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## Orinda Country Club once again OMPA Champions

By Jon Kingdon



Lily Holloway, 10 year old, Meadow Swim Club  
Photos Gint Federas

There are many things to count on - the sun rising in the East, prices continuing to rise and for the 19th straight year, Orinda Country Club won the OMPA Championship. Meadow Swim Club came in second for the fourth straight year and Moraga Valley Pool came in third, placing for the first time since 2015. Moraga Ranch won the award for Most Improved Team and Meadow Swim won the award for the Most Improved Team Without Relays and Orinda Park won the Heidary Sportsmanship Trophy. Elisabeth Butler, swimming for Orinda C.C. was named the outstanding female swimmer and Grant Kurtz, swimming for Moraga Valley was named the outstanding male swimmer.

There has been a singular focus this year at OMPA. Due to a change in the fall starting time for the Lamorinda schools, the final meet this year was not the County Meet but the OMPA, which occurred simultaneously with the County meet at Acalanes. Co-Director Sarah Spon

(along with Jen Nakamura) explained how this evolved: "The schools are starting earlier this year to align better with the first semester. Last year, the final exams were given after the holiday break, which was hard on the students. There was no opportunity to move the OMPA since there was another event last week at Campolindo which precluded moving our meet back a week."

There's been no crying over spilt milk from the coaches in not having the opportunity to go to the county meet. "As soon as they moved the county meet to our OMPA meet date, we knew that there would be a conflict," said Orinda C.C. Head Coach Steve Hauffer. "All of our coaches pointed to this meet. It's been a good summer, though it felt a little short due to the school year starting earlier and not having a county meet."

Orinda Parks head coach Brad Allen looked on the bright side: "Not going to county made it easier in that we had just this one meet to focus on for the summer. We did make a special deal for those that would have qualified for the county with their times. We would make them feel special, at each home meet, calling them down and recognizing them in front of the whole team."

Marc Cavallero, Moraga Ranch's head coach saw an advantage to just focusing on the OMPA: "It's weird to not go to the county meet. It's a great accomplishment for the kids that qualify but this year it makes for a nice end point to the season. We're all putting our eggs in one basket instead of stretching it out over two weeks."

Regardless of the OMPA results, the coaches saw real positives in their seasons. "It's been a really good summer," said Meadow Swims Matt Armanini. "We had our best group of 8-and-unders in the five years I've been here. We got a lot of young swimmers this year, which we have been waiting for. We have a lot of depth in both the girls and the guys. It's been a nice surprise and we look forward to their development."

Trevor Rose, Moraga Valley Pool's head coach saw their season's success on different levels: "We've had the biggest team in our history (284). Competitive athletics is important but I would also say a good family feel and positive environment is more important especially when you're working with kids. I appreciate everything about the team from the little kid that swims for the first time to the older kid that wins an event. It's all part of the process."

At the other end, Miramonte had the smallest team with 74 swimmers. Head coach Eddie Lee sees great potential in the team's future: "Our younger kids have been very strong which is awesome for the future of the team. We had seven 6-and-under breaststrokers in the top 25. Evelyn Gaffney broke five pool records this summer and broke the OMPA record on Saturday. A number of our swimmers would have gone to county but OMPA has been our focus."

All of the teams speak about the family feeling among its members. For Sleepy Hollow's Matt Ehrenberger, it's both figurative and literally that way: "My oldest son, Justin, graduated last year and my middle son, Nathan, is 16 and my daughter, Bailey, is 9 years old. It's always nice to see them swim. It's been a good summer though a little short. We never had our whole team in place for much of the summer so it nice to have everyone here at this meet. We're a different team than we've been in the past with new kids trying to step up and fill the shoes of those who have graduated. It's time for the next wave of Sleepy Hollow legends to step up and take over the leadership role."

In her second year as head coach of Moraga Country Club, Tiffany Forbes feels she has the team pointed in the right direction: "There had been a few years of turmoil at our club that is over and done and we're on an upward trajectory. We're small but we're mighty. Our swimmers love this meet a lot more than they love county. With five great senior coaches and about 30 junior coaches, we had a really solid and motivated staff." Forbes singled out 10-year-old Ellis Culleton and 9-year-old J.T. Gett as two to look out for down the road.

Tatiana Gessling of Campolindo Cabana had her team focus on OMPA along with team individual times: "As a group, I'm really proud of how hard they've all worked. They have individual goals but as a team we would try to get 500 points and then we bumped it to 1,000 and now we're trying to get to 1,500. We've been training for OMPA and this was definitely our number one priority."

