



Photo by Chad Rhym

A HEFTY PRICE TO PLAY?

The swim team must account for unavoidable participation fees. Those not covered by the Athletic Department are passed on to students.

BY JORDAN RHYM
Sports Writer

To participate in most sports at Clarke Central High School, participants must account for specific fees. Of these sports, swimming and diving requires among the highest fees, which makes it inaccessible to many students.

"Swimmers pay \$280 for use of the pool, that's how much (the University of Georgia Ramsey Student Center) charges us for swimming, and so they have to pay that portion. And then they have to also pay for their suit," varsity head swimming coach Emily Dowd said.

In addition to practice fees, the team must pay for registrations. According to Dowd, the difference in what can be paid by the team's fund is passed on as fees to participants.

"There's a lot that the school and my account here at school pays for, so that's (team members') responsibility to pay for the other section. We just don't have enough money to pay for the whole thing," Dowd said.

An additional expense comes from uniforms--a sweat suit worn by each student to meets over the swimsuit--which cost a total of \$67 for girls and \$50 for the boys, but are a one-time purchase.

Dowd says she tries to lower the price that comes along with being a member of her team. This has become more difficult since provisions to offer financial aid to prospective swimmers were discontinued.

"The system used to offer scholarships if you qualified for free and reduced lunch and you swam. But, with all the budget cuts in the system, that was removed years ago," Athletic Director Dr. Jon Ward said.

In an attempt to lower fees, the swim team raises money. Annually, students organize a "Swim-A-Thon" to garner donations to the team.

"We get sponsors to pledge a certain amount of money per lap, and then

we swim for about an hour and try to swim as many laps as possible," junior Alexandra Saupe said. "And then pretty much all of that money goes to Ramsey."

Ward believes that the cost can cause a barrier for potential athletes. "For someone who is thinking, 'Oh, well that would be something fun to do,' then the cost might become a barrier because, 'I might use my money to do something else,'" Ward said.

That was the case for senior Tyler Sartain, who was interested in joining the swim team but opted not to. Sartain says the price of participation was a factor in his decision.

"It was half the reason I didn't want to swim," Sartain said. "I could play tennis, a sport I've played before, for much cheaper."

Members of the varsity swimming team also recognize that the cost might turn potential swimmers away.

"We do (practice) with, like, two other teams, so it's not just Clarke Central that has this really high fee. But I do feel like it's definitely a smaller team because some people can't pay a high cost," varsity swimmer and junior Emma Clarke said.

Dowd says that the financial tradeoff is unavoidable. "I wish it didn't cost anything, but pools are extremely expensive, and it's an expensive sport, unfortunately, because you have to have the access to the facility to do it in," Dowd said.



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-- DR. JON WARD,
Athletic Director

Above: THE PRICE OF FITNESS: Senior Valley StipeMaas, who joined the swim team as a junior, practices at the University of Georgia Ramsey Student Center. These practices add up to around \$20 a week. "It's pretty expensive, but I thought it was worth it to get in shape," StipeMaas said.