

## Pioneers Aiming Sights On NW3A/4A Championships

Written by Staff Reports

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A much anticipated conference meet will finally take place on Wednesday. The Northwestern 3A/4A Conference championships will be held at the Hickory Foundation YMCA Wednesday beginning at 5

p.m. Watauga, St. Stephens, South Caldwell, Hickory, Fred T. Foard, Alexander Central, and Hibriten will be looking to lay claim to the 2012-2013 Northwestern 3A/4A Conference swim titles. Last year's champions St. Stephens (girls) and South Caldwell (boys) look to defend their titles. The St. Stephens girls should expect tough competition from Watauga, South Caldwell, and Fred T. Foard while the South Caldwell boys will face stiff challenges from Watauga, St. Stephens, and Hickory.

Based on regular season results, the meet should be wide open for the top five teams. Depth and yearlong USA Swimming programs will separate the top teams. As always, the relay events will prove to be a pivotal factor. Each school is allowed one team and points are doubled. Any disqualification will open the door for another team to move up in the meet.

Darby Middlebrook, Anne Taylor, and Doria Kosmala lead a strong group for WHS that looks to bring back a conference title that has eluded WHS for several years. Darby Middlebrook will also be going after Danielle Daggett's 1987 school record in the 500 freestyle and she could push for the 200 freestyle record of Darci Daggett set in 1993.

Taylor could push for the conference record in the 100 freestyle and has an outside chance of taking the school record from Jenny Hinshaw set in 1986. Freshmen Carson Middlebrook, Julianna Silver, and Maddy Allain will have to swim big in their initial conference meet for the Pioneers.

"Each swimmer is seeded well in their events and should help us score some much-needed points in this meet," said WHS coach David Gragg. "Seniors Tori Placentra and Eliza Enterline will also need big swims in order to score in their events. Our top scoring events should be the 100 and 200 freestyles as well as the 100 breast stroke in addition to the relays. If swimmers like Sidney Wiswell, Cheyenne Hayler, and Suzi Barker have big meets, they can move up and take away points from other teams. A win in this meet will require a total team effort and probably breaking a few school and conference records along the way."

On the men's side, Forrest Brown, Marcus Funston, Brandon Michelsen, and Noah Allain will lead a team looking to recapture the title after finishing second last year.

"Each one of these boys is seeded well in their event but will have to swim much faster if they want to close their Pioneer careers on top," Gragg said. "They will be joined by Joel Brown, Josh Herman, and Ben Watson in their attempt to unseat South Caldwell and hold off St. Stephens. The 200 IM, 100 butterfly and 100 freestyle look like our top scoring events. I am counting on Chris Winkler, Adam Patton, Josh Anderson, and Peter Vandenberg to have big meets and help move up in their events. While records may not be set, fast swims by each team member have to happen in order for us to win. With only 16 boys, there is not a lot of room for mistakes.

"As a coach, I could not ask for us to be in a better position on paper. I like to know where we stand, so I pre-scored the meet. We should do well, but I told the kids that the paperwork was over. Their actual swimming was what would get us the titles. I think both teams can sense

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winning and that is a feeling I hope materializes at the meet."