

## Community HS Sports: Top Stories

Jan. 22, 2007, 11:03PM

# Clear Lake far out front as favorite of league meet this weekend

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If the 24-5A Meet was an election, the pollsters — in this case, the other district coaches — would declare Clear Lake a landslide winner.

"It looks like it's going to be the same old story with Clear Lake the big favorite in both divisions (girls and boys)," Clear Creek coach Will Haltom said. "I'm trying to develop my own depth, just like the rest of the district, but right now, Clear Lake just has the numbers along with a number of quality swimmers."

Other coaches agree, like Pearland's Chris Roberts, who said, "Clear Lake is very strong again this year, and really, their girls are even stronger than they've been in the last couple of years. Clear Lake can go into the district meet and fill a lot of slots, and pile up the points, and that makes them really hard to beat."

Alvin coach Len Garcia adds: "Clear Lake has so much depth, I don't see anyone else challenging for the team championships."

It's unanimous, and while exact records aren't available, it's widely recognized that the Falcons and Lady Falcons have owned the district event ever since Clear Lake opened in 1972, and that was even before swimming and diving was an official University Interscholastic League activity.

"I understand from former coaches and swimmers that our boys have won every year, and our girls have won every year except one," Clear Lake's 13th-year coach Tom Landgraf said. "It's 30-something for both teams, sort of like the old TV show."

It may be hard to believe, but the Lady Falcons have become even stronger thanks to an influx of talented freshman like Ellen Lobb, who has set team and TISCA records in her first season of competition.

"Lobb is just a tremendous competitor, and it doesn't matter what race or distance," Landgraf said. "She just likes to race, and she's extremely good at it."

Clear Lake's well-stocked stable of what Landgraf describes as "thoroughbreds" includes seniors Sierra Dyer, Monica Beggs, Tara Romero and Kristin Rains, juniors Rosa Gentile and one-meter diver Nika Cranmer, sophomores Wendy Tsai, Danielle Garcia and Jeannette Wacker, and freshmen Kathy Lin, Megan McGuire and Caroline Baliker.

"This is the best girls teams we've had in a few years, and we've had some very good ones in the past," Landgraf said.

The Clear Lake boys may not have as much firepower as their female counterparts, but they still pack a punch thanks to juniors Joseph Kirasich and Jonathan Fouty, and sophomores Andrew McDonald, Josh Hurley and Kyle Gonzalez.

"Our game plan is designed to get as many swimmers and divers to state as possible, and that doesn't change from year to year," Landgraf said. "It starts with district, where we try to get a large number in the top six of each event, and then go and attack the region meet."

The Lady Falcons were third at regionals last year and the Clear Lake boys came in fifth.

Clear Brook has one of the top family acts in the area with freshman twins Adriana and Julia Sepulveda joining older sister Diana, a junior, on deck.

The Lady Wolverines also have seniors Laura Peterson and Lauren Holderrieth, junior Melissa Au and sophomore Kelly Vu going for region berths, according to coach Rick Barker.

Wolverine junior Mark Grijalva is the defending district meet most valuable swimmer, and he's shooting for region and state berths this year, along with senior teammates Alex Ruchte and Chuck Prosch, and junior Will Garske.

"Clear Lake will be the district favorite every year because they have so many outstanding swimmers in that community," Barker said. "They have one of the best girls teams I've ever seen."

Clear Creek is led by seniors Justin Russo and John Christopher, junior diver Bradley Berryhill, and freshman Benny Berezin in the boys division, and Lady Wildcat junior Kat Silkowsky and sophomore Kacie Baker.

"We're looking at Berryhill as a lock to go to regionals, Russo won the (district meet) 200 freestyle last year, and Christopher is trying to come back from injuries that plagued him last year," Haltom said. "We're excited about Berezin's chances to advance to regionals as a freshman. That's always exciting when that happens."

The top six district finishers in every event advance to next week's Class 5A Region 6 Meet at the Katy High School Aquatic Center with diving Tuesday at 10:30 a.m., swimming prelims Feb. 1 at 11:05 a.m. and swim finals Feb. 3 at 10:05 a.m.

The UIL State Meet is Feb. 16-17 in Austin.



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