

MORGAN HILL TIMES

Sweet toothed

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By Scott Adams (sports@morganhilltimes.com)

Beneath opal sky on a cushy, crisp mid-summer afternoon that was nothing typical for the season in Morgan Hill, Gilroy's Matthew Sosa, 16, kicked his way across a murky lagoon - a top-secret training facility for him and his Wolfpak mates.

From ashore, his coach Dave Wolfsmith, 42, watched and waited.

"When he gets about 30 yards out, go after him," Wolfsmith said to the rest of the Wolfpak, a rugged outfit of South Valley triathletes totaling 16 that day. "When you get to (Sosa), swim around him and come back here. Do it again and again."

After a few sighs from his audience at the thought of the workout, known as a swim blast, Wolfsmith added a signature dry-humored quip.

"Remember, I can't see anything under the water," he began. "So if you feel like getting a few kicks or punches in with each other go for it. That's what it's going to be like this weekend."

Off they went.

The brawny ex-naval man from Morgan Hill was referring to Sunday's Strawberry Fields Triathlon in Oxnard - and he wasn't kidding. Wolfsmith couldn't be, not after his son Lance Wolfsmith, 16, was socked in the face no more than five minutes into the Wolfpak's last triathlon in Des Moines, Iowa, in late June. Not while his athletes take in parts of the world's most physically demanding sport each practice.

"You've got to watch out," Dave Wolfsmith's daughter Lauren Wolfsmith, 15, said. "I've been kicked in the face a bunch of times during the swim. But I kick people, too. It happens."

The opening 800-meter swim has been all the Wolfpak boys have thought about since the Hy-Vee Triathlon in Des Moines. It was there that they produced three top-20 finishers in the Junior Elite division, ages 16-19, giving them vital team points in the three-competition USAT Junior Elite Cup Series - the nation's biggest stage for youth triathlon. Only the top-10 non-independent finishers score in each Cup event.

With a better performance in the swim, punches and kicks aside, the boys would be feeling better about themselves



Lance Wolfsmith finishes his first of two laps during a swim blast workout as he and other members of the Wolfpak triathlon team prepare for a competition this weekend in Oxnard.
Photo by: Lora Schraft



Courtney Ellenburg, right, and Lauren Wolfsmith, practice transitioning from swimming to bike riding during Wednesday's workout.
Photo by: Lora Schraft

and their chances of winning a national team championship in August.

"We've been swimming a lot since then - at least twice every practice," Sosa said. "We could have shaved like 20 seconds off our times if we were in the swimming shape we're in now. That's huge."

Added Lance Wolfsmith: "Running and biking are definitely our strengths, but we want to do just as good in the swim. We want to get out of the water as a team and be right there with each other.

"Our goal was to get four guys in the top 20 at Iowa. We want five this time."

Although lofty, that goal certainly isn't outlandish. The Wolfpak Junior Elites were against the odds when they tore through Des Moines, battling illness and injury - plus the after effects of track and field season.

"Most of our guys run track, so they were still in track shape - that's a lot different than triathlon shape," Dave Wolfsmith said. "Even with that, they did very well. They should do even better this weekend."

With a black eye and burned out legs - compliments of a faulty bike seat setting - Lance Wolfsmith placed a team-best fourth at Des Moines, covering the 750-meter swim, 20-kilometer bike ride and five-kilometer run in one hour, nine minutes and 20 seconds.

Teammate Tyler Rodgers, 16, of Coto de Caza finished 12th in 1:14:03 and Sosa took 19th in 1:17:31. Morgan Hill's Kyle Benton, 18, had a decent chance of making the top 20 but, because of sickness, had to withdraw after being lapped.

"I was miserable out there," Benton said. "I'm at 100 percent now, so I'm excited to get back out there and show what I can do."

