



Silverton High School swimming head coach Lucky Rogers during practice in Silverton, Ore., on Friday.

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With 80 swimmers, Silverton builds a path to prominence

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SILVERTON The perspective of the number changes from pride to intimidation and eventually to confusion.

Silverton High School's swimming team started this season with 80 swimmers.

For a program that was virtually unknown for so long can go from 30 swimmers a few years ago to 80 is a source of pride while simultaneously being intimidating to opponents.

Eventually you start to wonder how they can cram that many swimmers in a six-lane pool for practices.

"It's a little difficult, I'm not going to lie, but the first couple weeks, we practice circle swimming," said senior Megan Brockamp, who swam in the state meet in the medley relay last year. "And now we have a specific order of the faster to slowest. We're spread out at our own paces."

It's a problem most swimming coaches would love to have.

At the same time as the program's numbers have exponentially increased, the team has improved greatly.

The girls team is 6-0 in dual meets this season and the boys are 5-1 this season. Both teams beat Corvallis, which is a high-water mark for the team.

Before this season, Silverton has won one district team championship in its school history – the boys team won the District 10 championship in 1990.

This is the first time in decades Silverton has been a contender at the district level.

"It's fun to be relevant in a school where basketball has dominated for so long," said second-year head coach Lucky Rogers said.

Last season both Silverton's boys and girls teams placed third in the Mid-Willamette Conference, which was a huge step toward relevance.

Within the school, the swimming team is receiving attention.

"I think with Rogers' coaching style, and with him being a teacher at the school, people know more about swimming," Brockamp said.

"And he's also been really good about advocating to get people to know about swimming, like announcements and posters and the new gear, everybody sees the new gear when we wear it."

Part of the challenge in building a program in a specialized sport like swimming is getting kids to try it, even kids who don't know how to swim.

When senior Jaiden Davis was a freshman, not only could he not swim, but he couldn't put his head under water.

Assistant coach David Botieff works with the beginners and every season manages to take a novice and turn them into one of the top swimmers on the team.

Last year Davis was a district placer – and narrowly missed out on qualifying



for state – in the 50 and 100 freestyle races.

"I think it's also when we switched coaches to Rogers, we got a lot better," said junior Jason Orr, a state qualifier in the individual medley last season. "It jumped significantly."

"Rogers is a very well-liked teacher at our school and people just kind of saw that we were getting better so juniors and seniors started to join up and swim."

At Silverton, every other sport has gotten more recognition than swimming.

With all the state championships and deep postseason runs in sports like football, basketball and wrestling, it is understandable.

When the swimming team got a poster in the commons last year, it was a big deal to them.

"In our pep assemblies, they would mention us, and that was it," senior Jaiden Davis said of his freshman year. "It was like, 'Oh, go that Silverton swim team. Go them. They're doing good, I think.'"

Whereas prior freshmen classes have been filled with neophytes, this year's sizable group benefitted from a year-round swimming program at the town's YMCA pool.

Silverton's all-freshmen 200 medley relay team of Samantha Zurcher, Marie Tolmachoff, Maggie Kelley and Maddie Broyhill has the No. 2 time in the conference this season, and those girls have been consistent winners in individual

events in dual meets this season.

"Our girls team, we have a lot of really good seniors," Rogers said. "I knew we had a really good core of freshman girls coming in."

"In my mind the seniors were going to lead the way and the freshmen were going to fill in the blanks, but the freshmen, to be honest with you, have kind of taken over. We're solid."

Rogers' background in coaching is in basketball, something he coached in the community for 15 years until his children were on Silverton's swimming team.

He spent nine years as an assistant coach for the swimming program, and took over as head coach before the 2015-16 season.

One aspect of coaching basketball that Rogers has brought to the pool is he made practice fun.

"The other thing that's kind of alleviated is shoulder issues," said Rogers, who also spent nine years as Silverton's tennis coach. "On your freestyle stroke, most practice is freestyle, if you're not stretching and you're not doing the right stroke, you're going to hurt your shoulder."

"All of these drills emphasize the rotation and the stretching of the shoulder during the stroke so we're not having shoulder issues."

Silverton has had a total of one state tournament medal in the program's history.

The only state meet medal – for placing in the top six at an event at state – a Silverton swimmer has won was the 200 medley relay team of Hannah Beth Kearney, Haley Rogers, Sierra Prior and Natalie Tolmachoff placing sixth in 2010.

In most years, having one Silverton swimmer make it to state was a big deal. Last year they sent two relays along with Jason Orr and his older sister Lindsey Orr, who has since graduated.

Though none of them advanced out of the prelims, having that many Silverton swimmers at state was a big step forward.

"To see this now, a couple years later, it's really surprising and it's really cool to be a part of something that could possibly go to state," Marie Tolmachoff said.

With as many swimmers as Silverton has, it's understandable that the team has found some good ones.

Getting kids and keeping them motivated can be two different things.

"My biggest strength for these kids is motivation," Rogers said. "I get them to believe that they think they can do things that they didn't think they could do. I'm a big cheerleader, rah rah guy. When kids come out of the water and walk by me, they get fourth and I give them a high five, everybody sees that. I'm really loud."

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