

Our Athletes

Poised for postseason Blue Knight seniors are ready for final test

By JOHN GORALSKI
SPORTS WRITER

Coach Jay Dubinsky emerged from the YMCA pool fully clothed, dripping wet, but with a wide grin from ear to ear.

On Wednesday, Feb. 24, the Blue Knight swim team trailed NW Catholic from start to finish. Southington matched the Indians point-for-point after the first race but lost, 89-81. Why, then, was Dubinsky smiling?

Swimming

Because this year, the postseason is bringing excitement. Southington finished the season, 5-6, but stayed within a few points of some of the state's powerhouse programs. The team's come a long way in recent years, and Dubinsky credited his seniors.

"I kind of wondered,

when they came in, where the program was going to go. We lost a lot of numbers, but they stuck with it," he said. "They might not have the best win-loss record, but to see their times come down like they did is what you're looking for. These guys pushed themselves for four years, and that's a credit to them."

Against NW Catholic, the Knights fell behind by 10 points in the first event, but kept pace throughout the rest of the meet.

Kyle Nitz (2:03.28) won the 200 freestyle and finished second in the 500 freestyle. Mike Smigelski, Jason Albert, Timi Sowa, and Colin Magaro teamed for a victory in the 200 freestyle relay. Those were the only wins for the Knights, but they collected with nine second place finishes, seven third place finishes, and scored three times in all but a trio of individual

Feb. 24
NW Catholic 89
Southington 81

paces.

This year's team has more depth than ever before. Once again, Dubinsky credits his senior class.

"They came in at a time when numbers started to go down, and a lot of them were brand-new swimmers," said the coach. "To watch them grow over four years was something. To have them all get best times their senior was fulfilling and a credit to their hard work."

Now, the Knights will prepare for the upcoming postseason. Southington will have two divers at the diving competition in Hamden on March 11. The Knights will have multiple entrants in the swimming qualifying meet in Hamden on March 13, and Dubinsky expects to chal-



JOHN GORALSKI

Jon Gworek swims the 500 freestyle race during the regular season finale on Wednesday, Feb. 24. The postseason begins on March 11.

lenge for positions at the championship meet at Wesleyan University in Middletown on March 17.

"Now, we'll be narrowing down fewer swimmers in the pool, so we can really start to fine-tune technique," said Dubinsky. "We can cut

down on yardage to get some energy stored up. Those guys that will be swimming at states are all really close. I hope that they feed off of each other like they did last year to get best times at states. Hopefully, we can do it again. Maybe we'll even get

into some championship meet."

They've come a long way.

To comment on this story or to contact sports writer John Goralski, email him at jgoralski@southingtonobserver.com.

Unified Sports: UNICO sponsorship saves the day

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help us out with uniforms and transportation," Maddalena said. "It's wonderful because we can go to tournaments now. We can go to scrimmages. We'll start track and field in the spring, and they will give us start-up money for that to help us out. It's like a blessing from heaven to me."

The local program has already gained attention throughout the area. Special athletes are teamed with partners, and they compete in regional tournaments. Southington's team participates in intrasquad scrimmages during

halftime of varsity contests. The team gathers after practices for pizza parties and extra-curricular activities.

The success of this sports program isn't measured by wins and losses.

"If you look at these kids, it's become a big part of their lives," said Maddalena. "This is what makes them excited to come to school. They get to wear their uniforms and show their school pride. They haven't had that opportunity in many areas, so this has been great."

The program has received widespread recognition. Six Southington ath-

letes were invited to participate in a recent play day through the CIAC.

Southington High School was one of two schools contacted by Project Unify, a national program, to serve as a model for future school groups. The Knights were also approached by the University of Massachusetts to partici-

pate in an 11-state study for the federal government.

"We could not do this without the ongoing support of UNICO. They have such a legacy of positive involvement in our community, making contributions to many worthwhile organizations," said Southington High School Principal Kathleen

McGrath. "They're very supportive of our Italian Honor Society, the top 25 dinner, and now they recognize some very special students in our Unified Sports program. I appreciate all their efforts."

Ron Ingriselli said that the partnership was a perfect fit.

"I feel great about this. I'm happy for my wife

because she's involved with the program, and I'm very proud of UNICO," said Ingriselli. "I think they stepped up big-time. Kudos to our members. This is something we can look forward to doing for years."

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