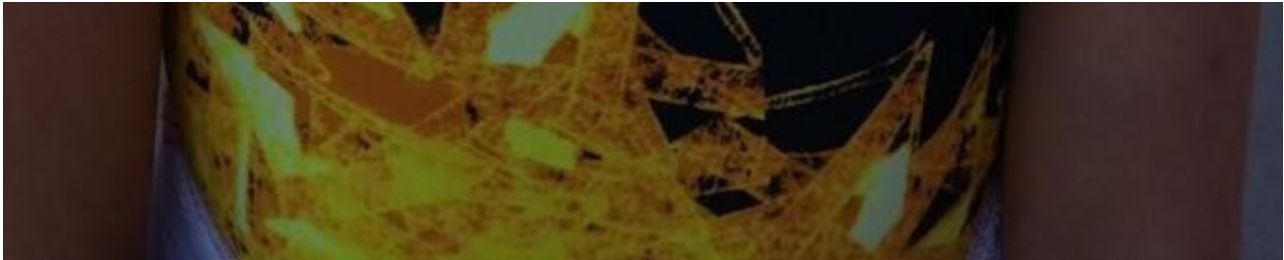




Up-and-coming Stingrays enjoy swimming

by Brent Feeney, Sports Writer
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EDWARDSVILLE – One thing about the summer club swimming season is always this: Many up-and-coming swimmers are always part of the team.

Sunset Hills' Stingrays have three such swimmers on the team this year: Blake Chrenka, who competes in the 8-and-under boys division, Nora Walton, who also competes in the girls 8-and-under division, and Josie O'Day, who competes in the 13-14 girls division.

Chrenka has been swimming for the past two years for the Stingrays. “I just really like swimming,” Chrenka, who will be in third grade this coming school year at Woodland Elementary School in Edwardsville. “It's really fun to me.”

Chrenka wants to swim like all-time American swimming champion Michael Phelps. “I like being in the water,” Chrenka said about why he enjoys swimming, “and it keeps you healthy. I'd like to beat my personal record in every event.”

O'Day is returning to the pool this year after injuries set her back. “I was out for a long time before I came in; I've been hurt and wasn't just feeling good,” O'Day, a rising eighth-grader at Lincoln Middle School, said. “I just took track instead, so when I got back in the water, I felt uncertain and I wasn't as strong as I was. It took a lot to work harder.”

O'Day's mother – who celebrated her birthday at Thursday night's Stingrays meet against Collinsville's Splash City - got Josie into the pool. “My mom loved swimming for fun; it was one of her favorite things to do,” O'Day, who turns 14 Wednesday, said. “She encouraged me in swimming and I really didn't want to do it as much, but I was so little, I didn't have a choice. As soon as I got in, I started to love it and I kept on doing it.

“It's one of my favorite things to do,” O'Day said; she's been swimming since she was seven.

As far as goals for the remainder of the season, O'Day said “I'm trying to break a minute in the 100 freestyle; I'm trying really hard – I'm about three milliseconds away (from breaking the minute mark), so I'm pretty close. It would be really exciting to break that one-minute point.”

Walton, who is five years of age, enjoys swimming - “you just make sure you go faster and win races. It's a lot of fun.”

Walton is glad to be part of the Stingrays and hopes to continue swimming for a long time.