

1976 Season review...



MEMBERS OF THE ROSS swim team for 1975-76 are shown above. Front row (left to right): manager Gloria Perez, Carol Gottron, Doug Ackerman, Brian Koenig, Pat Casey, manager Kim Stanley; **second row:** manager Dave Gressman, Mark Porzak, Howe

Hawk, co-captain Brett McKittrick, co-captain Kevin Casey, manager Randy Scout; **third row:** diving coach Andy Christensen, assistant coach Jeff Horvath, Tom Messina, Charlie Lease, Terry Nitschke, Scott Heschel, and Head Coach Art Bucci.

Quality, not quantity for Ross

"Don't go near the water" is not the phrase to adopt when you coach a swim team.

Art Bucci, the new head coach of the Ross Little Giants tankers, may feel that way when his team has to venture outside of the comfy confines of the Fremont Junior High pool which serves as the Ross watery home.

With only a 13-member squad, Bucci will be lucky to escape with a win in the large pools. In the larger pools, the Ross mentor may wish his team did not have to "go near the water."

"We do have quality but not quantity," Bucci pointed out. "The way the scoring is set up, we should do alright in a four-lane pool but in a six-lane pool, our shortage on bodies will hurt us."

The scoring for a four-lane pool is 4-2-1 for individual events and 6-3-1 in relays. For a six-lane pool, it is 6-4-3-2-1 on individuals and 8-4-2 in relays. The added scoring spots, especially in the individuals will crop up against Ross.

Bucci can smile a little, seven of the 13 dual meets for Ross are at home.

The Little Giants finished second in the Buckeye Conference last season but gone from the squad are standouts Kirk Hess, Marty Mason, and Mike Keller. One BC champ, junior Hal Hawk is set to defend his backstroke title.

Bucci feels that going for the win in the larger pools may not be all that important (because of the numbers shortage). Instead, "Improvement will be the big thing and that is what we will work on," he said.

As far as strong points on this year's squad, Bucci says, "The backstroke, breaststroke, and the sprints

in freestyle should be pretty good. Where we have to build is in the distance (500) freestyle . . . we have some young kids working hard in this area."

In the medley relay, Bucci listed a combination of any four swimmers: senior Pat Casey, backstroke, Tom Messina and Kevin Casey, junior breaststrokers, senior Terry Nitschke or Hawk at butterfly with freestylers Brett McKittrick, senior, and sophomores Charlie Lease and Doug Ackerman.

"Depending on who I put in the medley, I think it has the possibility to qualify for the state," Bucci said.

In other events, Bucci listed his swimmers who could be swimming in the events.

McKittrick, Ackerman, Mark Porzak (sophomore), and Lease will swim the freestyles. Porzak and Lease will probably handle the 500-yard event.

In the breaststroke, Nitschke, Kevin Casey, and Messina will compete. Hawk, Brian Koenig (sophomore), Pat Casey, and Porzak will be in the backstroke while in the butterfly, Hawk, McKittrick, and Nitschke all could be in the event at some point in the season.

Scott Heschel, third in the BC in diving a year ago, will be the top returnee along with junior Carol Gottron.

Ross will open Saturday with a trip to Upper Arlington. Findlay will also be in the 2 p.m. meet.

The first home meet for the Little Giants will be Wednesday, Dec. 10 at 4 p.m. with Port Clinton.

RACING

Messina's victory highlights Ross swim team debut

UPPER ARLINGTON — Ross came in third in a three-team swim meet but first year coach Art Bucci was happy.

"We had several swimmers better their times and the medley relay team really had a good time for this early in the season," he said.

Upper Arlington, an annual state powerhouse in the water world, dominated the meet with 142 points to make the meet a two-way battle between Buckeye Conference schools Ross and Findlay.

The Trojans won that battle but by only a 69-66 margin.

"Tom Messina did a heck of a job for us," Bucci pointed out. "He bettered his time by over five seconds."

Messina, a junior, led a Ross one-two finish in the breaststroke, nipping teammate Kevin Casey by a little over a tenth of a second. Messina, whose best time had been a 1:15-plus in the event splashed to a 1:10.535 to Casey's 1:10.677.

That race was the best showing that the Little Giants tankers had during the afternoon. Upper Arlington won nine of the 11 events including both relays. Findlay's Todd Worthington glided to a 53.734 to win the butterfly and give the Trojans their only win of the day.

Bucci's medley relay paddled to a 1:53.975 for second spot behind Upper Arlington. Brian Koenig swam the first backstroke leg in 28.8 and Kevin Casey posted a 31.2 split in the breaststroke. Terry Nitschke recorded a 25.6 butterfly split and Charlie Lease closed out the medley with a 27.6 freestyle leg.

Messina was named the Little Giant's "swimmer of the week" for his efforts.

Ross will host Port Clinton at 4 p.m. Wednesday at the junior high pool in its first home encounter.

Upper Arlington (UA) 142, Findlay (F) 69, Ross (R) 66

EVENTS

Medley relay: Upper Arlington (Moulton, King, Aldag, Prohaska) 1:46.682; Ross (Brian Koenig, Kevin Casey, Terry Nitschke, Charlie Lease) 1:53.975; Findlay (Orwick, Bar, Arneson, South) 1:55.003

200 Freestyle: Hudson (UA) 1:43.123; Sepsy (UA) 1:55.379; Evans (F) 1:58.307; Brett McKittrick (R) 1:58.085; Schrader (F) 2:04.841; Mark Porzak (R) 2:27.499

Individual medley: M. Devore (UA) 1:59.753; D. Devore (UA) 2:04.950; Worthington (F) 2:07.201; Hal Hawk (R) 2:18.715; K. Casey (R) 2:26.4; Bair (F) 2:30.812

50-yard Freestyle: Palmer (UA) 23.682; Klingensmith (UA) 24.288; Nitschke (R) 24.961; South (F) 25.615; Parks (F) 26.522; Doug Ackerman (R) 29.752

Diving: Treece (UA); Bender (F); Coon (UA); Freeman (F); Carol Gottron (R)

Butterfly: Worthington (F) 53.734; Aldag (UA) 54.985; Moulton 57.405; Nitschke (R) 59.100; Orwick (F) 1:05.881; Pat Casey (R) 1:24.487

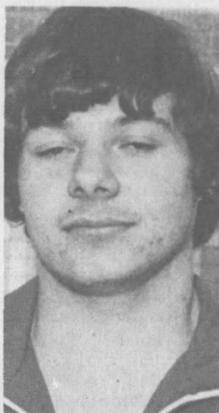
100-yard Freestyle: Prohaska (UA) 51.947; Arneson (F) 52.634; Moulton (UA) 57.405; McKittrick (R) 53.525; Parks (F) 57.7; Ackerman (R) 1:09.642

500-yard Freestyle: Hudson (UA) 4:48.763; R. Moulton (UA) 5:12.728; Schrader (F) 5:31.533; Evans (F) 5:49.947; Lease (R) 6:17.459; Porzak (R) 6:34.473

Backstroke: C. Moulton (UA) 1:00.758; Sepsy (UA) 1:02.289; Hawk (R) 1:02.703; Koenig (R) 1:04.429; Orwick (F) 1:06.945; Mondry (F) 1:11.095

Breaststroke: Tom Messina (R) 1:10.535; K. Casey (R) 1:10.677; Klingensmith (UA) 1:11.936; Palmer (UA) 1:12.506; Bair (F) 1:16.227; South (F) 1:16.927

Freestyle relay: Upper Arlington (D. Devore, Sepsy, Stephens, M. Devore) 3:24.621; Upper Arlington 3:28.405; Findlay 3:32.814; Ross (Hawk, Lease, Koenig, McKittrick) 3:50.997; Ross (P. Casey, Ackerman, Messina, Porzak) 4:48.689



TOM MESSINA
... Leads Ross

g ahead to '76

"In fact," Gregg said, "most of our older players are really looking forward to coming back next year. I've already talked to Walter Johnson. I feel he's played very well this season and he's got a number of good years left in him."

