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East Bay Sea Serpent relays conquer the pool at OMPA

Submitted by Asha Spitzer



Sea Serpent athletes and coaches celebrating after the relays. Photos provided

This July, the Lamorinda community had the opportunity to watch a long-standing tradition once again: the East Bay Sea Serpents relay at the OMPA swim meet.

Every summer the local swim teams assemble at Campolindo High School for the Orinda Moraga Pool Association swim meet (OMPA). This year, on Saturday, July 29, after the finals session, a bonus team joined the ranks for the OMPA relays: the East Bay Sea Serpents. The East Bay Sea Serpents, founded in 2001, is the local Special Olympics swim team that practices out of Campolindo High School. The serpents came to the pool clad in green T-shirts for their 13th annual relay, with 16 swimmers. After a brief warm-up in the dive pool, the swimmers marched over to the blocks in their four relay teams, surrounded by the roaring crowd.

As the serpents readied themselves at the blocks, the crowd stilled in anticipation.

With the sound of the starter, the serpents pushed off with a rush of water, the fans screaming in the bleachers.

In lane three, the medley relay consisted of Shari Kimball (backstroke), Ryan Peneliza (breaststroke), Andrea Halliday (Butterfly), and Ramon Silano (Freestyle). Lane four was one of the free relays, with Eric Bobbitt, Lilian Calahan-Klein, Tyler Caporoletti, and Brandon Cordoba. Lane five was the second free relay with Dillon Roach, Thomas Sullivan, Sally-Ann Gaughn, and Katie Vanderleit. Lane six was the third free relay with Brynne Knudsen, Aimee Gee, Trenton Fontes, and John Gomez.

The swimmers raced through their relays, each sprinting across the pool with a hard finish so the next leg of the relay could begin. Brynne Knudsen started her relay off strong with a powerful freestyle, finishing with an extra-loud cheer from supporters in the Moraga Ranch Swim Team bleachers. As the swimmers dashed across the lanes the enthusiasm from the crowd grew, with thundering roars from all sides of the pool as the serpents finished their final laps.

Simon Keenan, a dedicated serpent who unfortunately could not swim in the relays due to an injury, cheered on his teammates from the Sleepy Hollow Swim Team bleachers.

Andrea Halliday, a Sea Serpent with nine years of experience, shared that her favorite part of the relays was "meeting new friends and the cheering of the crowds," and has decided that along with her air-brush tattoos and OMPA T-shirt, she wants to get her hair braided next year.

Katie Vanderliet, who has been a Serpent since she was 13, announced she liked racing her freestyle as the anchor of her relay and getting her free shirt.

Head coach Brian Wentzel explained, "The Lamorinda community has had a rich history of aquatics and summer swimming tradition. This event is unique in that it fosters inclusion and awareness of swimmers with intellectual disabilities in our community. "Additionally, the awareness at OMPA has been a recurring source of young volunteers for the program which is core to our long-term viability."

As the summer fades to its end, the East Bay Sea Serpents' dedicated swimming is just beginning. They will be back at Campolindo High School soon for their fall practice season so they can begin preparing for next year's competitive summer.

If you are interested in volunteering or swimming with EBSS, please visit the EBSS team website and register for the fall session.



Katie Vandereliet swimming her freestyle to anchor the relay.

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