

All-star swimmers

Woodland trio will compete in San Diego

By STEPHANIE HAMMON/Democrat Sports Writer



Woodland swimmers Matt Whittle, AnnClaire MacArt and Mikayla Gness, left-right, have been chosen among the best in the Sierra Nevada Swimming Association. (Stacey J. Miller/Daily Democrat)

Temperatures in Woodland dipped below freezing last weekend but that didn't stop AnnClaire MacArt, Matt Whittle and Mikayla Gness from jumping into the water.

The three young Woodland swimmers will compete this weekend with Sierra Nevada at an All-Star meet in San Diego. Their competition will include swimmers from San Diego Imperial Swimming and Central California Swimming in the first meet between the associations.

"The kids knew they had to get certain times to be considered for the team so it's a good motivating factor for them," Woodland coach Bret Williams said.

MacArt, Whittle and Gness aren't strangers to this kind of high-caliber competition. They've all been swimming for almost as long as they can remember and have competed at other prestigious meets like the Junior Olympics, Far Westerns and Western Zones.

Still, it's things like family and friends that keep the sport fun for them.

MacArt, 10, comes from a family of swimmers. Her two brothers also compete for the Woodland Swim Team and her mother swims with the Master's club.

Whittle, who competes in the 9-10 boys division, got into the sport at age 3 because his dad was a swimmer.

"Swimming gives you a good competition. You get really good fitness and you also get to meet people," Whittle said.

A specialist in the butterfly and breaststroke events, Whittle says that meeting new friends is the best part of swimming.

"Most people think swimming isn't a team sport but it really is," he said. "You need people there cheering for you. Swimming is really all about friendship."

Whittle says he has made friends with fellow swimmers from as far away as Nevada and 12-year old Gness is looking forward to making friends with the other all-stars in San Diego.

One unique feature of the All-Star meet is that the three Woodlanders will swim with - rather than against - some of their usual foes from the Sierra Nevada Association.

"They may end up on a relay team with kids they normally compete against," said Williams. "It helps with sportsmanship - it's a really positive experience."

MacArt, Whittle and Gness will leave for San Diego on Saturday morning. They are unsure of which events they will compete in, though they each have their specialties. MacArt does well in freestyle events, Whittle is best at butterfly and breaststroke, and Gness "can do it all," according to Williams.

The three swimmers are looking forward to the unique competition.

When asked about what excited him most, Whittle responded, "We get to stay up late on a school night because we're coming back Sunday night."