

WATER POLO

Raising sport's profile at event

By GREG HARDER
Leader-Post

The sport of water polo continues to make waves in Regina.

Already a reputed spawning ground for some of the top players in Canada, the city is diving back into the shallow end this weekend for the 2010 16-and-under boys national club championship at the Lawson Aquatic Centre. By staging a grass-roots-level event, the local water polo community believes it can continue to increase its profile while also exposing the next generation of players to the game.

"It helps to introduce the sport at a high level to the whole community," offered Jymmi Kaye Demchuk, executive director of Water Polo Saskatchewan. "There's just something about a national competition. It creates so much excitement and it draws the whole country together. You get to see the best of the best."

This is the second time in three years that Regina has successfully bid for a national water polo championship. The 2008 16-and-under girls event was also held at the Lawson.

"We've hosted nationals for quite a few events over the years," noted Demchuk. "We have a very good reputation."

Following this weekend's tournament, Water Polo Canada is slated to hold a three-day training camp at the Lawson for the 16-and-under boys age group. A total of 38 players, including eight alternates, have been invited to try out for 20 spots on the national summer team. There aren't any Saskatchewan athletes among them, but that doesn't mean they're not on the national radar.

Russell Lenferna and Drake

Greschner, both of whom are playing for the Regina Squids this weekend, have taken part in 18-and-under camps this year in Victoria and Halifax. Regina's Jared Goosen was also invited to the first 18-and-under camp in Victoria while Lenferna, who's from Weyburn, has been identified as a prospect for the senior national team.

On the women's side, players like Whitney Genoway and Jenna Crook of Regina are already part of the national program.

Those athletes are following in the footsteps of current and former national-calibre players from the Regina area like Noah Miller, Robin Randall, Will Tunison and Kevin Graham. Randall and Graham were members of the 2008 Canadian Olympic team.

"We're so pleased that this provincial program and club program can prepare kids for that level," added Demchuk,

who believes the future is bright for water polo in Saskatchewan — and will be on display this weekend. "When we get three players (trying out for the 18-and-under squad), that just helps elevate the whole team.

"Hosting these events, it's our tie to Water Polo Canada. The national team coaches are here and they're watching these athletes. We're going to be watching the future of water polo in Canada."

The 13-team field includes clubs from Ottawa, Montreal, Toronto, Calgary, