

Saskatchewan synchronized swim team makes waves

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A podium finish at the Canada Winter Games was the big ticket item on the wish list of the Saskatchewan synchronized swimming team at the beginning of the season.

Saskatoon Aqualenes head coach Laurie Wachs knows that overcoming the strong teams that come out of Ontario, British Columbia, Ontario and Quebec is tough. Wachs, who coached the Saskatchewan team as far back as 1987, passed the torch to Regina's Natalie Good for the 2007 Games, but maintained the role of manager.

Saskatchewan had never been on the podium at the Canada Games in synchro.

Wachs and Good wanted to change that, but knew they would have to go for broke. The team designed a routine heavy on creativity but light on the compulsory elements that would be required for the western regional and Canadian championships in the weeks following the Games.

"Canada Games are different because there are no compulsory elements," said Wachs. "We wanted the (Canada Games) routine to be as creative as possible." The gambit didn't pay off as Saskatchewan finished fifth in the team category.

"Our team hoped to do better," said Wachs. "We gave it our best shot, but we would have like to have moved up a place, which was realistic." Now the team must scramble to amalgamate compulsory elements into their routine for the western regional championships, March 22-25 in Saskatoon.

"We're in a fairly stressful position now," said Wachs. "Now we have to put those compulsory elements in and the routine might not be as creative as it was.

"We have two weeks and we haven't been able to practise yet," she said. "The kids are experienced, so I hope we'll be able to put those elements in and have a great routine." The Canada Games solo event was a different



CREDIT: Richard Marjan, The StarPhoenix
 The Saskatchewan synchronized swim team and manager Laurie Wachs (right) prepare for western regionals

story. Jessica Guenther of Saskatoon made Saskatchewan synchronized swimming history with a breakthrough bronze-medal performance.

"This was the first medal ever for Saskatchewan at a Canada Games, so that was pretty exciting" said Wachs. "Our best hope was for Jessica to bring back a medal. She did a great job." Quebec, Ontario, Alberta and British Columbia finished first through fourth at the Canada Games.

On the national scene, Quebec and Ontario have been dominant, while in the West, Alberta and B.C. have consistently provided tough competition.

Wachs believes seeing those teams at the Canada Games helps her team understand what it needs to do to be successful at westerns and nationals.

"The East is so strong it was a benefit to see them before nationals," she said. "We have a lot of work to do. If we want to be competitive, then we need to raise the bar now." dsmunroe@sp.canwest.com

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