

# Kitayama making waves in the pool

## Fairview freshman excels in racing and synchronized swimming

By Chris Shelton  
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Photo by Marty Caivano

Fairview's Taylor Kitayama practices synchronized swimming after her regular swim practice Monday at the South Boulder Recreation Center.

Upside down and under water, Taylor Kitayama twirled around — her legs decorating the surface with the grace of a ballerina as she worked on her solo synchronized swim routine Monday.

It was just the beginning of a near-four-hour practice with the Boulder Aquateens that came right on the heels of a two-hour Fairview swim team practice at the South Boulder Recreation Center.

But it's all in a day's work for the Fairview freshman.

Kitayama trains as many as 12 1/2 hours per week for synchronized swimming.

It's been well worth it, too. Kitayama placed in the top 10 in two events at last year's national championships for her age group (13-15 year olds).

Also, with limited practice time for the Knights' swim team, Kitayama has qualified for state in five events: 100 backstroke, 100 freestyle, 200 medley relay, 200 freestyle relay and 400 freestyle relay.

She will lead off Fairview's 200 medley relay team as the backstroker when the Knights this week go for their 18th win in 18 Boulder County Invitational meets. The Knights are the top-seeded medley relay team heading into this meet.

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The Boulder County Invitational begins with preliminaries at 4:30 p.m. Friday and finishes with finals at 2 p.m. Saturday. Both days' events are at the South Boulder Recreation Center. The diving competition is at 10:30 a.m. Saturday at the University of Colorado.

"In her case, synchronized swimming is working," said Fairview coach Bob Smartt. "We haven't had somebody this fast who's practicing with us just once or twice a week. She's doing extremely low yardage (in training) for someone with her times."

Kitayama takes piano lessons on Tuesdays and swims in Fairview meets on Thursdays and weekends. But her first sport is synchronized swimming.

And she wouldn't have it any other way.

"Really good synchronized swimmers make it look a lot easier than it is," Kitayama said. "Just being graceful is so hard. You have to be so aware of what your body is doing."

Her Aquateens team took eighth at nationals last year and her trio group was ninth. At regionals last year, she was first in trio, first in team and fourth in duet.

Thanks to her success, Kitayama has earned the chance to do a solo routine for the first time in her six-year career. She will perform it for the first time at a meet in Loveland on Sunday. The Aquateens are preparing for a meet next month in Lawrence, Kan., and nationals later this year in Ohio. Other nationwide meets will take the team to San Diego and Honolulu this year.

"A lot of it is her drive," Aquateens coach Traci Lunsford said. "She's willing to do things over and over and over again. She wants to do it until she gets it right."

Kitayama was doing dance, gymnastics and swimming when a friend introduced her to synchronized swimming in the fourth grade.

Through synchronized swimming, she's developed techniques that benefit her in swimming.

Kitayama can hold her breath longer than most swimmers, a trait she developed in synchronized swimming. She once tried to see how long she could hold her breath in science class one day and went nearly two minutes.

It helps her overcome her height. Kitayama stands 5-feet-21/2 inches, while most successful backstrokers are tall athletes.

"At the higher levels of competition, most of the backstroke races are swum under water dolphin kicking," said Fairview backstroke swim coach Spencer Hawkins. "She has a flawless start and, with her breath control from synchro, she again has an advantage of staying under water longer than other girls. Streamline dolphin kicking under water is faster than swimming on the surface, and she is able to exploit this."

Given that synchronized swimming is Kitayama's primary sport, Smartt had to do some convincing to get her out for the Fairview swim team.

But Smartt really wanted Kitayama on his team after she broke three backstroke records at his swim camp this summer. Allowing her to attend one or two practices a week gives her the flexibility she needs to do both sports.

"I was kind of hesitant whether I'd have enough time," Kitayama said. "I'm really glad I'm doing it. It's so fun to see all the girls on the team."



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