

Manta Rays Begin Eighth Season with Tie-Dye Party & Intrasquad Swim Meet

More than 260 Manta Ray swimmers kicked off the 2011-2012 swimming season with a tie-dye party and the Annual Manta Rays Intrasquad Swim Meet in October.

"We have a record number of swimmers this year with over 350 swimmers including our 19 & older adult Masters team," said Head Coach Ken Heis. "Our annual intrasquad meet is a great opportunity for both the swimmers and our parent volunteers to kick off the season."

A few days before the Intrasquad meet, the team hosted a Tie-dye Big/Little Party outside in front of the natatorium. The Big/Little program was started to keep swimmers from getting lost in all of the excitement of a large team. The program pairs younger swimmers on the team with the older swimmers to bring the growing team together as a thriving unit. The swimmers tie-dyed shirts, made posters, and learned team cheers together, creating a basis for the long-term success of the team.

The Mason Manta Rays, a City of Mason USA Swimming team, will host the Southwest Regional Championships on the weekend of February 18-20, 2012. Swim meets bring thousands of swimmers, parents, and officials to the City of Mason's Mason Community Center. In addition to entry fees helping to raise funds for the city, the High School Swim Boosters operate a concession stand. Many local businesses also reap the rewards of hosting these big meets because these swimmers have such huge appetites.

With more than 350 total swimmers on the team ranging in age from 6 to 18, plus a growing adult Masters program, the Mason Manta Rays have become one of the biggest and strongest teams in Southwest Ohio. The program has grown from 110 swimmers to over 350 in seven years. The Manta Rays team has placed very high in the state and is nationally ranked at 60 out of over 2700 teams in the nation.

Running a top USA swim program requires a big commitment from parents. In addition to paying the annual fees to the City of Mason, parents volunteer an average of around 30 hours per year, with some parents putting in a lot more.



Mason Manta Rays Big/Little swimmers Gabe Fraga (left) and John Galvin show off the team poster they created.

"Our parents time, run the timing board, officiate, sell T-shirts, organize events, manage the web site, yell and scream for their kids, clean up the bathrooms, take pictures, direct traffic, and never say no," said Geoff Thatcher, a parent with three swimmers on the Mason Manta Rays.

The Mason Manta Rays swim team currently has three swimmers qualified to try out for the USA Olympic team at the 2012 Olympic Trials in Omaha: Dani Barbiea, Austin Caldwell, Amanda Smith

Head Coach Ken Heis has been selected by Ohio Swimming to coach the Elite USA Swimming High Altitude Training Camp at the USA Olympic Training center in Colorado Springs on October 14-17. Several Manta Ray swimmers will be attendance. There is no cost to the City for Coach Heis to attend.



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