

# MORGAN HILL TIMES

## Brotherhood of the wolf

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By Scott Adams ([sports@morganhilltimes.com](mailto:sports@morganhilltimes.com))

Wearing dark sunglasses, cross-training shoes, stop watches, black-and-white speedsuits and no smiles, the imposing South Valley-based team Wolfpak had the look you associate with triathletes - a cross between poker champion and pit boss.

With little expression, the muscle-bound teenagers jogged and biked through Morgan Hill's Community Park on Tuesday, trotting single file and pedaling four wide.

In team and in bloodline, the Wolfpak's Youth Elite and Junior Elite triathletes are family. The ties extend from coach Dave Wolfsmith to his son Lance Wolfsmith, 16, and nephews-in-law Kyle and Dustin Benton, ages 18 and 13. Although unrelated, the Wolfpak's other youth/junior team members Matthew Sosa, 16, Kooper Knutson, 14, and Coto de Caza's Tyler Rogers, 16, are just as close.

"We might as well be brothers," Lance said. "We're all really tight with each other. It comes from training so hard together. We work out every day."

Added Sosa, who's known as "Chewy" to his teammates: "It's probably the most intense sport out there, and when you have guys training as hard we do for it, you develop a bond with each other. We're always training. Like yesterday, I worked out four times."

With its solid work ethic and results, plus unflinching camaraderie, Wolfpak is widely considered the best outfits in the USA Triathlon Junior Elite Cup Series, the proving ground for future Olympic hopefuls and international-level triathletes.

"A lot of people don't know what Elite racing is," Dave Wolfsmith said. "This is redlining the whole way. This is swimming, biking and running at your absolute fastest level. You don't pace yourself. You can't."

Think of the Wolfpak as one of the toughest teams in the toughest sport's toughest series. This week, the Wolfpak traveled to Iowa for one of the toughest competitions, the USAT Des Moines Youth Elite/Junior Elite Cup-Hy-Vee Triathlon.

The event starts Saturday afternoon in muggy 90-plus degree weather and features a 400-meter swim, 10-kilometer bike ride and 2.5-kilometer run for youths (ages 13-15); and a 750-meter swim, 20-kilometer bike ride and 5-kilometer run for juniors (16-19).



Members of South Valley's Wolfpak triathlon team from left, Lance Wolfsmith, Matthew Sosa, Kyle and Dustin Benton bike at Community Park as they prepare for a triathlon in Des Moines, Iowa, on Saturday.  
Photo by: Lora Schraft



The Wolfpak is considered one of the favorites in the Junior Elite team national championship hunt for triathlon.  
Photo by: Lora Schraft

"It should be a fun weekend," Dave Wolfsmith said almost jokingly. "The guys can't wait to get out there."

The Hy-Vee Triathlon is the first of three events in the team-competitive Junior Elite Cup Series. Aggregate results from each competition determine the top team. The other two triathlons are the USAT Youth Elite/Junior Elite Cup, held July 20 in Oxnard, and the USAT Youth Elite/Junior Elite National Championships in Colorado Springs, Colo., Aug. 9. The top-10 non-independent finishers in each division score points for their teams.

"Wolfpak is certainly going to be in the running," said USAT Athlete Development Coordinator Steve Kelley. "Their team is strong. One of the things that's challenging is developing a cadre of athletes who are willing to commit to the big races. Dave has done a good job building a team that competes and is ready to take on national competition."

One of the favorites to place first in the 80-man Junior Elite field this weekend is Lance, the Wolfpak's frontman, who's enjoyed a storied three-year career running cross country and track for his father at Sobrato High School. The senior placed seventh at Junior Elite nationals last year and is a former Youth Elite national champion. He said he has much to prove after a hard-luck first year in Junior Elite. Lance made a big stride by winning the Uvas South Bay Triathlon in May. He finished first in his age group (14-19) and second overall at one hour, 29 minutes, 50.7 seconds. Uvas was the Wolfpak's last triathlon.

"I'm pumped to be going back to Des Moines," Lance said. "I had a really, really bad race last year and broke a chain at another race. I've been kind of counted out. This is a big opportunity for me."

Lance, who took 14th place in the two-mile at state finals, has spent most of the past months improving his stroke.

"Lance is definitely further along in his cycling and running than most kids," Kelley said. "He knows swimming is where he needs to put in his most extra effort to get to the national level."

Dave Wolfsmith felt the same Tuesday.

"He wants to close the gap this year. To do that, he needed to work on swimming - that's his weakest event. Every guy has his strengths and weaknesses," Dave Wolfsmith said.

Kyle, who also had a strong running career at Sobrato, is one of the Wolfpak's best bikers. He finished third (1:36:54.8) in the 14-19 age group at Uvas.

"Kyle's really improved this year," Dave Wolfsmith said. "His bike is great."

Sosa also is a prep track standout. He clocked a sub-55 second time in the 400 meters this year for Gilroy High School and placed fourth in the 2006 Youth Elite national championship triathlon in Bridgeport, Conn., the same meet Lance won. Sosa and Lance are the only two Wolfpak members left from the 2006 Youth Elite team that placed second in the nation.

"It's still the most exciting sport to me," said Sosa, who placed fifth (1:41:50.6) in his age group at Uvas. "Triathlon is like no other sport. You can pull basketball players just off the street, or baseball players. You can't just throw someone into one of these and expect them to do good."



The Wolfpak placed second nationally in the Youth Elite division two years ago.  
Photo by: Lora Schraft



The Wolfpak's Lance Wolfsmith placed seventh in the Junior Elite national championships last year and first in the Youth Elite finals in 2006.  
Photo by: Lora Schraft

The secret to success in triathlon is training "pure and simple," Sosa said.

"You have to get out here and do your hardest at least three times a day."

As with most sports, competition is the best form of training for triathlon. Knutson and Dustin, who attended Gilroy's Solarsano Middle School this past year, have started earlier. Knutson has twice done the famed Escape From Alcatraz Triathlon, and Dustin recently placed third in a non-Elite triathlon in Wisconsin.

At Uvas, Knutson placed seventh (1:51:12.3) in the 14-19 age group and Dustin took second (21:44.1) as a relay swimmer. They will compete Saturday in the Youth Elite division.

"Those guys are coming along," Dave Wolfsmith said. "They're young, but they're on their way."

For the team rather than the individual, each Wolfpak member is out to do their best Saturday, hoping to finish in the top-10. The Wolfpak lacked funding and numbers to field a strong team in 2007 but have the talent and bodies to return to prominence this summer.

As Dave Wolfsmith said while holding a list of last year's top Elite squads, it all starts this weekend.

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