

## **St. Joe's Swim Team hopeful heading into MMAA Championship**

**By Adam Gorski**

It hasn't been easy sledding for teams competing in Monsignor Martin Boys Swimming over the past decade all thanks to the utter dominance of the Canisius Crusaders, who will be going for their 18<sup>th</sup> straight title when the championship meet takes place on Tuesday at Buffalo State College.

Despite the odds being heavily stacked against them, however, that hasn't stopped the St. Joe's Marauders from working tirelessly towards bringing home the school's first swimming title since 2005, and giving it their all no matter the outlook.

"Canisius definitely has the upper hand right now ... they're the class of the league," St. Joe's head coach Jeff Banks said. "We've been very fortunate that every year, we have a really good group of guys. The cohesiveness of the team has kind of been our thing."

The Marauders finished Monsignor Martin league play with a 2-2 record, and a 4-5 overall record, and their successes have come despite only having two seniors on the roster, as well as plenty of swimmers who aren't competing outside of school.

Juniors Sebastian Gwitt, Jimmy Crane, and Freddy Piwko alongside freshman Owen Bembenista were all players Banks viewed as unsung heroes, but for the eighth-year head coach, his whole roster could make a case for that description.

"Our whole team is really unsung heroes," Banks said. "Ninety percent of our roster is made up of kids who don't swim year round. We are very competitive with just high school swimmers. Kids who play other sports, or don't play any other sports."

The undisputed leader of this Marauder team has been senior captain and four-year varsity swimmer Matt Banks. Banks, who has performed strong in both the 100 butterfly (57.15 seasonal best), and the 50 free (23.84 seasonal best) all year, could not be happier with how the team has grown with his potential final meet approaching.

“Our young guys are starting to develop and step up in the pool and outside the pool, and our older guys are starting to take leadership roles and encouraging the freshmen on,” he said. “We’ve had a good season, very productive year.”

While Banks has yet to experience anything but Crusader dominance in his three previous years in the pool, he is hopeful that this year could be different.

“Everyone’s got to swim big. They have to race like a champion that day,” he said. “It’d be great to get another year up on the banner, it’s been quite some time ... To win the league again, I think it’d be very nice for our freshmen to experience it, for me as a senior to finally win it, and the juniors to carry that momentum into next year.”

With only three teams left competing in Monsignor Martin (St. Francis being the third squad), the league as a whole has become quite the tight knit community. Thus, no matter what the results may bring, the experience as a whole for each team will be special.

“We use the meet as a cumulative event. The goal is to get everyone’s kids to swim faster,” Jeff Banks said. “We’re down to three teams, which is unfortunate, but one thing we do that I’m really proud of is that all three teams come together to honor the seniors of all the schools. There isn’t another sport in Monsignor Martin that can put the rivalry aside like that.”