

Fairview hopes to unseat Creek

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Team togetherness - and a lot of fast swimmers - could help Fairview wrest the 5A girls title from Cherry Creek. (John Leyba, The Denver Post)

Bob Smartt is certainly that.

So when faced with the unenviable task of guiding his Fairview swimming team to victory over Neptune's very own Cherry Creek aquatics machine, Smartt has gone to great lengths.

Try Florida and Russia.

The Florida trip came in November when 41 of the 87 brave Knights went for some team bonding and intense, two-a-day training at the International Swimming Hall of Fame in Fort Lauderdale. There the girls swam in the outdoor, 50-meter oceanfront pool and enjoyed what Smartt considers a "defining element of this team."

The trip to Russia came over the Internet, where Smartt is in his second season of using a complex training regimen originally created by a team of scientists from the former Soviet Union.

Will it be enough to topple the always-favored Bruins, who have won the past three Class 5A state titles and 22 of the 33 championships since the team title was first contested in 1974?

Smartt and the Knights will find out Friday at the 5A swimming and diving championships at the Edora Pool Ice Center in Fort Collins.

"Only two teams bring home a trophy, and it would be nice to bring home a trophy," said Smartt, who is in his eighth season at Fairview. "That will be real mystery of the meet: Who will be second?"

Second place has gone to the Knights for the past three seasons. Fairview, however, is the last team to beat Cherry Creek when it won its only team title in the sport in 2004.

"You always have to go in with optimism and thinking maybe you can win this year. If everyone performs really well, something good could come out," said Fairview sophomore Lauren Rigg, who recently made the spring junior national cut in the 200 butterfly at a race in Texas.

Fairview senior Sophie Lucas has the state's top time so far in the 100 butterfly and is fifth-fastest in the 50 freestyle. Rigg has the third-best time in the 100 butterfly and Mikella Zgliczynska and Julie Anderson are fifth and eighth, respectively, in the 500 freestyle.

The Knights, who have nine non-club swimmers who have qualified for state, are right in the thick of things in the all-important relay events, which yield double points. Fairview is No. 2 in the 200 medley relay (behind Cherry Creek) and 400 freestyle relay (behind Boulder) and has the third-best time in the 200 freestyle relay (behind Cherry Creek and Boulder).

"It's easy for us to get motivated, especially with a team like Cherry Creek," Lucas said. "They're such good competition and they motivate us to push ourselves better."

In preparation, Smartt has been refining strokes down the stretch while tapering his team with a more scientific approach.

"It's all about what you do in practice," Smartt said.