The big defensive tackle is the older statesman of the Browns, playing in his 11th season since coming out of California State at Los Angeles.

Tight end Milt Morin, a product of the University of Massachusetts, is right behind with 10 years in the National Football League. Gregg indicated that Morin is expected to remain in a Cleveland uniform in 1976, although he has seen little action this season because of the sparkling play of rookie Oscar Roan.



CAROL GOTTRON of Ross is upside down in the middle of her final dive into the Fremont Junior High School pool. Gottron finished third in the competition. (News-Messenger photos by Bruce Crippen)

Maryland rout Tech

was a gift given him last season while in New Mexico for National Collegiate Athletic Association tournament play.

Neither Lucas nor the Terps needed luck to crush Georgia Tech, now 1-2. Tech played the Terps almost even with a slow, deliberate game until the last minutes of the first half. But Maryland came back in the second half

Top Twenty schools, 14th-ranked Kentucky defeated Miami of Ohio 91-69 and 18th-ranked Michigan stopped previously undefeated South Carolina 91-82.

Jack Givens and Rick Robey combined for 61 points to lead the Kentucky Wildcats. Never trailing in the game, Kentucky rolled out to a 50-31 halftime advantage and later increased their margin to 99



HAL HAWK'S BUTTERFLY STROKE HELPED CARRY HIM TO INDIVIDUAL MEDLEY WIN

Juggling act gives Ross win over Port Clinton

By BOB MARKER
N-M Sports Editor

By profession, Art Buccì is a teacher and secondly, a swimming coach. Wednesday, he took a third profession that usually goes hand in hand with a swim coach's job: juggling.

Buccì played the percentages and juggled his lineup against Port Clinton in the first home meet of the young season for the Little Giants and it paid off with a 43-40 victory.

One of Buccì's juggling tricks was moving top backstroke Hal Hawk out of his specialty and into the butterfly.

"I did that because I felt that we could 'one-two'em'," the Ross coach referring to what swimmers refer to as taking the top two spots in an event.

"Of course," Buccì continued, "We had to have at least a third from Pat Casey in the backstroke. I was pretty sure that Brian Koenig could win the back."

Buccì's tricks could not have worked any better had he invented juggling. Hawk was second behind Little Giant Terry Nitschke's 58.6 in the butterfly with a 1:03.4. Casey responded with what Buccì wanted with a third by less than a half length over Port Clinton's Frank Savage in the backstroke.

With Casey's part in Buccì's act completed, Ross set themselves up for the final event, the 400-yard freestyle relay, with a clean sweep of the top two spots in the breaststroke. Tom Messina won his second straight race in that event with a 1:10.8, shading teammate Kevin Gatten's 1:11.2.

"If we had not gotten all those points in the back and the breaststroke, then we would have gone into the freestyle relay knowing that we would have to win it,"

Buccì explained. "Instead all we needed was a second."

Brett McKittrick, who won the 200 free but tied with Port Clinton's Rick Enderle in 100-yard freestyle sprint, swam the first leg of the final relay event and built up a two length lead. Even though Ross lost the lead on the next leg of the race, McKittrick's fast start assured the Little Giants of the second spot.

"We are coming right along," Buccì said while toweling off from a trip into the pool sponsored by his team after the win. "I believe everyone of the kids bettered their time."

Ross' next meet is Saturday in the Upper Arlington Invitational.

Ross 43, Port Clinton 40.

EVENTS

Medley relay: Ross (Brian Koenig, Kevin Casey, Terry Nitschke, Charlie Lease) 1:53.7; Port Clinton (Frank Savage, Mike Burdorf, Scott Harger, Mark Enderle) 2:01.3; Port Clinton (PC) 2:06.0

200 Freestyle: Brett McKittrick (R) 1:59.4; Dave Fischer (PC) 2:02.2; Chet Tokar (PC) 2:06.9

Individual medley: Hal Hawk (R) 2:18.7; K. Casey (R) 2:24.2; Harger (PC) 2:35.7

50 Free: Rich Enderle (PC) 24.3; Terry Nitschke (R) 24.7; H. Enderle (PC) 26.2

Diving: John Van Der Gussen (PC) 172.35; Fabey (PC) 169.45; Carol Gottron (R) 141.5

Butterfly: Nitschke (R) 58.6; Hawk (R) 1:03.2; Harger (PC) 1:06.3

100 Freestyle: (Tie) McKittrick (R) and R. Enderle (PC) 52.5; Burdorf (PC) 58.7

50 Freestyle: Fischer (PC) 5:43.4; Chet Tokar (PC) 5:55.0; Mike Porczak (R) 6:14.8

Backstroke: Koenig (R) 1:02.6; Byrne (PC) 1:10.4; Pat Casey (R) 1:13.1

Breaststroke: Tom Messina (R) 1:10.8; K. Casey (R) 1:11.2; G. Enderle (PC) 1:16.9

Freestyle relay: Port Clinton (Burdorf, Kelley, Fischer, Tokar) 3:48.6; Ross (McKittrick, Lease, Koenig, Hawk) 3:49.2; Port Clinton 3:53.2



FREESTYLER BRET MKITTRICK WON THE 200 AND TIED FOR THE TOP SPOT IN THE 100 FREESTYLE

Ross ties for 6th at U. Arlington

UPPER ARLINGTON — Ross finished in a tie with Lima Shawnee for sixth spot in the Seventh Upper Arlington Swimming Relays Saturday.

The Little Giants tallied 30 points while host school Upper Arlington won the meet with 108. Glenoak was second with 84 and Worthington finished third with 82.

Ross' best finish was a fourth in the 400-yard individual medley relay. With Kevin Casey turning in a 1:05.6 for one leg of the race, the Little Giants' team of Casey, Brett McKittrick, Terry Nitschke and Hal Hawk recorded a 4:11.966.

Ross won one event, a "wild card" relay which was added to the meet for the first time. No points were given in the race but Hawk, Brian Koenig, McKittrick, and Nitschke were on the team.

Other Ross finishes included a fifth in the 400-yard medley relay in 4:04.037. Hawk, Tom Messina, Nitschke and McKittrick were on the team.

In the 400-yard backstroke, Mark Porczak, Charlie Lease, Koenig and Pat Casey placed fifth in 4:39.585. Messina, Kevin Casey, Koenig and Porczak breaststroked their way to a 4:52.723 for fifth.

In the 400-yard freestyle relay, Doug Ackerman, Pat Casey, Lease and Carol Gottron recorded a 4:14.5, good enough for fifth.

Ross coach Art Bucci pointed to the time improvements and said that he was happy with the performance of his team.

Hawk lowered his seasonal best in the backstroke to 1:02.3 and Nitschke was timed in 58.0 for his butterfly low this season. Nitschke also recorded his best time to date in the breaststroke with a 1:07.9.

Messina paddled to a 1:09.6 in the breaststroke for his best time and Pat Casey was caught in 1:10.9 in the backstroke for her best.

In other Ross swimming news, Koenig was named as the team's "swimmer of the week." Koenig was first in the backstroke against Port Clinton last Wednesday in 1:02.6 and was timed in 1:12.6 in the breaststroke at the Upper Arlington relays.

Ross will travel to Findlay next Saturday in its next appearance.

UPPER ARLINGTON TEAM STANDINGS: Upper Arlington 108, Glenoak 84, Worthington 82, Firestone 54, Findlay 50, (tie) Ross and Lima Shawnee 30



BRIAN KOENIG
Swimmer of the week

Trojan tankers slip by Ross

The Ross High School swimming team dropped a 47-36 meet to Buckeye Conference rival Findlay Saturday at the YMCA.

Little Giant coach Art Bucci said not enough depth kept the Giants from winning the meet.

Brett McKittrick, named "swimmer of the week," was beaten in both the 200-yard freestyle and 100-yard freestyle by less than a second, losing the 100-yard by four-tenths of a second and the 200-yard freestyle by one-tenth of a second.

Brian Koenig, of Ross, winning the 100-yard backstroke with a time of 1:03.6, had his best time in the 200-yard individual medley with a time of 2:18.2.

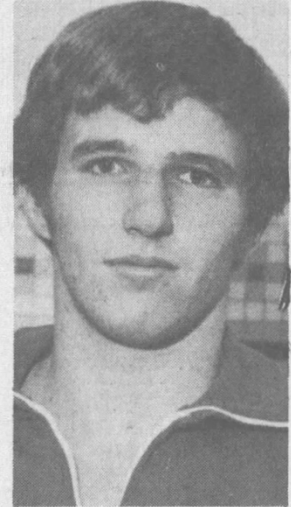
Charlie Lease of Ross improved from a 1:02.3 to a 1:00.1 in the 100 free.

The Ross 200-yard medley relay team of Koenig, Tom Messina, Terry Nitschke and Lease defeated the Findlay team by more than seven seconds, finishing with a time of 1:53.1.

Nitschke scored a victory in the 50-yard freestyle with a time of 24.9 seconds, defeating teammate Hal Hawk by six-tenths of a second.

Scott Heschel, recovering from a broken hand, dived for Ross for the first time this season and finished second with 179 points.

Among Findlay winners were Todd Worthington in the 100-yard fly and breaststroke and Dave Arneson in the 200-yard individual medley and 100-yard freestyle.



BRETT MCKITTRICK

...Swimmer of the week

Ross dominates Colonel Crawford

Terry Nitschke, Hal Hawk, and Brett McKittrick were triple winners as Ross paddled past Colonel Crawford 52-31 Tuesday afternoon at the Fremont Junior High School natatorium.

"I thought the meet would be much closer than this," Ross Coach Art Buccell said. "But we picked up some points in events that I did not expect."

The Ross coach proceeded to name several swimmers who responded with the points that turned the meet into a runaway and upped Ross' dual meet record to 2-1.

"Koenig (Brian) in the individual medley (third), Nitschke winning that event, and Porczak (Mark) in the 200 free, were points I did not expect," Buccell said. "Nitschke had swam only a 2:16 going into the IM while Doug Rank (Colonel Crawford) had a 2:14 and I was not sure of first place points in that event."

Nitschke responded with a 2:13.5 to win the IM and added the 100-yard butterfly later in the meet to go along with a leg on the medley relay for his three first places. For his efforts, the Ross senior was tabbed as the "swimmer of the week."

"Carol Gottron got us a third in diving and I did not expect that either," Buccell added.

Hawk swam the opening leg on Ross' winning freestyle relay after winning the 200 free and the backstroke, the latter in 1:02.6, his best mark this season.

McKittrick won the 50 and 100-yard freestyle sprints and anchored the freestyle relay for his three wins.

Scott Heschel won the diving with 201.10 points for Ross but has still not reached top form after missing the first few weeks of the season because of a broken hand. Gottron recorded 143.40 points for her third place finish.

The other first place for Ross was Tom Messina in the breaststroke with a 1:10.2, his best time in that event to date.

Ross will compete in the Bowling Green State University High School Relays Saturday, Jan. 3 in its next outing.

Events
200—medley: Ross (Brian Koenig, Tom Messina, Terry Nitschke, Charlie Lease) 1:52.6; Colonel Crawford (Doug Ravi, Steve Seif, Mike Senna, Mike Dennison) 1:53.7; Colonel Crawford 2:11.6

200 free: Hal Hawk (R) 2:03.0; Mike Cole (CC) 2:13.5; Mark Porczak (R) 2:21.2

200 individual medley: Nitschke (R) 2:13.5; Doug Rank (CC) 2:15.2; Koenig (R) 2:19.6

50 free: Brett McKittrick (R) 23.9; Mike Dennison (CC) 24.7; Lyle Biederman (CC) 27.2

Diving: Scott Heschel (R) 201.10; Mike Spencer (CC) 196.30; Carol Gottron (R) 143.40

100 butterfly: Nitschke (R) 58.8; Senna (CC) 1:05.6; Ed Fetter (CC) 1:10.0

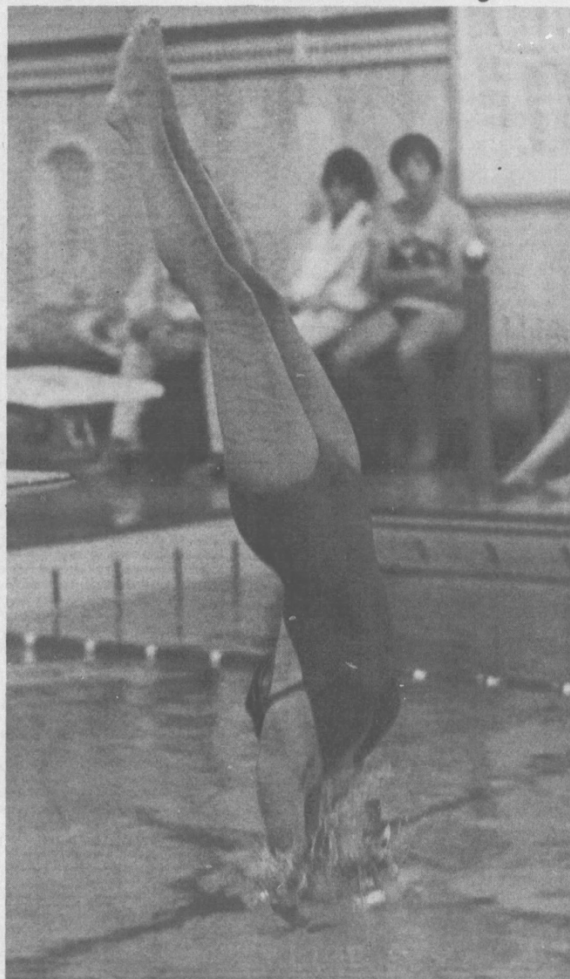
100 free: McKittrick (R) 53.1; Biederman (CC) 1:00.8; Charlie Lease (R) 1:02.2

500 free: Cole (CC) 5:50.0; Porczak (R) 6:18.9; Kevin Biederman (CC) 6:27.2

100 backstroke: Hawk (R) 1:02.6; Rank (CC) 1:09.1; Koenig (R) 1:03.1

100 breaststroke: Messina (R) 1:10.2; Senna (CC) 1:10.8; Casey (R) 1:13.2

Freestyle relay: Ross (Hawk, Lease, Casey, McKittrick) 3:56.7; Colonel Crawford (L. Biederman, Cole, Seif, Dennison) 3:58.9; Colonel Crawford 4:21.2



CAROL GOTTRON (above) enters the water as she completes a dive in the meet against Colonel Crawford. She finished third in the competition. At the left is Terry Nitschke, Ross' "swimmer of the week." (News-Messenger photo by Bruce Crippen)



Circle Bob is winner
FLORENCE, Ky. (AP) — Circle Bob outran Marge's Pick by a neck in a heavy fog Tuesday night to capture the \$3,200 featured thoroughbred mile at Latonia in 1:41 2-5.

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SMU football coach is fired

DALLAS (AP) — Southern Methodist University has fired Dave Smith as head football coach after a stormy three-year tenure marred by probation and other problems.

Dr. James Zumberge, SMU president, said this step had been under consideration for 36 hours before a final decision was reached Tuesday night.

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Hawk paces Little Giants

BOWLING GREEN — Hal Hawk bolstered Ross to a surprising third place finish in the Bowling Green State University High School Swim Relays Saturday.

The nine-team meet was won handily by Toledo St. Francis as the Knights swept to the top spot in all nine events. Sandusky was a distant second (119-61) and Ross chalked up 44 points.

Hawk was only two-tenths of a second off the Ross school record for the backstroke while leading off in that stroke in the 400-yard medley race. Hawk was caught in 1:00.9 as he zeroed in on the school mark.

The medley relay finished second in 4:00.3 with St. Francis in front with a 3:56.4. Joining Hawk on the medley was

Tom Messina, Terry Nitschke, and Bret McKittrick.

"It was just a case where he had some super swims," Ross Coach Art Bucci explained about the high finish. "That medley relay really turned in a good effort."

Ross recorded seconds in the 200 breaststroke relay and the 400-yard individual medley, in addition to the medley relay finish.

Hawk was named as the Little Giant's "swimmer of the week" by Bucci. The Ross junior also led off in the individual medley to round out his afternoon of swimming.

TEAM STANDINGS: Toledo St. Francis 119, Sandusky 61, Ross 44, Findlay 40, Perkins 37, Mansfield Malabar 27, Napoleon 26, Shawnee 18, Ayersville 2

Events

400 medley relay: St. Francis 3:56.4; Ross (Hal Hawk, Tom Messina, Terry Nitschke, Bret McKittrick) 4:00.3; Napoleon 4:07.7; Malabar 4:10.2; Sandusky 4:13.1; Shawnee 4:14.0

800 freestyle relay: St. Francis 7:40.6; Findlay 7:42.5; Sandusky

7:50.0; Perkins 8:03.2; Ross (Chris Ackerman, Charlie Lease, Kevin Casey, Mark Porczak) 9:52.3; Ayersville 10:16.2

200 backstroke relay: St. Francis 1:48.9; Perkins 1:58.2; Ross (Brian Koenig, Pat Casey, Kevin Casey, Hawk) 1:59.4; Findlay 2:08.0; Napoleon 2:08.4

200 breaststroke relay: St. Francis 2:01.1; Ross (Nitschke, Messina, McKittrick, K. Casey) 2:05.4; Sandusky 2:09.4; Napoleon 2:15.9; Perkins 2:16.0

Diving: St. Francis 444.70; Sandusky 362.30; Findlay 357.35; Malabar 352.90; Ross (Scott Heschel and Carol Gottron) 317.65; Perkins 295.05

200 butterfly relay: St. Francis 1:46.1; Sandusky 1:55.8; Malabar 1:52.0; Perkins 1:54.9; Napoleon 1:59.8; Findlay 2:01.5

500 freestyle crescendo: St. Francis 4:29.5; Findlay 4:33.4; Sandusky 4:36.3; Malabar 4:42.6; Perkins 4:47.9; Shawnee 4:48.3

400 individual medley relay: St. Francis 4:02.8; Ross (Hawk, McKittrick, Nitschke, Koenig) 4:09.1; Napoleon 4:15.5; Sandusky 4:23.6; Perkins 4:24.0; Malabar 4:33.6

400 freestyle relay: St. Francis 3:30.6; Findlay 3:32.4; Shawnee 3:40.2; Sandusky 3:40.6; Perkins 3:42.2; Malabar 3:44.8

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HAL HAWK

Ross swimmers set three records in third win

Ross swimmers set two pool and one school record Saturday while defeating Margaretta 45-38.

The medley relay team of Hal Hawk, Tom Messina, Terry Nitschke, and Brett McKittrick lowered both the school and pool records for that event with a 1:47.8 timing. The previous school mark of 1:47.9 was posted in 1965 by the team of Mike Wise, Dan Kohr, Ron George, and Ron Roberts.

The medley pool record was set in 1965 by the Ross team of Kidney, Miller, Kohr, and Taylor with a 1:48.2.

Nitschke claimed the other pool record with a 1:06.7 in the 100-yard breaststroke. The old mark was held by Pat Aten of Ross and Bill Coyle of Sandusky set in 1965 which two-tenths of a second slower than Nitschke's new mark.

"I switched a lot of people around for this meet," said Ross Coach Art Bucci after his team has won its third dual meet of the season. "It worked out pretty well for us."

Nitschke was a triple winner along with McKittrick. In addition to his leg on the medley relay and his record breaststroke swim, Nitschke claimed the top spot in the 200-yard individual medley with a 2:16.5.

McKittrick added the 50-yard freestyle sprint and came back to take the butterfly in his first try at that event this season. The Ross co-captain was caught in 23.8 in the free sprint and splashed his way to a 1:02.1 in the butterfly.

Scott Heschel claimed the diving top spot with 224.65 points while Hal Hawk claimed the other first spot for Ross with a first in his specialty, the backstroke in 1:02.7.

Bucci named co-captain Kevin Casey as the Ross "swimmer of the week."

