

This weekend, thirteen Wellington swimmers – Marisa Black, Ralphie Cornejo, Michael Davis, Emberly and Macy Gonzalez, Colin Green, Chance Hamel, Derick Kotchavar, Dakota and Jensen Lynnes, Nash Oswald, Jordan Thompson, and Mackinze Tracy – tackled a whole new rodeo. League Finals offered a taste of what was to come, but it could not compare in size, length, or competition to Missouri Valley Districts. Swimmers from all over the western portion of the state competed in 92 events over the course of three days. Each day had two sessions – thirteen-and-overs in the morning and twelve-and-unders in the early afternoon – so while swimmers were not at the meet for as many hours at a time as they were the weekend before, most had to report three times. Head coach Lyndsie Oathout and families that have children on both sides of the age-group divide toughed out all six sessions! Wichita Swim Club hosted the marathon meet, a blessing that cut costs and travel time. The indoor, 50-meter pool provided a more stable environment, eliminating variables such as wind and cloud cover. One thing it did not eliminate, however, was heat. Granted, it was cooler inside than in the full sun outside, but the humidity made everyone feel like a swimmer – and want to be one!

For first-time qualifiers Ralphie Cornejo, Michael Davis, Colin Green, and Derick Kotchavar, there was another unfamiliarity to overcome. In the Great Plains Swim League, the clerk of the course directs swimmers to their races in an orderly fashion, but Districts imitates year-round swim meets where kids are responsible for getting themselves to the correct heat and lane on time. These young men were up for this challenge and all the others. The excitement of their first Districts meet propelled all to impressive performances. Ralphie Cornejo cut time on his 50 free and swam the 50 fly legally for the first time, never an easy feat for a nine year old but especially remarkable on a 50-meter pool. Michael Davis cut time on all the races he had swam before, including an almost six second cut on the 100 free that achieved the long course Districts standard for the first time! Like Michael, Derick Kotchavar cut in all his races, the largest improvement being a 2.78 second drop on the 100 free. The 100 breaststroke was a bonus swim for Colin Green (an unqualified race that a swimmer who is qualified in at least one other event is allowed to swim), but no more! Colin cut close to five seconds to beat the Districts cut by almost four. He also dropped nearly three seconds in his 100 free.

To make up for its unique challenges, Districts provides rare opportunities. While GPSL does not give twelve year olds the chance to swim 100 meters of butterfly, backstroke, and breaststroke or the 200 free, Districts lets even the youngest swimmers try their hands (and feet) at those more challenging events. To say that Nash Oswald took advantage of the chance to experiment with a longer race is an understatement. Though seeded eighth, Nash out-touched all the other swimmers, qualifying for Championships at the same time! Jensen Lynnes also experienced great success in a long event. She almost made Championships in the 100 back and placed eighth. Ten-year-old Michael Davis bonus swam the longest event available to his age group: the 200 free. After carefully planning his strategy, the young swimmer executed his paces perfectly, right down to “sprint with everything you have on the last 50.” He placed twelfth. Districts even expands choices for older swimmers. Marisa Black swam the 200 back, placing sixteenth.

Another opportunity available at Districts is time trials. For a small fee, kids are allowed to swim a race of their choosing. While they cannot place, score points, or earn ribbons, their time will count towards personal records and Championship qualifications. Jensen Lynnes entered the weekend motivated to punch her Championship ticket at her last chance to do so, motivated enough to time trial twice! On Saturday afternoon, she tried the 50 free; on Sunday morning, the 100 back, a heartbreak in which she landed just 0.2 shy of her goal! In the end, her persistence paid off. Her stellar performance on the 100 back time trial increased her confidence prior to the 50 back, and she sailed to her first Championship cut of the season and a third-place medal.

In addition to individual swimmers making a name for themselves in the broader swimming community, the team became recognizable for its spirit. Marisa Black, Chance Hamel, and Jordan Thompson made about as many signs for Wellington as all the other teams had combined. Every time a Wellington swimmer hit the water, a group of others crowded at the end of his or her lane, cheering and waving elaborate posters with slogans like “She is really a mermaid” and “Will win for doughnuts.” The unity held up even though Wellington’s year-round swimmers were required by USA Swimming to compete for their other team. Wellington-registered swimmers extended support to their friends in different caps, and year-round swimmers returned the favor by recruiting some of their Wichita teammates to yell with them for the Sailfish.

This Districts was notable for another reason. Long-time Sailfish Mackinze Tracy wrapped up her swimming career on Saturday after competing in the 200 free, 100 back, and 50 free. She will be missed!

Next weekend, Nash Oswald and Jensen Lynnes will venture to Lawrence to compete at Missouri Valley Championships. Nash have a busy weekend competing in the many races that he could not swim at this meet because of overqualification (swimmers with Championship times prior to Districts are not allowed to swim those races at Districts) as well as his new qualifications, the 50 and 100 breast, and possibly bonus swims! Jensen will swim the 50 back and bonus swims. As Wellington’s post-season shirts say, “Just keep swimming...swimming...swimming.”

Here are the results for Wellington swimmers. Performances earning medals (1st through 4th) and those earning ribbons (5th through 8th) are bolded. Unfortunately, information on how much time was cut by swimmers who swam under year-round clubs (Marisa Black, Ralphie Cornejo, Macy Gonzalez, and Dakota and Jensen Lynnes for Wichita Aquashocks and Nash Oswald for Wichita YMCA Neptunes) is not available. Best times for these swimmers are noted with a (PR) while those that swam for Wellington at this meet have time cuts listed.

- Marisa Black – 16th on 200 Back; 16th on 100 Fly (PR); 17th on 100 Back; 20th on 100 Breast (PR); 21st on 50 Free; 26th on 100 Free (PR)
- Ralphie Cornejo – 19th on 50 Fly; 22nd on 50 Free (PR); 30th on 100 Free
- Michael Davis – 12th on 200 Free; 18th on 50 Free with a 0.7 second cut; 19th on 100 Free with a 5.77 second cut; 21st on 50 Back with a 0.95 second cut

- Emberly Gonzalez – 25th on 50 Free; 26th on 100 Breast with a 2.7 second cut; 26th on 100 Free with a 0.2 second cut; 28th on 200 Free
- Macy Gonzalez – 18th on 100 Breast (PR); 20th on 50 Breast (PR); 23rd on 200 IM (PR); 27th on 50 Free (PR); 28th on 50 Fly; 28th on 50 Back (PR)
- Colin Green – 16th on 100 Breast with a 4.82 second cut; 20th on 100 Free with a 2.91 second cut; 24th on 50 Free
- Chance Hamel – 16th on 100 Breast with a 1.59 second cut; 17th on 200 IM with a 3.15 second cut; 30th on 100 Free with a 1.18 second cut
- Derick Kotchavar – 16th on 100 Free with a 2.78 second cut; 19th on 200 Free with a 0.62 second cut; 21st on 50 Free with a 0.12 second cut
- Dakota Lynnes – 16th on 200 IM (PR); 19th on 100 Back (PR); 28th on 50 Free
- Jensen Lynnes – **3rd on 50 Back (PR); 8th on 100 Back (PR);** 14th on 50 Free; 17th on 50 Breast; 21st on 100 Free; 21st on 100 Breast
- Nash Oswald – **1st on 100 Breast (PR); 5th on 50 Breast (PR)**
- Jordan Thompson – 20th on 50 Free with a 0.09 second cut; 27th on 200 Free; 27th on 100 Back; 29th on 100 Free with a 1.06 second cut
- Mackinze Tracy – 28th on 200 Free; 30th on 100 Back; 35th on 50 Free