Lance Wolfsmith, Rodgers, Sosa and Benton will represent Wolfpak in the Junior Elite division alongside Morgan Hill's Kyle Deisenroth, 16, who's making his 2008 Cup Series debut. Beyond health, they'll have the advantage of a small field - no larger than 30 Junior Elites - and draft-friendly terrain at Strawberry Fields. Race director Jaime Silber described it as a "beginner's course."

"It's very flat, very fast and not too challenging," Silber said in a telephone interview Wednesday. "The bike and run legs are flat. Some people love it and others don't - that's because it sort of levels the playing field."

The one catch, of course, is the swim. Unlike most races, Strawberry Fields features an open-water dip.

"Swimming breakers in the ocean is a lot different than swimming in lakes," Dave Wolfsmith said. "Obviously, you've got the current, the waves and the run up the sand. It's going to be tough. You just have to go as hard as you can. Every second counts."

That mantra plays into every Wolfpak workout. The team spent the last month fine-tuning all aspects of the race, including the overlooked but oh so important transition between events. The toughest is the first: from swimming to biking. It's common to see triathletes stripping off their wetsuits while slipping into their bike shoes - all while jogging. Once they hit the road at full speed, Dave Wolfsmith said, they strap their feet into the pedals.

"Transition is like an event in itself," added Lance Wolfsmith, the 2006 Youth Elite national champion. "You



Gilroy's Matthew Sosa runs ashore during a swim blast workout with his Wolfpak teammates Wednesday in Morgan Hill.
Photo by: Lora Schraft



The Wolfpak swims a warmup lap before practice.
Photo by: Lora Schraft

can have the best swim, but if you waste time between events you lose everything you worked for."

Fresh off his victory in the Independence Day, Inc., Fourth of July 5K, Lance Wolfsmith expects to finish in the top three if not first at Oxnard. He has his eye on Benjamin Steavenson, who placed second in the Hy-Vee.

"He's the best out there right now in my opinion," Lance Wolfsmith said. "I'm looking forward to battling with him again."

Adding to the excitement of Sunday's 7:05 a.m. competition, is that it's the final test before the Aug. 9 USAT National Championships in Colorado Springs, Colo., the Cup Series climax. It's there that the top individual and team will be crowned.

"We're already pumped for it," Sosa said. "We're in better shape for this weekend, and we're going to be in our best shape for nationals."

The Wolfpak also is sending a three-person male team of Youth Elites, ages 13-15, and a mixed girls unit led by Lauren Wolfsmith.

The Wolfpak boys have veterans in Derek Deisenroth, 15, and Dustin Benton, 13 - Kyle Deisenroth and Kyle Benton's younger brothers - plus Gilroy's Kyle Collet, 14. They join newcomer Kyle Alexander, 12, a competitive Morgan Hill swimmer.

Derek Deisenroth was a second-place relay runner in the May 18 Uvas South Bay Triathlon, and Dustin Benton covered the 400-meter swim, 2.5-kilometer bike ride and 10-kilometer run at Des Moines in 46:19 - good for 22nd place. The Wolfpak Youth Elites are without veteran Kooper Knutson, 14, who's recovering from a chipped bone in his leg. The Gilroy native placed 14th at Des Moines (45:00) and will miss the rest of the season, Dave Wolfsmith said.

Although green, the Wolfpak girls feature several prep stars, including cross country/track runners Kirsti Whitmyre, 18, and Olivia Duran, 17 - CIF-Central Coast Section finalists at Sobrato and Live Oak high schools - and Courtney Ellenburg, 14, an incoming freshman at Sobrato.

Whitmyre's honing her skills for a potential walk-on career at Cal Poly San Luis Obispo.

"After my first triathlon practice I was thinking, 'do I really want to do this?'" she joked. "Your whole body is tired after practice - it's a good feeling."

Duran felt the same way, adding a hint of eagerness for her first triathlon.

"I can feel myself getting a lot stronger already," Duran said. "I just hope I can finish this weekend. You have to be crazy to do this."

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