The next meeting for Ross will be Wednesday when the Little Giants will



KEVIN CASEY
... Swimmer of the week

take on Buckeye Conference powerhouse Sandusky at the home of the Blue Streaks. The meet will begin at 6:30 p.m.

RESULTS

200 medley relay: Ross (Hal Hawk, Tom Messina, Terry Nitschke, Brett McKittrick) 1:47.8; Margaretta (Tim Claes, Brad Eisenhauer, Randy Nemitz, Derrick Shinault) 2:01.1; Margaretta 2:05.6

200 freestyle: Ed Schirg (M) 2:00.1; Brian Koenig (R) 2:05.0; Tom Willer (M) 2:04.0

200 individual medley: Nitschke (R) 2:16.5; Kevin Casey (R) 2:22.5; Eisenhauer (M) 2:39.8

50 freestyle: McKittrick (R) 23.8; Steve Sanders (M) 24.8; Mark Shupp (M) 25.7

Diving: Scott Heschel (R) 224.65; Nemitz (M) 199.60; Kirk (M) 159.50

100 butterfly: McKittrick (R) 1:02.1; Koenig (R) 1:04.1; Tom Willer (M) 1:09.8

100 freestyle: Sanders (M) 54.0; Hawk (R) 55.1; Shupp (M) 56.6

500 freestyle: Schirg (M) 5:45.4; Rathman (M) 6:09.8; Mark Porczak (R) 6:23.5

100 backstroke: Hawk (R) 1:02.7; Claes (M) 1:06.6; Pat Casey (R) 1:11.3

100 breaststroke: Nitschke (R) 1:06.7; Messina (R) 1:11.5; Salmon (M) 1:15.0

400 freestyle relay: Margaretta (Shirg, Dave Willer, Shinault, Nemitz) 3:54.1; Ross (Koenig, Porczak, Charlie Lease, K. Casey) 3:59.3; Margaretta 4:01.5

Ross girls host Sylvania

The Ross High School girls basketball team will play in its home opener tonight against Sylvania, with the junior varsity game scheduled to begin at 6 p.m.

Sandusky swimmers too strong for Ross

SANDUSKY—Ross met with the inevitable Wednesday at the watery home of the Sandusky Blue Streaks.

The Little Giants, with only 12 swimmers, resigned themselves to the fact that they did not have enough "bodies" to win in the six-lane pool. The thinking was correct as the Blue Streaks posted a 103-68 triumph.

"Overall," Ross Coach Art Bucci said as he began to explain the meet, "it was just a meet that we swam through — we knew we could not win in the six-lane pool so we just decided to try to have enough good swims to get us ready for Findlay Saturday."

The Little Giants will be back in the friendly steamy climate of the Fremont Junior High School four-lane natatorium pool on Saturday to face the Trojans.

Bucci pointed out that one of the better races of the dual meet was in the very first race: the medley relay. Ross lost the race by nearly four seconds but there was a reason to the showing.

"We missed two turns completely," he said. "If that had not have happened, I think we could have won the race."

Brett McKittrick, Terry Nitschke, and Hal Hawk chalked up the only first places for Ross. McKittrick, who Bucci felt had one of his more outstanding efforts in the 100-yard free, won that event with a 52.2 clocking.

Nitschke won the butterfly by nearly two seconds with a 58-flat and Hawk took the backstroke in 1:01.1.

Bucci also felt that Mark Porczak turned in one of his better efforts in the 500 free with a second place time in 6:10.7.

The meet with Findlay Saturday will begin at 2 p.m.

EVENTS

200 Medley relay: Sandusky (Jack Waldo, Chip Palazzo, Chuck Bennett, Mike Troike) 1:46.8; Ross (Hal Hawk, Kevin Casey, Terry Nitschke, Brett McKittrick) 1:50.3; Sandusky 1:55.8
 200 free: Scott Spayd (S) 1:57.5; Jim Parker (S) 1:57.9; Kevin Troike (S) 2:01.7; Brian Koenig (R) 2:05.7
 200 IM: Waldo (S) 2:10.5; Hawk (R) 2:18.4; Gary Johnson (S) 2:23.5; Greg Johnson (S) 2:25.5
 50 free: M. Troike (S) 24.1; McKittrick (R) 24.2; Paul Wilke (S) 26.0; Charlie Lease (R) 27.0
 Diving: Bob Knoll (S) 251.70; Scott Heschel (R) 213.70; Kurtz (S) 178.45; Carol Gottron (R) 146.90
 100 butterfly: Nitschke (R) 58.0; Bennett (S) 1:00.17; Paul McAllister (S) 1:03.1; Johnson (S) 1:04.2
 100 free: McKittrick (R) 52.2; M. Troike (S) 54.2; Fred Sutter (S) 57.0; Wilke (S) 57.4
 500 free: Spayd (S) 5:21.3; Mark Porczak (R) 6:10.7; Doug Ackerman (R) 6:34; Don Lippis (S) 7:15.6
 100 backstroke: Hawk (R) 1:01.1; Koenig (R) 1:04.1; Brian Boissonault (S) 1:04.2; Ted White (S) 1:06.2
 100 breaststroke: Palazzo (S) 1:05.9; Nitschke (R) 1:08.5; K. Casey (R) 1:11.3; Tom Messina (R) 1:11.6
 400 free relay: Sandusky (Sutter, Ed Kane, Parker, Spayd) 3:49.9; Ross (Porczak, Ackerman, Lease, Koenig) 4:14.4; Sandusky 4:33.3

S

High individual series — Gil
 Gittinger 177-191-206 — 574; Lucille
 Snyder 197-172-194 — 563

ELK'S LADIES

Croghan Colonial Bank 40 24
 Smiley Tire Co. 40 24

Whirlettes	33	35
Harris Insurance	33	35
The Little Shop	28	40
Thurn's Garage	28	40
Whirl-E-Winds	28	40
Dick's Cafe	20	48
Ja-Kee's	15	53

Worthington's pool record leads Findlay

The Ross High School swimming team dropped a 47-36 decision to the Findlay Trojans Saturday afternoon at the junior high natatorium pool.

The key event of the meet was the 200-yard medley relay, which saw Findlay edge Ross by one-tenth of a second with a time of 1:53.8. Todd Worthington of Findlay set a new pool record in the 50-yard freestyle with a time of 22.7.

For Ross, Hal Hawk tied the school record in the 100-yard backstroke with a time of 1:00.7. Brett McKittrick had his best time in the 100-yard freestyle, which he won with a time of 52.0. Terry Nitschke had his best time in the 200-yard individual medley, which he won with a time of 2:12.7.

Doug Ackerman was named swimmer of the week by coach Art Bucci. Ackerman improved his time by nine seconds in the 500-yard freestyle with a time of 6:25. Mark Porczak improved by two seconds in the 500-yard freestyle from 6:10 to 6:08.

Brian Koenig had his best time in the 200-yard freestyle, improving his time from 2:05 to 2:01 and Scott Heschel was nine points off the school record in diving with 225 points. Gary Bender of Findlay set a school record in diving with 234.25.

