

SPORTS



Senior Declan Lapsley celebrates another win by the girls and boys swim teams at the South Carolina regional meet on Oct. 7. Both the girls and the boys teams won the state championships on Oct. 13 at the University of South Carolina. *photo // Margaret O'Neil*

Swimming takes all

Excitement reigns as girls and boys win state championships

Annie Wright *staff writer*

From the beginning, he knew it was over. The final touch didn't mean a thing. The other three swimming behind him couldn't make a difference. Nothing could have shaded over the feeling of disappointment.

Senior Chase Collier felt this as he disqualified himself, and the rest of his 400 meter freestyle relay during the last race of the 2016 South Carolina High School League state swim meet.

"I felt like I had let the team down. Everyone had amped up the relay since it was the last event of the meet...then nothing counted," he said.

Collier, then a junior, flinched at the start of the race, resulting in an official disqualification of the relay's times. Although the race itself would not have changed the team's final standings, the boys couldn't shake what had happened, and they knew they weren't going to let it happen again.

And they didn't. They captured the state championship Oct. 13 by a 100-point margin, 465-365, over second place Riverside High School.

The girls' team also captured the state championship, winning by 46 points over second-place Riverside with a 397 points.

Now a team captain, Collier helped lead not only his team throughout the season to-

wards their goal, but the girls' team as well.

"After last year we got super angry at ourselves, and I was super angry at myself, but all that did was motivate us," Collier said. "It drove us to work way harder this year. We all had a positive mindset the whole time and knew we were not going to lose the meet."

With a new attitude and a new drive to win big, the girls and boys dominated at the Blatt Natatorium at the University of South Carolina in Columbia.

"Going in, I was pretty amped, but in the back of my mind I still didn't really know if we were going to win or not," said senior Piotr Tarala, team co-captain. "I knew we had a better team last year, so I didn't know how we'd look this year. I was pretty scared."

For two years, the boys had been ranked second, while the girl's team had placed third, both by only a handful of points.

Unlike many of the other high schools at the meet, both of Wando's teams included multiple swimmers in the top heats of each event. With more swimmers competing for higher standings, the points were easily racked up, putting the girls' and boys' teams on top. Within the first hour of the meet, both teams led by a margin of 40 points.

Senior and girls' team captain Elli Seabrook said the energy of the team was relaxed throughout the meet, encouraging each other to stay true to their goal and "just go for it."

Sticking to their focus, the boys led stuck throughout the meet, creating a gap that couldn't be approached.

Senior Johnny Gush repeated as state title winner in the 100-yard butterfly, adding that the meet was one of his "better performances within the last year."

Along with Gush, junior Cameron Mehta reigned number one in the 100-yard breaststroke.

In the last heat, Mehta was ranked fourth fastest among other top swimmers, yet he pulled past the rest adding 24 points to his team's overall score.

"We didn't think he would win. I knew he had the chance, but I wasn't expecting him to go that fast and do that and win" Tarala said. "After Cameron's race, we for sure knew we were going to win at that point. It just shot us above the rest."

Aside from individual wins the boys took first in both the 200-yard medley relay and 400-yard freestyle relay.

After the initial lead, the girls' standing was skimmed as rivals Riverside High School and Fort Mill High School began to place on top in individual and relay events. Despite their efforts, the competing teams could not defeat the Lady Warriors.

Senior co-captain for the girls' team, Erin Turner, added, "I knew we were about to win after the girl's final relay and [Coach Cheryl] Durden turned around, looked me in the eye and said 'All right, y'all need to back up. You're gonna jinx it.'"

In all their collected efforts, both teams took home shining gold medals, and pressure for next year's meet. Coach Durden reflected back on the moment.

"When everyone realized we had just won state, both boys and girls, it became so crowded and everyone was jumping up and down and freaking out," she said. "It was so great, it really was." With her fourth season coaching the teams, Durden argued her coaching wasn't the only thing driving her swimmers.

"Their motivation really got them to their first place win," she said. "All of our kids dropped all of their times. And with our captains, they really stepped up to help win their championships."

Boys and Girls Swimming

State Champions