

Warriors salute legendary swim coaches

Written by Tom Fruehling

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While 27 men's state championship banners adorn one wall of the Washington High School swimming pool, a new sign was unveiled Saturday honoring the two coaches who built what Principal Ralph Plagman called "a tradition of excellence."

The late Hal Krizan coached the Warrior swim team from the time the school opened in 1957 until 1973. His teams won 11 state titles, including 10 in a row from 1964 on, as well as one runner-up.

Jim Voss, now 72 and retired since 1998, led the program for the next 25 years and brought home 15 more state championships along with five second-place finishes.

For the first time Saturday at the annual invitational meet named after Voss, competition was held at the newly designated "Hal Krizan – Jim Voss Pool."

"It's unparalleled what those two coaches accomplished," noted Plagman, who has been at Washington since 1981. "They are an indelible part of our school history."

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And the tradition continues under current coach Chris Cruise, an all-American swimmer under Voss who has been at the helm since 1988 with one state title to his credit.

“There have been just three coaches in Washington’s 58 years,” Plagman pointed out. “The 27 state championships (the last in 2008) are the most for any sport in the state of Iowa.



“And the men’s swimming team has won 51 consecutive district championships, which is unprecedented anywhere in the country.”

Voss, still a fixture at Wash meets and active in local youth swimming programs, said the foundation of excellence was established when he came on board.

“It starts at the top, from the administration on down,” he said. “And we always had parent involvement. Washington swimming has always had a family atmosphere and it’s always been about team.”

The legacy is inspirational.

“You look up at that board and see so many great teams and it motivates you,” said senior Jared Thorson, who won the 100 yard butterfly Saturday at the six-team event topped by West Des Moines Valley. “It’s like you want to do your best and not be a disappointment to all those others that came before you.”

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Junior Nick Saulnier, the only other Warrior winner Saturday in the 100 yard backstroke, echoed his teammate's view. "It's a lot to live up to," he said. "But we use it as motivation."

Although both swimmers said they were pleased with their winning times Saturday, each has set a goal of breaking the Mississippi Valley Conference records next week at the Linn-Mar pool.

The district meet is three weeks from now, also at Linn-Mar, with the state meet at Marshalltown Feb. 14. With 12 seniors lost from last year's state runner-up team, Cruise said depth is an issue with Washington's chances this year.

Defending state champion Iowa City West is strong again this year and will pose a threat to the Warriors' district meet win streak.

"Our top swimmers are swimming very well," Cruise said. "And our others are coming along. I guess we'll find out in three weeks how much they've improved."

Saulnier, for one, is confident. "We haven't tapered yet, so we'll be ready to go," he said.

It is, after all, the Washington Way.

TEAM STANDINGS

1. West Des Moines Valley 333, 2. Waukesha South 281, 3. Bettendorf 274, 4. Washington 227, 5. Des Moines Lincoln 95, 6. Cedar Falls 79.

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WINNERS

200 medley relay - WDM Valley 1:40.20
200 free - Nathan Spencer, Bettendorf, 1:45.79
200 IM - Tanner Nelson, Bettendorf, 2:01.41
50 free - Sam Gorham, WDM Valley, 21.95
100 fly - Jared Thorson, Washington, 53.62
100 free - Sam Gorham, WDM Valley, 47.52
500 free - John Acevedo, Waukesha, 4:52.11
200 free relay - West Des Moines Valley 1:29.93
100 back - Nick Saulnier, Washington, 54.64
100 breast - Tanner Nelson, Bettendorf, 1:01.52
400 free relay - West Des Moines Valley 3:17.39