Charlie Lease of Ross had his best time in the 100-yard freestyle with 59.3 and Pat Casey had her best time with 1:05.5 in her part of the 400-yard freestyle relay.

Bucci said he felt the team swam well and he is hopeful the Giants can pass the Trojans in the Buckeye Conference meet.

"We need a little bit more improvements in some times," he said. "I thought we worked pretty hard."

EVENTS

200 medley relay: Findlay (Greg Orwick, Todd Worthington, Derek Barr, Keith South) 1:53.8; Ross (Kevin Casey, Tom Messina, Terry Nitschke, Charlie Lease) 1:53.9; Findlay 2:03.5
 200 free: Gwil Evans (F) 1:57.3; Brian Keonig (R) 2:01.9; Chris Schrader (F) 2:02.2
 200 IM: Nitschke (R) 2:12.7; Orwick (F) 2:20.6; K. Casey (R) 2:23.6
 50 free: Worthington (F) 22.7; Brett McKittrick (R) 23.8; Hal Hawk (R) 25.0
 Diving: Gary Bender (F) 234.25; Scott Heschel (R) 225.0
 100 butterfly: Nitschke (R) 58.4; Arneson (F) 58.6; Madson (F) 51:05.3
 100 free: McKittrick (R) 52.0; Evans (F) 53.7; Bill Parks (F) 58.2
 500 free: Schrader (F) 5:23.41; Schutte (F) 5:47.52; Porczak (R) 6:08.0
 100 backstroke: Hawk (R) 1:00.7; Koenig (R) 1:03.3; Mowdry (F) 1:10.7
 100 breaststroke: Worthington (F) 1:05.76; K. Casey (R) 1:10.6; Messina (R) 1:11.1
 400 free relay: Findlay (Arneson, Orwick, Evans and Schutte) 3:42.6; Ross (Hawk, Lease, Koenig and McKittrick) 3:50.6; Findlay, 3:55.4



DOUG ACKERMAN
 ... Swimmer of the week

Fostoria
 crushes
 Lakota

h (SJ) 4-1; 140 — Scott Blanton (SM) to (SJ) 7-4; Moyer (SJ) pinned Tom Scherk (SM) an Schwanger (SM) def. Jim Meyer — Kevin Nemitz (SM) won by default erle (SJ); 177 — Joe Dye (SM) pinned ld (SJ) 4:54; 187 — Brian Harris (SM) (SJ) 6-2; HVY — Dale Courtney (SJ)



PAT CASEY

...Swimmer of week

mici cut

"He is no longer a member of the squad," said Hayes. The coach declined to elaborate on the reason.

Buonamici, a 6-foot-3, 236-pounder from Brentwood, N.Y., was the third leading tackler last fall.

Ross romps but times slip

The Ross High School swimming team defeated Buckeye Conference foe Marion Harding 52-30 Saturday afternoon at the junior high school natatorium.

Pacing the Giant tankers were Hal Hawk, who barely missed a school record in the 100-yard backstroke, and Pat Casey, named swimmer of the week by Giant coach Art Bucci.

Casey improved her time in the 100-yard backstroke by 1.9 seconds and finished second to Hawk. Hawk finished with a time of 1:00.8, one-tenth of a second off the school record.

Other accomplishments cited by Bucci in the meet were Doug Ackerman's 100-yard freestyle time of 1:04.8. Ackerman finished third in the event and improved his time by five seconds.

Kevin Casey in the 100-yard breaststroke finished first with a time of 1:10.1, a half second off his best time. Craig Messina just

missed a second place finish in the 100-yard breaststroke with a time of 1:11.6, one-tenth of a second behind the Marion swimmer.

Although the final score was about what Bucci expected, the coach was not pleased with some of the times turned in by the Ross swimmers.

"I'm more interested in times than the score," Bucci said. "Today we just couldn't do it." He said the 200-yard medley relay team, which finished first at 1:48.8 could have turned in a better time, and he was disappointed in the times of Brian Koenig and Terry Nitschke in the 500-yard freestyle. Koenig finished first and Nitschke second with times of 5:44.4 and 5:55.1.

The Little Giant swimmers resume action Friday when they host powerful Sandusky and travel to Toledo Saturday for the tough St. Francis Invitational. Bucci, who does not expect Ross to beat Sandusky, is hoping to finish among the top five at Toledo.

Events

200 medley relay — Ross (Hawk, Messina, Nitschke and McKittrick) 1:48.8; Marion (Felt, Green, Virdon, Somerlot) 1:59.3; Marion, 2:04.6.

200 freestyle — Koenig (R)

2:04.2; Retterman (M) 2:17.4; Porczak (R) 2:19.3.

200 individual medley — McKittrick (R) 2:19.7; K. Casey (R) 2:23.2; Ballinger (M) 2:49.4.

50 freestyle — F. Somerlot (M) 25.0; Hawk (R) 25.1; B. Somerlot (M) 26.2.

Diving — Heschel (R) 199.55; Virdon (M) 181.65; Ballinger (M) 146.35.

100 butterfly — Nitschke (R) 58.4; F. Somerlot (M) 1:04.2; Wiederman (M) 1:13.5.

100 freestyle — McKittrick (R) 55.2; Chaney (M) 1:02.6; Ackerman (R) 1:04.8.

500 freestyle — Koenig (R) 5:44.4; Nitschke (R) 5:55.1; McDaniel (M) 7:29.3.

100 backstroke — Hawk (R) 1:00.8; P. Casey (R) 1:10.0; Felt (M) 1:14.1.

100 breaststroke — K. Casey (R) 1:10.1; Virdon (M) 1:11.5; Messina (R) 1:11.6.

400 freestyle relay — Marion (Baggs, Ballinger, Somerlot and Green) 4:07.0; Ross (Lease, Ackerman, Porczak and P. Casey) 4:19.7.

Ohio college

scores

By The Associated Press
Saturday's Results
Conference

Big Ten

Iowa 78, Ohio State 67
Mid-American

Bowling Green 83, Northern Illinois 77

Kent State 68, Central Michigan 62

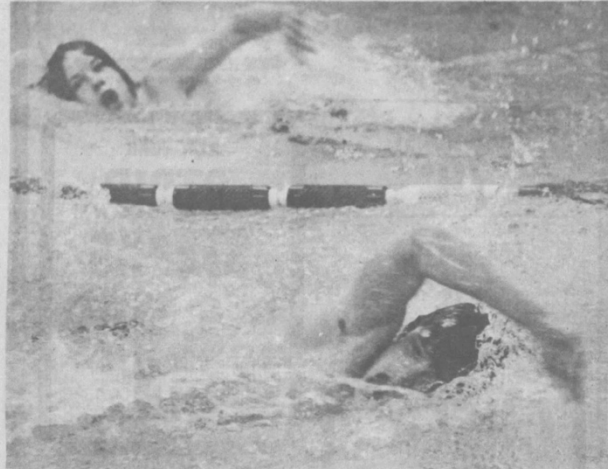
Miami 86, Ohio University 63
Toledo 86, Eastern Michigan 63

Ohio

Capital 77, Ohio Wesleyan 76
Denison 55, Muskingum 53 OT
Heidelberg 67, Baldwin-Wallace 58

Mount Union 82, Kenyon 80
Ohio Northern 75, Wooster 67
Otterbein 57, Wittenberg 55

ACE BROKEN GLASS in
FORM DOORS
Warp's TOP QUALITY ACRYLIC PLASTIC



Sandusky wins; records broken

Four records went by way of the deep six Friday night at the Fremont Junior High School natatorium.

