Cronje, Allison Marocco, Mikell Larson) and third (Michelle Arnold, Valerie Klemencic, Melissa Moore, Kelly Beyer) in the 200 freestyle relay. In the 50 freestyle Larson, Cronje and Samantha Markiewicz were first, second and third, and Beyer took sixth. The 200 freestyle was another key event as Marocco was second, Markiewicz fourth and Elizabeth Mabeus fifth.

The Bruins broke team records in the 200 and 400 freestyle relays and 400 free and had 28 time improvements during the meet.

- GAR-FIELD: Brittany Fox and Sarah Taylor were double winners, helping the girls outlast Forest Park 165-121.

- HYLTON: Damir Scasni earned two personal bests.

- WOODBRIDGE: Against Hylton, the boys won all three relays and all eight individual events. Brad Blair (200 freestyle, 50 freestyle), Matt Penning (200 IM, 100 butterfly) and Scott Russell (500 free, 100 backstroke) were double winners, while Blair (50 freestyle) and Russell (500 freestyle) achieved regional cut times. Taylor Osbourne and Grant Rackham added two personal bests each.

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