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## Swim clubs dive into OMPA traditions

By Casey Scheiner



Devon Luce of Orinda Park Pool Swim Team during an exhibition swim. Photo provided

Every year in late July, a magical air washes across Orinda and Moraga. Hundreds of cars drive around town, adorned with supportive messages. A mass of kids, all in identical T-shirts, might be shoulder to shoulder at a matinee showing at the Orinda Theatre. Most notably, as the summer winds down, kids splash, dive and swim at their local pool for hours.

These activities are part of the leadup to the Orinda Moraga Pool Association Championship Meet, known merely as "OMPA" to most. The culmination of the season for the nine swim clubs based in Orinda and Moraga, the three day event, which transpired July 29-31 this year, brings not just excitement on the days in which throngs of enthusiastic parents, coaches, and swimmers migrate to the Soda Center at Campolindo High School, but anticipation in the preceding week, which is stuffed to the brim with activities.

One of the biggest parts of OMPA is not the meet itself, but the traditions that set the scene for it. Though each club is slightly different in the ways they celebrate the arrival of the summer's biggest meet, many teams have a lot of rituals in common.

From team dinners on the nights before the meet, which combine carbohydrate loading and skit shows, to car decorating sessions, where families paint their windows and add flags so anyone driving past them knows where their allegiances lie, to field trips to the movies, swim clubs concoct many activities to invigorate their members ahead of OMPA.

"I love driving around town and seeing the crazy waves, fins and everything people put on their cars, it creates a sense of anticipation for the meet," Moraga Country Club head coach Sean Malley, also an OMPA swimmer as a child, explained. "OMPA builds a unique community, [where] younger kids feel just as valuable to the contribution of the team as an older kid and the support the older kids give to the younger ones means a lot and helps continue to build and pass on a sense of community within each club."

Unfortunately, this summer, one club has been away from their pool and the traditions which exist there. Moraga Valley Pool relocated for the year, due to a renovation that sent their practices to the pools at Saint Mary's College, Miramonte High School, and Campolindo High School.

"Most summers, people hang out at the pool and it's like a home base. This year, we have been practicing at other pools, so we aren't able to do much other than practice and leave right after practice ends," Alex Battersby, a swimmer at MVP, said. "We're trying to start fun bonding experiences, like our silly alliterative tradition Breaststroke Briday, where on Fridays, we do breaststroke workouts, which are equally fun and exhausting."

One more rite of passage for the week occurs on each day of competition, after the caravans of enthusiastic families arrive, but before a single foot touches the blocks, when the Boy Scouts of Troop 237, decked out in full uniform, kick off the festivities by raising the Star-Spangled Banner. "We're excited to be raising the American flag at OMPA," Wyatt Johnson, the Troop 237 senior patrol leader, commented. "It's a great honor that our troop has gotten to do for many years."

Following the display of the Red, White, and Blue, the weeks of suspense come to a head on Friday evening, as kids dive into the year-end competition. The next 48 hours can only be described as "magical," an adjective multiple sources used to encapsulate the event. A community is united in its enthusiasm for swimming, as evidenced by last year's meet's slogan, "Together In These Lanes," representing locals eager to rejoin their friends following the COVID-19 pandemic.

After three long days of intense competition, team bonding, and setting new personal bests, many teams reconvene at their home pools Sunday night in one final team dinner to nourish their worn out bodies, reflect on the season, and enjoy time together as a team one last time this summer, before swimmers become students again.

This year's meet may feature an athlete or two who one day joins the illustrious list of the 18 Olympians who once swam at OMPA. Dozens more may continue their swimming careers through high school, college, and beyond. But certainly, through the magic that engulfs this summer's OMPA, thousands of coaches, parents, and swimmers will make memories that last a lifetime.

Orinda/Moraga Pools Association

65th Annual Championship Meet 2022

Team Rankings - Through Event 270

Women - Team Rankings - Through Event 270

1. Orinda Country Club 1954
2. Sleepy Hollow Legends 1730.5
3. Meadow Swim Team 1729.5
4. Orinda Park Pool Swim Team 1164
5. Moraga Valley Pool Swim Team 1160.5
6. Moraga Ranch Swim Club 1146.5
7. Moraga Country Club 952.5
8. Campolindo Cabana Club Marlins 559.5
9. Miramonte Swim Club 328

Men - Team Rankings - Through Event 270

1. Orinda Country Club 2103.5
2. Meadow Swim Team 1585.5
3. Moraga Valley Pool Swim Team 1429.5
4. Moraga Country Club 1398
5. Moraga Ranch Swim Club 1299.5
6. Orinda Park Pool Swim Team 1034.5
7. Sleepy Hollow Legends 977
8. Campolindo Cabana Club Marlins 484
9. Miramonte Swim Club 457.5

Combined Team Scores

1. Orinda Country Club 4057.5
2. Meadow Swim Team 3315
3. Sleepy Hollow Legends 2707.5
4. Moraga Valley Pool Swim Team 2590
5. Moraga Ranch Swim Club 2446
6. Moraga Country Club 2350.5
7. Orinda Park Pool Swim Team 2198.5
8. Campolindo Cabana Club Marlins 1043.5
9. Miramonte Swim Club 785.5



Ella Dulski and Tali Stryker congratulate each other. Stryker broke the 50 yard freestyle meet record with a time of 23.80. Photo provided

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[back](#)

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