Jack Waldock of Sandusky broke two Ross pool records and Hal Hawk of Ross set another to go along with a record performance by the Little Giants' medley relay team.

Waldock's record in the 200 and 100-yard freestyles paced the Blue Streaks to a 45-31 win over Ross. The Blue Streaks' flash cranked off a 1:50.6 in the 200 and a 50.1 in the 50 freestyle sprint for the new pool standards.

Hawk backed his way to a 1:00.4 clocking in the backstroke, three-tenths of a second better than his own old mark set just this season. Hawk joined Kevin Casey, Terry

Nitachke and Bret McKittrick in Ross's medley for new school and pool records. The Little Giants' foursome turned in a 1:46.6.

Waldock, only a junior, was also a member of the Blue Streaks' winning freestyle relay team. The Sandusky flash anchored the team to a 3:38.9 as the Blue Streaks swept the top two spots.

McKittrick, Nitachke and Hawk, along with the medley relay, picked up the only first places for Ross. McKittrick captured the 50-yard freestyle sprint in 23.7. Nitachke turned in his best time of the season to win the butterfly in 57.4.

Best times of the season for Ross were turned in by Casey in the breaststroke with a 1:06.6 and Doug Ackerman and Mark Por-

czak in the 500 freestyle with 6:14.4 and 6:05.5 respectively.

EVENTS

200 medley relay: Ross (Hal Hawk, Kevin Casey, Terry Nitachke, Bret McKittrick) 1:46.6; Sandusky (Brian Buonomano, Chip Palanza, Chuck Bennett, Mike Truice) 1:49.9; Sandusky 1:58.4.

200 freestyle: Jack Waldock (S) 1:50.6; Scott Spayd (S) 1:58.1; Brian Koenig (R) 2:00.7.

300 individual medley: Palanzo (S) 2:09.9; Nitachke (R) 2:12.9; Hawk (R) 2:18.4.

50 freestyle: McKittrick (R) 23.7; M. Truice (S) 24.1; Paul Wilke (S) 25.9.

100 butterfly: Nitachke (R) 57.4; Bennett (S) 1:00.2; Fred Butler (S) 1:06.1.

100 freestyle: Waldock (S) 50.1; McKittrick (R) 52.1; Randy Deland (S) 57.5.

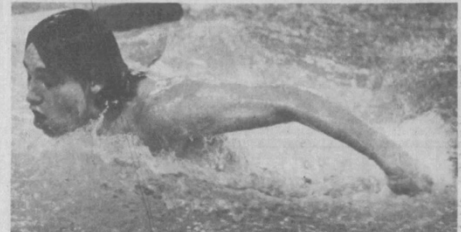
500 freestyle: Jim Parker (S) 6:14.3; Spayd 6:15.3; Mark Porczak (R) 6:05.5.

100 backstroke: Hawk (R) 1:00.4; Koenig 1:02.9; Ted White (S) 1:05.7.

100 breaststroke: M. Truice (S) 1:08.5; K. Casey (R) 1:10.6; Tim Mesina (R) 1:11.6.

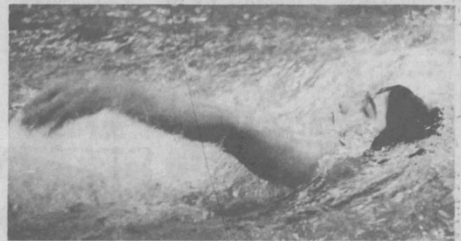
400 freestyle relay: Sandusky (K. Truice, Spayd, Palanzo, Waldock) 3:38.9; Sandusky (Bennett, Wilke, Deland, Butler) 3:47.8; Ross 4:08.3.

JUST PASSING (left) by are Ross teammates Doug Ackerman, top, and Mark Porczak, bottom, as both compete in the 500-yard freestyle. Porczak finished third, just ahead of Ackerman.



DIFFERENT STROKES but for the same person. At the top, Terry Nitachke is caught in midstroke of the butterfly while on the bottom, he is

using the backstroke. The action was in the individual medley. (News-Messenger photos by Bruce Crippen)



Calvert clobbers St. Joe 71-41

By BILL STEWART

N-M Sports Writer

TIFFIN — The Calvert Senecas "beat them to the punch" in the words of Calvert coach Mike Ingram and waltzed to a 71-41 basketball victory over the St. Joe Crimson Streaks Friday night.

"We got them down in

the first quarter and I think that was it," explained Ingram. "I think we beat them to the punch tonight."

The Senecas grabbed a 22-13 lead at the end of the first quarter and were never threatened at all by the Streaks, who for the third time in four weeks

had the Friday night blues. The victory raises Calvert's record to 11-2 and 6-2 in the Sandusky Bay Conference. St. Joe drops to 3-10 and 1-7 in the SBC.

Calvert's attack featured well-balanced scoring as forwards Randy Wurm and Joe Williams and guard Tim Altweis all

had 15 points to lead in scoring. Pivot man Chuck Rohrbach and Kevin Warnement added nine points, which was more than anyone could muster for St. Joe. Greg Kuns and substitute Mike Oplie led the Streaks with eight.

Calvert led 46-24 at halftime and upped it to 70-37 for its biggest lead of the game. Pressure man-to-man and a trap defense employed by the Senecas forced 29 St. Joe turnovers and enabled Calvert to score many uncontested baskets before the Streaks could get back on defense.

"We were very lethargic tonight," observed St. Joe coach Carroll Cooley, who was at a loss to explain St. Joe's performance. "We were just doing a lot of things we weren't supposed to do."

The Eagles hit 27 of 69 from the field, 12 of 23 from the line, grabbed 34 rebounds and committed 15 turnovers. Shivak had 11 rebounds.

The Eagles hit 27 of 69 from the floor, 14 of 22 from the line, had 45 rebounds and 16 turnovers. Speck had 17 rebounds for Eastwood.

Score by quarters

Woodmore stuns Eagles

PEMBERVILLE — The Woodmore Wildcats squandered an early lead and then had to play an overtime before dropping the Eastwood Eagles, 70-65, in Suburban Lakes League basketball action Friday night.

Scott Chambers canned 20 points in leading a Woodmore attack that

not let it drop there, though, as they chipped away and finally pulling into a tie with two minutes left in the game.

After finishing the regulation tied at 63, Woodmore took charge in the overtime and never trailed.

Besides Chambers, Joel Shivak and Dave

Ross 4th at Toledo meet

TOLEDO — Fremont Ross finished fourth in the St. Francis Invitational Swim Meet Saturday.

"St. Francis beat St. Xavier," Ross Coach Art Buccci said, "but there was a mixup in the points and nothing was really official."

