

By Randy Whalen

The last two seasons have been really good for the Lockport Township boys swimming team.

The Porters plan for this one to be good as well.

Lockport got off to a pretty nice start to the season this month, finishing second in its first two events. Those were the Warrior Pentathlon on Friday, Dec. 2 at Lincoln-Way West, and a triangular meet with Andrew and the Plainfield Co-op team on Thursday, Dec. 8 at Lockport.

"I think it's not too bad," Lockport boys swimming coach Jason Ozbolt said of the start to the season. "I like that this group does a good job of setting their own goals of what they want to accomplish. They set small goals to do meet by meet and they have either hit those or been just short."

At the Lincoln-Way West Pentathlon, Chicago University High School (960.5 points) placed first while the Porters (747) were second. Reavis (733), Lincoln-Way West (705.5), Lincoln-Way Central (683), and Lemont (681) rounded out the six-team field.

During the pentathlon, there were multiple people from each school participating in the five different events. Doing well for the Porters was senior Ryan O'Connor, who finished in the Top 5 in all the events. He placed second (55.97 seconds) in the 100-yard backstroke, and also in the 200-yard individual medley (2:07.02). He was third with a time of 55.55 seconds in the 100-yard butterfly, fourth with a time of 1:08.84 in the 100-yard breaststroke, and fifth (52.07 seconds) in the 100-yard freestyle.

Sophomore Shane Gabel also placed in the Top 10 twice for Lockport. Those were fourth (51.97 seconds) in the 100-yard freestyle and sixth (59.64 seconds) in the 100-yard butterfly. Senior Charlie Pluth also was Top 10 for the Porters as he placed ninth (1:14.98) in the 100-yard breaststroke.

Gabel continued his success at the Porter's triangular meet. He took first by nearly a second in the 50-yard-freestyle with a time of 22.71 seconds. He also won the 100-yard freestyle with a time of 51 seconds flat. O'Connor placed second in a pair of events. Those were the 200-yard IM (2:06.40) and the 100-yard backstroke (57.89 seconds).

Michael Erickson, a senior, placed second in the 500-yard freestyle (5:19.09) and the Lockport 200-yard freestyle relay foursome of O'Connor, Erickson, senior Julian Moreno, and Gabel placed second (1:38.07) as well.

"It was good and it was nice to have a home meet," O'Connor said. "We're hosting a sectional this season and that's nice for senior year."

Last season, O'Connor went to state in the 100-yard backstroke and the 200-yard IM. He wants to return in both events but also with better times.

"That's what I'm hoping for," O'Connor said of getting back to state. "Last year I won both events at the sectional but didn't make the qualifying times. This year I want to make the qualifying times. This season's team has quite a few freshmen. The guys are stepping up their intensity."

Erickson is in the longer races, the 200-yard, and 500-yard freestyle events along with the freestyle relays.

"I love the distance races," Erickson said. "I didn't when I was little but I was pushed into it by my mom (Connie) and my coaches. Now I actually love it. The goal is to get to state and we have a lot of freshmen pushing us."

The Plainfield team, which co-ops all four of the schools in town, easily won the triangular event with 104 points. Lockport (55) was second and Andrew (24) placed third.

On Saturday, Dec. 10, Lockport participated in the Wildcat Relay Invite at West Chicago. There the Porters placed fifth out of 10 teams. West Chicago (162.50) won it while Neuqua Valley (156.50) was second. York (113), Glenbard West (110), Lockport (106), and Wheaton Co-Op (102) rounded out the top six teams.

The meet ran 11 different relay events. The Porters top place was third in the 50-100-150-200 version of the 500-yard freestyle, and also third in the 200-yard backstroke relay.

That same day, Saturday, Dec. 10, the Lockport divers were at the Argo Diving Invite. Freshmen Logan Fields and Andy Giorgetti are the Porter's top divers and did well.

"We have a lot of people back and seniors who have stepped up," Ozbolt said. "We have some good freshmen and underclassmen too. The JV team has been good and we're looking for them to step up too."

Last season, the Porters were edged by Lincoln-Way East (238 points) and placed second at the Lincoln-Way Central Sectional with 230 points. They know if they want to win their first sectional title since the 2000-01 season, a key stretch is now.

That started on Thursday, Dec. 15, as Lockport hosted a triangular meet with Bolingbrook and Joliet Township. Then Friday and Saturday, Dec. 16 and 17 are slated to be busy days. The divers are at the Neuqua Valley Invite on that Friday. The next day, the swim squad will split into two teams and attend both the Joliet Township Winter Sprint Invite and also the Neuqua Valley Invite.

Then on Thursday, Dec. 29, the Porters will host Notre Dame College Prep starting at 10:30 AM.

"There are a couple of more question marks that need to be filled in," Ozbolt said. "We have to have a good winter break mentality. It's tough and physically jarring. But if we can get through that it will set us up for later in the season."