

A family affair at Fairview: Seven sets of sisters swim on Knights squad

By Joshua Lindenstein
Tuesday, February 12, 2008



Photo by Paul Aiken

Standing from left to right, Nisa and Shirin Sedaghat, □ Tara and Tasia DeMuth and seated Caroline and Mackenzie Patterson make up three of the seven sets of sisters who swim for Fairview.

The Sedaghat twins, Nisa and Shirin, walked into Fairview swimming practice at the South Boulder Recreation Center on Wednesday smiling and joking around with each other and their teammates. To the unacquainted, everything about them looked the same.

They were just two days away, however, from creating at least one big difference: One would be swimming the 50-yard freestyle at the state meet and the other wouldn't. Just one of Fairview's four spots in the event remained unclaimed for this week's state meet in Fort Collins, and the Sedaghats and one other Knight would be vying for it in Friday swim-offs.

"There's a lot of tension," Shirin said. "But I'll be happy either way if (Nisa) swims or I go."

Lucky for Shirin, she won the swim-off and didn't have to put the tougher-to-swallow side of her statement to the test. The win means she'll be swimming at state in the 50 free, 100 breaststroke and 200 free relay. Nisa, meanwhile, will miss out on swimming at state in all three of the events in which she has qualified -- the 50 free, 100 free and 100 back -- though she will be an alternate for the 200 free relay.

Such unfortunate familial circumstances are bound to arise when a roster includes seven sets of sisters as Fairview's does this year. But for all the sibling rivalry, most of which is on the friendlier side anyway, the dynamic is one that not only helps foster camaraderie among classes on the team, but also raises the level of competition in a way that can only benefit the squad as a whole on race day.

"The twins and sisters maybe require a little more care, but I think there's a little more upside because when it works it compounds," said head coach Bob Smartt, whose Knights are ranked second in the state behind powerhouse Cherry Creek.

The Sedaghats are one of three sets of sisters -- along with the DeMuth twins, Tara and Tasia, and the Pattersons, Mackenzie and Caroline -- that saw both siblings earn state-qualifying marks this season.

Thankfully for Smartt, the Sedaghats' situation is one he's often able to avoid because of the wide array of events and distances in swimming.

"You don't get as much family angst when you're able to have them swim different things," Smartt said.

The DeMuths are a perfect example and play an especially critical role for the Knights. Unlike the Sedaghats, the DeMuths rarely swim the same event, as the juniors will combine to swim in seven different races at state. Tasia is ranked seventh in the 100 free and 12th in the 50 free, and she swims on two highly-seeded Knights relays, the 200 and 400 free. Tara is ranked 12th in the 100 breaststroke, and will also swim the 100 butterfly and 200 medley relay.

"We have a really good relationship," Tara said. "We're always saying that we'll beat each other. But it's all in fun."

For Caroline Patterson, the benefit of having a big sister on the team came in already being friends with many of her older teammates.

"It just brings more of a relaxed atmosphere," the freshman said.

But the biggest benefit, Smartt said, comes in training.

That's where the competition between sisters often trickles into the adjacent lanes and pushes everyone on the team to work harder.

Sibling rivalry gave Mackenzie Patterson a little motivation boost just two weeks ago. Although she and Caroline usually swim different events, the younger Patterson had a breakthrough day at the Boulder County Invitational in the 200 individual medley, one of Mackenzie's events.

"I can still win but it's by a lot less now," Mackenzie said. "I'm happy that she's doing well. But at the same time it makes me work harder because I don't want her to be able to beat me."

There's also, Smartt said, the added dimension sisters get of having someone with whom to commiserate at home after a tough day of practice.

"It's sort of shared misery," Smartt says with a chuckle.

The sister act isn't a new phenomenon for the Knights. They've had plenty of siblings make waves together, most notably the Rovira sisters -- Madeline and Elizabeth, now a senior -- who three years ago swam together on two state champion relays. Meanwhile, Lauren Rigg, one of the Knights' top swimmers this season, has two brothers who are accomplished swimmers for Fairview, Scott, a senior, and James, who graduated last year.

Smartt is quick to credit the summer youth swimming programs in Boulder with blessing his team with talented athletes by the family-full.

"It's probably economies of scale," Smartt said. "Once the parents start driving (to practices), it's easy to throw the extra kid in the back seat."



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