

LHS swim coach reflects on 15-year career

By Ronald Bond
The Observer

LA GRANDE — He is affectionately called the “Meanest Coach Ever” by some of his athletes, even though there isn’t a mean bone in his body.

That mean coach, La Grande swim coach Darren Dutto, continued a tradition of winning that was started in the high school boys program prior to his arrival and built the girls program into a perennial state contender.

After 15 years pool-side, one that saw La Grande bring in 14 state trophies under his tutelage — including the 4A/3A/2A/1A boys championship trophy in 2016 — Dutto has resigned as head coach.

“It felt like a good time because my kids had graduated from the swim team the previous year,” he said. “We had a lot of success this past season. Things went well for the most part. It seems like a good time to ride out on a high note and call it good.”

Dutto, 51, a professor of exercise science in Eastern Oregon University’s Physical Activity and Health Program, isn’t ruling out returning to coaching, but he said he is ready for “life to be a little less crazy.”

He steps away, though, with a track record few can match. La Grande not only won its fifth boys swim title under Dutto but claimed two second-place trophies and took both third and fourth twice.



Observer file photo

La Grande head swim coach Darren Dutto throws his fists in the air during a race at the 2020 state swim meet in Beaverton. Dutto has resigned from his role as the swim coach after a 15-year run where he guided the boys and girls each to seven state trophies, including the 2016 boys state title.

The girls program had success unmatched prior to his arrival, claiming second in 2012, taking third four times and fourth twice. The girls program earned a trophy at state

in six of the past seven years, and the boys took home hardware five of the last six. Both teams also claimed numerous individual state titles.

Dutto, originally from

central California, was a collegiate swimmer at UC Davis, which also was where he first dove into coaching, leading a summer recreational team.

“I coached for a few



Observer file photo

La Grande head swim coach Darren Dutto, left, watches his stopwatch during the 2017 state swim meet in Gresham. Dutto, who coached the Tiger swim team for 15 years, has stepped down from the position.

“I love working with the kids, getting to know them, helping them be successful in whatever that means. To me, hands down that is the most rewarding part of it.”

Darren Dutto,
Longtime La Grande High School swim coach

years then, and I really enjoyed it,” he said. “That led me into a graduate program.”

Coaching fell by the wayside for several years while he pursued a master’s degree and later earned a Ph.D. But shortly after moving to La Grande, a friend suggested he apply for the open swim coach position at LHS. He

became the head coach in 2005.

He didn’t know at the time La Grande just had come off a run of winning four straight state titles from 2001-04, but he was confident that with his coaching philosophy the run of success could continue.

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MATURE living



6 ways to prevent falls around the house

Despite all of the potential hazards around a house — from electrical issues to fire hazards to carbon monoxide — the National Home Security Alliance says that falls are the leading cause of death due to home accidents. Falls are responsible for one-third of all home-related fatalities. Although seniors are the group most affected by falls, these types of accidents can affect anyone.

A broken bone may be a minor inconvenience for young people, but fractures are more serious for the elderly. As a result, seniors must take measures to protect themselves against falls. These steps can minimize risk at home.

1. Remove tripping hazards. Examine rooms and hallways for potential hazards, such as slippery throw rugs, floorboards that stick up, loose carpeting, or furniture that blocks walking paths. Remedy these hazards as soon as possible. Address loose floorboards and/or place nonslip materials beneath rugs.

2. Install grab bars or railings. Install grab bars in certain locations for extra stability or where someone may need leverage getting up from a seated position. They are particularly helpful near toilets and bathtubs and in stairways and hallways.

3. Stick to sensible shoes. Sensible shoes fit properly and have sturdy, nonskid soles. Avoid walking around in slippers or even in stocking feet, which are much more slippery.

4. Store items within reach. Store items that are used frequently, such as dishes, in easily accessible cabinets and other locations. This prevents having to climb or reach for them.

5. Install more lighting. Poor visibility can contribute to falls. Lighting in hallways, stairways, bathrooms, and bedrooms — even if it is a small night light — can be enough to light the way.

6. Reinforce your home’s exterior. Falls do not only occur inside. Inspect the perimeter of a property for uneven turf, holes or cracked or uneven patches of walkways. Make sure lighting is working at entryways, and check that exterior handrails are secure.

Falls can cause serious injury or death, particularly for aging men and women. Simple fixes around the house can make things more secure and reduce the risk for falls.



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