

With district meet coming soon, Brook swimmers look to leaders

Members of the Clear Brook High School aquatics program have one thing in mind as the district championships approach — doing their best.

Regional power Clear Lake is heavily favored to win the meet hosted by Brazoswood High School, which comes Jan. 27 at the Lake Jackson Recreation Center.

The Falcons simply have too much talent, both in ability and numbers, to be toppled in the point standings. That fact, however, doesn't discourage the Clear Brook team or head coach Rick Barker.

"Right now we're focused on our speed work and getting ready to race," Barker said.

"What we can do is aim for personal best times in the different events and hope to get some kids to regionals. We have several kids capable of getting there, so we're looking forward to it."

Leading the way for Clear Brook is junior Mark Grijalva, the two-time defending most valuable swimmer in the district.

Already one of the best since the day he stepped onto the Clear Brook campus, Grijalva has been the one to reckon with in the distance swims across the district.

Even Tom Landgraf, leader of the powerful Clear Lake team, has said Grijalva is one of the finest he has seen in recent years.

For the Wolverines, Grijalva competes in the 200-yard individual medley, the 200-freestyle and the 500-freestyle.

The junior owns the school record at 4 minutes, 44 seconds in the 500-free and has a personal best time of 1:47.02 in the 200-free.

Clear Brook has been home to more than a dozen All-America performers since opening in the late 80s. Grijalva clearly is another potential candidate.

The junior might be the top swimmer in the district at least in terms of honors. He does not, however, take anything for granted.

"Mark is one of those guys who can work hard but still have a lot of fun. The other guys see that and are pushed to do the same thing. In that respect, having a talented swimmer like Mark has been great so far."

It remains to be seen just how fast Grijalva will have to go in his respective events to grab a regional or state berth, but Barker is not betting against his standout one day meeting his goals.

"Mark definitely has some high expectations," Barker said.

"He should. Mark has improved so much. He was pretty good when he got here, but he has just gotten better and better. He shaved eight seconds off his 500 time his freshman year and 10 more as a sophomore."

Grijalva humbly speaks of his expectations. He is honored to have been chosen as the top swimmer in the district two years running, but there is more work to be done.

"I am a little surprised at what I have done since I came to Brook," Grijalva said. "But I have been swimming my entire life and do have goals I'd like to achieve."

Both Barker and Grijalva agree now is the time to put everything together. This is when the best of the best stand up and are heard.

Grijalva has already gained membership to the group, but does have more to prove.

"There are a lot of factors involved on race day," Grijalva said. "Really, it's all about staying on pace and going for it in the end. All you can do is swim your best race."

Sepulveda trio makes waves
The Clear Brook team has also gained a big lift from the three Sepulveda sisters, including junior Diana and freshman twins Adriana and Julia.

Diana, one of the team's leaders, swims the 100-butterfly and the 100- and 500-freestyle events.

Adriana, already the school's record holder in the 200-freestyle (1:56.85) also competes in the 100-free, where she has tied the school record at 54.43.

Julia, a 100-breaststroker, has a personal best time of 1:08.68.

For the most part, the three sisters have always taken part in different events, rarely going head to head in youth swimming or now in high school.

Instead, the Sepulvedas simply want what's best for each other. Julia admits the breaststroke event is a good fit.

"I've always been a breaststroker," Julia said. "Even back in youth swimming, it seemed to be the one event I was good at."

Adriana is happy to have a school record, but she is only looking to do her part to help the team score better. The eldest sister, Diana, has stepped up as a team leader.

"Diana is a great sprinter," Barker said. "She has done a great job in all of her three years, but this year has really shown her leadership in her workouts and giving everyone a lift."

"In swimming, if you can get leaders like Diana and Mark to show the way with hard work and a desire to get better, you can have an effect on so many others. That's what I have seen here."

"We are a relatively young team, but we have some great leaders. Having the Sepulvedas back for another year after this as a

group of three and having Mark back means we are going to grow."

Other CBers doing well

Aside from Grijalva and the three Sepulvedas, Barker has come to rely on several other Wolverines who have also put together fine performances this season.

A pair of senior boys, Alex Ruchte and Chuck Prosch, have also fared well. Ruchte is a 100-breaststroker, while Prosch competes in the backstroke and butterfly events. Both could do well at district in their final year of competition.

On the girls' side, senior Laura Peterson has developed into a great competitor in several events, while Melissa Au is a solid backstroke and butterfly swimmer.

"These kids are really the top competitors for our team," Barker said. "Overall, we don't have as many kids as maybe Clear

Lake and Clear Creek have. We know it's always going to be that way because we can see it all the way up through youth swimming. That's fine. We're developing a good young group here at Clear Brook. Among the guys, we have three seniors and three juniors. The girls are young as a group as well."

And of course Barker loves the work and leadership being shown by Grijalva and others.

"It helps so much when your best athletes are your hardest workers," Barker said. "You can only do so much as a coach. You need your athletes to help out."

"When kids see an attitude like Mark's, it rubs off. We're trying to deeply embed that type of attitude here. When you have that, you can do a lot of good things as a program."

"At district we're going to all do our best and hope we come away with some personal best times."



A school record holder in the 500-yard freestyle, Clear Brook's Mark Grijalva has shown again and again why he has been named the district's most valuable swimmer the last two school years.



Clear Brook's Sepulveda sisters include junior Diana (center) and freshman twins Adriana (left) and Julia. Diana has become a team leader at Clear Brook, while the freshmen have taken aim at the Wolverines' record books. Photos by John Bechtel