Each of the coaches has their own way of doing things though there are many similarities in their approaches. The keys for success for these coaches range from technique to character and attitude. If there is one consistency for all of them, it's important for their swimmers to have fun.

For Haufler, "It's not just the kids in the top 10 but the kids in the top 20 that helps our team. It's all about stroke technique, start, turn and finish." Allen says: "It's hard work, effort and sportsmanship. We want to mix the balance between hard work and play perfectly."

Cavallero has taken a unique approach: "We don't swim and train yardage which is the old school mentality of swim. We go the opposite of that. We focus on good technique, balancing that with making it a positive experience. We want it to be fun and enjoyable and we want to build that team spirit and comradery."

Gessling points to "competitiveness and striving to be their best as an individual and always trying to find something to push themselves, like internal motivation because it's really hard for a coach to always yell but if the swimmer is in to it, setting their own goals and pushing themselves, you're going to have success."

Allen's formula is "to put time in the water but you have to make sure that your swimmers are having fun and they want to compete and get better and faster. The balance between hard work and play is what we want to mix perfectly."

For Armanini, "It's just being very consistent with our structure and routine. The younger kids feed off and thrive in that and we have been able to develop a system that on several days a week we do certain stroke groups and the rest of the week we do dives and other days we do free style."

Lee goes for "technique and the little details of the stroke along with motivation. We try and get the kids pumped up and believing in themselves and realize that they can accomplish their goals if they have no doubt in themselves at all."

For Rose, it's character: "You got to want to try every day or else you can't succeed when you compete. You have to care as much about shaking someone's hand as you do winning the event. You have to care as much about a workout as you do a championship meet swim. It's doing the right things as a human and as a teammate that is way more important to us than fast swimming though the fast swimming is a by-product of all that."

Ehrenberger keeps it simple: " We just try and work hard day in and day out and we try not to worry too much about things that we can't control, just the things that we can control. It's consistency over the years of coaching and the kids and parents buying into system."

It's been more than just taking care of the swimmers for Nakamura and Speron: "We've been preparing for this meet since last October," said Nakamura. "It's setting up vendors and food trucks. Selling ads and finding sponsors like Zuma, Creative Energy, LAMO Water Polo, Tice Valley among others."

For both of them and for most of the community, it's more than a meet, says Speron: "The most fun is having all the kids come in and seeing the excitement build up all week. All of this generates great comradery with everyone talking about OMPA all over town and in the community."

#### TEAM RESULTS

Orinda Country Club - 4462 (244 swimmers)

Meadow Swim - 3018.5 (225 swimmers)

Moraga Valley - 3000 (284 swimmers)

Sleepy Hollow - 2962 (226 swimmers)

Moraga Ranch - 2151 (165 swimmers)

Orinda Park - 2090.5 (219 swimmers)

Moraga Country Club 2046 (143 swimmers)

Miramonte Swim Team - 1129 (74 swimmers)

Campolindo Cabana Club - 758 (111 swimmers)?

INDIVIDUAL MEET RECORDS BROKEN

GIRLS

Evelyn Gaffney (Miramonte) - 6 & Under breast stroke (20.38)

Lily Holloway (Meadow) - 9-10 50 yard back stroke (31.01)

Grace Clark (Meadow) - 13-14 50 yard back stroke (26.71)

BOYS

Grant Kurtz (Moraga Valley) - 11-12 50 yard fly (26.54)

HIGH POINT WINNERS

6 & Under Girls 6 & Under Boys

Evelyn Gaffney - Miramonte Henry Shamia - Orinda C.C.

7-8 Girls 7-8 Boys

Hayden Holloway - Meadow Jack Deal - Orinda Park

9-10 Girls 9-10 Boys

Lily Holloway - Meadow Ellis Culleton - Miramonte C.C.

11-12 Girls 11-12 Boys

Elisabeth Butler - Orinda C.C. Grant Kurtz - Moraga Valley

13-14 Girls 13-14 Boys

Grace Clark - Meadow Matteo Petty - Moraga Valley

15-18 Girls (Tie) 15-18 Boys

Mackenzie Murphy - Orinda C.C. Narayan Sharma - Sleepy Hollow

Katie Lyons - Orinda C.C.



Luke Childers, 9 yo, Moraga Valley Pool



Grayson Menard, 9 year old, from Sleepy Hollow Photo Gint Federas

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[back](#)

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