

**SWIMMING**

# Pool party: Rockville is No. 1 again in the MCSL

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Recent high-school graduates Katura Harvey (Richard Montgomery) and Colleen Haase (Good Counsel), rising Georgetown Prep junior Brady Fox and rising Richard Montgomery sophomore Cara Chuang are elite-level swimmers. The D.C. area is a hotbed for the sport and they compete at a national level, some internationally — Haase has already qualified for 2008 Olympic Time Trials.

Yet all of them, and their many national-caliber teammates, look forward to returning to their Montgomery County Swim League teams each summer. It's not the same intense environment as U.S. Swimming, but it's where most of their swim careers were cultivated. MCSL is ripe with friendly neighborhood rivalries and these swimmers relish in the opportunity to represent their communities.

The league consists of 89 teams, spread throughout Montgomery County, and split into 15 divisions. The six-week 2007 season culminated over the week-end with the divisional meets — each division hosted its own

championship competition. And, for the third consecutive year, Rockville (5-0) established its supremacy over county swimming, tallying 1,055 points to clinch first place in the county's top division for the third straight year at Saturday's Division A meet at Flower Valley in Rockville.

Tilden Woods (4-1) finished second at Saturday's Division A meet and Mill Creek Towne (3-2) and Flower Valley (0-5) tied for third. Hallowell (1.5-3.5) and Bethesda (1.5-3.5) finished fifth and sixth, respectively.

"It's amazing, to win for the third straight year," Rockville head coach Richard Lee said. "We came into this season knowing we were strong. Everyone expected us to win but it was up to us to come through and swim all the meets. We had a target on our back and we had to make sure everyone swam hard. And they did. I'm real proud of what the kids accomplished."

Final division rankings don't rely solely on win-loss records, but rather points accrued throughout the entire season. Teams compete in five dual meets, the relay carnival and divisionals. Each dual-meet winner receives six points. Divisionals weigh most heavily on

teams' final division position with a first-place finish worth 20 points, second 16 and third 10.

Division alignment is reassessed following each season, but whether a team is moved up or down isn't based on win-loss records. All swimmers' times from the season are compared and analyzed, essentially creating a swim-off on paper. And division alignments are created accordingly.

What makes MCSL special is that each and every participant, whether age 8 or 18, is just as important as the next. Swimmers earn a certain number of points depending on where they finish in their event. And that creates a sense of camaraderie between older and younger team members — and the young ones look up to and are motivated by the talent of swimmers like Haase, Harvey, Chuang and Fox.

The divisional meet provides struggling teams the opportunity to make one last push, to display their strengths and show off their talent. While depth plays a major role in all meets, it's more important during the dual-meet season. With only the top-two swimmers from each team in each event entered at divisionals,

teams are able to rely more heavily on their star power. For example, Flower Valley, which has competed in Division A for 20 consecutive years, failed to win a meet all season. But, backed by strong performances from Haase, who'll swim at the University of Georgia next year and won the girls 15-18 100-meter individual medley and 100 breaststroke Saturday, Stephen Schmidt, who won the boys 13-14 100 individual

medley, 50 backstroke and 50 breaststroke, Sarah Haase (girls 13-14 100 individual medley, 50 breaststroke) and recent Walter Johnson graduate Ben Mechlak, who'll swim at North Carolina State next year and recorded third-place finishes in the boys 15-18 100 freestyle, 100 backstroke and 100 individual medley, it pulled out a third-place finish at divisionals to earn fourth place overall in the division.

"There is definitely a sense of neighborhood pride at these meets," Flower Valley head coach Joey Mechlak said. "This finish definitely helped us close our season out on a high note. All of our losses were close, we just couldn't seem to edge them out on those days. But this was a great way to end the season. I'm proud

of what my kids done, it's a huge thing."

Rockville's team is unique, because it's a public pool and not for a certain community. But its swimmers feel that same sense of unity. Once again, led by Cara Chuang, who set an MCSL record in the girls 15-18 100 backstroke in Week 3 and recorded four top-three finishes Saturday, including a win in the girls 15-18 100 backstroke, and Andrew Gibson, Matthew Gibson, Tony Yang and Jason Tang, who set a record in the boys 14U 175 graduated freestyle relay in Week 1 and then again at divisionals, it topped county swim ranks. And with most of its key swimmers eligible to return next year, Lee and his charges are keen on retaining their crown.

"These kids keep coming back because of their love for the sport," Lee said. "MCSL offers fun competition. It's nice because everyone is equally important to the team, everyone has something to bring to the table. It's amazing to win this for our third straight year."

**Note:** Waters Landings' Elizabeth Weiner set an MCSL record in the girls 15-18 50-meter butterfly in Week 1 and again in Week 3.