St. Francis was first followed by state powerhouse St. Xavier and Findlay in third followed by Ross. There were eight of 15 invited teams in the meet.

"All the times were bad," Buccci pointed out. "I think most of the coaches there were tapering their kids off and getting them ready to peak for the districts. The only good swim was in the breaststroke."

Mark Schlatter of St. Francis was two-tenths of a second off the state record in that 100-yard event with a 59.2.

The Ross coach said that his team did not swim well. "Our kids were coming off the Friday night meet with Sandusky and may have been tired."

Brett McKittrick finished second in the 50-yard freestyle sprint in 24.5 for the best Little Giants finish. He was also fifth in the 100 free.

Kevin Nitschke was sixth in both the butterfly and the breaststroke and Hal Hawk finished sixth in the backstroke.

The medley relay team of Hawk, Tom Messina, Nitschke, and McKittrick was fourth in 1:49.9, nearly three seconds slower than the pace it set on Friday night.

Buccci named three swimmers as his "swimmers of the week." Hawk and Kevin Casey won the award for the second time this season with Mark Porczak being named for the first time.

Ross's next meet will be at the junior high natatorium against Lorain Catholic at 2 p.m. Saturday.



MARK PORCZAK

Ross tankers in deadlock

A first and third place finish in the 400-yard freestyle relay helped Lorain Catholic salvage a 41-41 tie with the Ross High School Little Giants in a dual swimming meet Saturday at Fremont Junior High School.

The Giants were holding a 38-34 lead until the relay team of Paul Costin, Kirk Knisely, Tim Dombrowski and Paul Vasiloff defeated the Giant team of Charlie Lease, Brian Koenig, Kevin Casey and Brett McKittrick by more than 15 seconds with a time of 3:44.3.

Earning first place finishes for Ross were Terry Nitschke in the 200 individual medley at 2:14.3; McKittrick in the 50-yard freestyle at 23.9; Scott Heschel in diving; Nitschke in the 100-yard butterfly at 57.9, and Hal Hawk in the 100-yard backstroke at 1:00.8.

The 200-yard medley relay team of Hawk, Kevin Casey, Nitschke and Lease also finished first with a time of 1:50.6, 13 seconds ahead of the Lorain quartet.

Lease was named swimmer of the week by Ross coach Art Bucci. In addition to anchoring the 200-yard medley relay team to victory, Lease had a third place finish in the 50-yard freestyle and helped lead the 400 freestyle relay team to second.

Bucci was disappointed in the meet outcome.

"I thought we would be able to win," he said. "There were no time improvements. We trained hard this week, but I guess we need more hard work."

Bucci said the extra work may have been the reason for the times not being any better. He said he felt Ross lost some points in the 200-yard freestyle when Koenig was beaten for second by seven-tenths of a second, and in the 100-yard freestyle, which saw McKittrick edged for first by Vasiloff by four-tenths of a second.

The next activity for the Ross tankers will be next Saturday at Sandusky in the Buckeye Conference meet. Bucci said the Giants will be shooting for a second place finish, while conceding that Sandusky will be too tough to beat out for the conference title.

EVENTS

200 medley relay — Ross (Hal Hawk, Kevin Casey, Terry Nitschke and Charlie Lease) 1:50.6; Lorain Catholic (Bill Traxler, Joe Gnfzak, Keith Higgins and Helen Bialorwiki) 2:03.4; Lorain Catholic, disqualified.

200 freestyle — Paul Vasiloff (LC) 1:57.6; Martin Kraly (LC) 2:01.1; Brian Koenig (R) 2:01.8.

200 individual medley — Nitschke (R) 2:14.3; Hawk (R) 2:16.6; Chris Stawicki (LC) 2:21.6.

50 freestyle — Brett McKittrick (R) 23.9; Kirk Knisely (LC) 24.5; Lease (R) 27.2.

Diving — Scott Heschel (R) Greg Vanche (LC) Barb Lach (LC).

100 butterfly — Nitschke (R) 57.9; Tim Dombrowski (LC) 1:00.5; Stawicki (LC) 1:03.7.

100 freestyle — Vasiloff (LC) 52.5; McKittrick (R) 52.9; Skip Smigel (LC) 56.0.

500 freestyle — Jim Janasko (LC) 5:50.8; Paul Costin (LC) 5:50.9; Mark Porczak (R) 6:06.8.

100 backstroke — Hawk (R) 1:00.8; Koenig (R) 1:02.8; Kraly (LC) 1:09.1.

100 breaststroke — Smigel (LC) 1:08.7; Kevin Casey (R) 1:10.3; Tom Messina (R) 1:11.9.

400 freestyle relay — Lorain Catholic (Costin, Knisely, Dombrowski and Vasiloff) 3:44.3; Ross (Lease, Koenig, Kevin Casey and McKittrick) 3:59.6; Lorain Catholic, third.



CHARLIE LEASE
... Swimmer of week

News-Messenger

Sports
news

UCLA's Bruins, the defending champions, colleagues with a brilliant fast break and by undefeated record



WINNERS of special athletic awards for Ross High School's winter sports teams are shown above. Left to right in front: Jesse Heidelberg, Julie Otermat, Roxie Price, Sue Buehler, Mara Tolhurst, Karyl Solze,

Garry Clark, Tony Munoz, John Lipstraw; back row: Dave Fahrback, Pete Werling, Jim Smith, Hal Hawk, Denny Smith, Brett McKittrick, and Brian Koenig.

Cavs could drop magic number to one

CLEVELAND (AP) — The Cleveland Cavaliers polished off the Houston Rockets five weeks ago in their last meeting here, but guard Mike Newlin wasn't

convinced the Cavs were for real.

After the 107-103 defeat which plunged the Rockets six games behind then-division-leading

Cleveland, Newlin said, "I'm just not a believer in the Cavaliers. I think we'll catch them."

Just like the rest of the doubters throughout the National Basketball Association, though, Newlin may soon have to accept Cleveland as a real contender.

Since that meeting on February 22, the Cavaliers have slipped from 1½ games ahead of Washington in the Central Division to 1½ games behind the Bullets. But they continue to lead the Rockets by six games in the chase for second place and an automatic playoff berth.

The two teams meet here again tonight and a victory by the Cavaliers would lower their "magic number" for their first ever postseason spot to one.

Going into the contest

with the Rockets, any combination of three Cleveland victories or Houston losses totalling three will clinch at least second place in the division.

The Rockets, owners of a 4-1 edge over the Cavaliers this season, come into the contest with a 38-37 overall mark, compared to 43-30 for the Cavaliers.

"This is a real big game for us," said Cleveland forward Bingo Smith. "We need to eliminate Houston first."

The only original Cavalier still with the expansion-born club added, "We've had a good series (with Houston). The games have been close, but I think they've been getting the right play or break at the right time.

"They have a young club like we do and it seems we always have good games," he added.

The Cavaliers, who finished a stretch of seven games in 10 days just last Saturday, now play five games in six days with only Friday an off day this week.

They play at New Orleans Wednesday night and back here against Boston Thursday night.

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