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AQUATICS

Rams among favorites in pool

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Awty is one the verge of its first-ever state title, just four years after head coach Tom Quitzau launched the Rams' aquatics program.

Awty's girls will be the front-runner at the TAPPS Division II State Swimming and Diving Championships on Friday and Saturday at the Conroe ISD Natatorium. The Rams will have 11 state qualifiers in 20 individual events, not to mention all three relays — the type of numbers required to make a run at the state crown.

“Our girls were second (in state) last year,” Quitzau said. “I hate to be superstitious, but I really consider us the favorite. If we don't have any major screw-ups, we should win.”

To accomplish that feat, Awty must knock off defending champion Dallas Parish Episcopal School.

Awty crushed the competition at the recent TAPPS South Regional Swimming and Diving Championships at the Josh Davis Natatorium in San Antonio. The Rams tallied 125 points, nearly double the amount of runner-up Second Baptist with 63 and well ahead of third-place Victoria St. Joseph with 59.

Sophomore Andrea Moreno was one of the meet's standout performers, claiming four gold medals.

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Moreno began the meet by anchoring the victorious 200-yard medley relay. She joined freshman Melissa Blott, senior Sarah Meyer and junior Emmanuelle Quitzau to post a winning time of 2:05.83, a full eight seconds faster than San Antonio TMI (2:14.13).

Individually, Moreno was a winner in the 100 butterfly (1:01.45) and the 500 freestyle (5:25.10).

Moreno capped her day by swimming the last leg on the first-place 400 freestyle relay. Emmanuelle Quitzau, Blott, junior Jessica Plank and Moreno obliterated the field with a time of 4:10.17, well ahead of Corpus Christi Incarnate Word (4:37.34).

After seeing her dominate at regionals, Quitzau fully expects Moreno to clean up at state. She posted the fastest qualifying time in the 500 freestyle and ranks second in the 100 butterfly. Awty's 400 freestyle relay is currently the state leader, while the 200 medley relay is second overall.

“Andrea had the meet of her life (at regionals),” Quitzau said. “Andrea has a terrific shot at winning the 500 free (at state). She should be in the top three in the 100 fly, but she might even win it — if she's able to break one minute.”

Blott, one of several youngsters on the squad, took second at regionals in the 200 individual medley (2:26.66) and third in the 100 backstroke

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(1:07.23). Blott ranks third and fourth, respectively, among state qualifiers.

“Melissa could medal (at state) in her two events,” Quitzau said. “She's swimming extremely well.”

Emmanuelle Quitzau, the coach's daughter, finished second in the 100 butterfly (1:09.84) and fifth in the 100 backstroke (1:11.77). Quitzau is seeded high at state in both events, coming in fifth and sixth, respectively.

“Andrea and Melissa have been our top two swimmers all season, but Emmanuelle is right behind them,” Quitzau said.

Plank was a regional silver medalist in the 100 freestyle (1:04.84) and was seventh in the 50 freestyle (29.13). Plank qualified for state in both races and has the fourth-fastest time in the 100 freestyle.

Plank also led off the fourth-place 200 freestyle relay, joining senior Alice Gondallier, sophomore Margarita Delgado and sophomore Claire Jardin to notch a time of 1:58.50. The 200 freestyle relay is a medal threat at state, seeded fifth overall.

Other individual state qualifiers for Awty included Delgado, 100 butterfly; senior Caroline Gentry, 100 freestyle and 100 backstroke; junior Demi Halton, 100 breaststroke and 200 individual medley; freshman Caroline Ibrahim, 100 breaststroke; Claire Jardin, 50 and 100 freestyle; Meyer, 100 breaststroke and 500 freestyle; and freshman Ellie Tamura, 200 and 500 freestyle.

While Awty's girls had unparalleled depth, the boys did more with less. In fact, the Rams

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brought only a handful of swimmers to regionals and still placed third. Second Baptist was the Division II boys' regional champion with 116 points, edging Lutheran South with 114 and Awty with 99.

“Our boys are a little frustrated. They want to keep up with our girls,” Quitzau admitted. “They didn't swim their best at regionals, but, hopefully, we'll be where we need to be at state.”

At regionals, the only event won by Awty's boys was the 400 freestyle relay. The quartet of junior Ross Gordon, junior Sander Basingerhorn, senior Barley Halton and senior Clement Jardin won in 3:43.71, five seconds ahead of Lutheran South (3:48.74). Awty is seeded No. 1 in this race at state.

“Our 400 free relay is going to be very difficult to beat,” Quitzau said.

Gordon was a double individual medalist at regionals, coming in second in the 500 freestyle (5:22.39) and third in the 200 freestyle (2:00.77). He's projected to finish second and third in those races.

“Ross really stepped it up and scored well for us,” Quitzau said.

Basingerhorn, one of the state's top sprint freestylers, was second in the 50 freestyle (23.57) and fourth in the 100 freestyle (54.73). He's seeded second and fourth, respectively.

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Halton had a fine meet, placing fourth in the 100 backstroke (1:07.22) and the 100 butterfly (1:09.34). Halton is expected to make the finals at state, seeded fifth and sixth in his races.

Other state qualifiers were sophomore Roberto Andrade, 100 butterfly and 200 individual medley; Clement Jardin, 50 and 100 freestyle; senior Peter Keeling, 50 freestyle and 100 breaststroke; junior Thomas King, 200 and 500 freestyle; and freshman William Ware, 100 breaststroke.

Awty's 200 freestyle relay, featuring Basingerhorn, Gordon, Keeling and Clement Jardin, was third at regionals (1:39.67). Also, the 200 medley relay, which included Halton, Keeling, Andrade and King, took third (1:56.67). The Rams could claim medals in both events, as they are seeded third and fourth.

Quitau anticipates a tight three-team race with defending state champion Lutheran South, last week's regional winner Second Baptist and Awty for the boys' title. The Rams were third at state a year ago,

"We've come out on the short end against those schools the last couple of years. There's not much separating us," Quitau said. "If something happens, such as a relay getting disqualified or a couple of kids move up or down, we could right there at the top."

Quitau said Awty's rise up the TAPPS ranks is impressive, considering the fact the program is just a few years old. More importantly, only a handful of the Rams are involved in club swimming.

"The only time I have most of these kids is during

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the season," Quitau said, "but they work hard, they have fun and they want to do well."

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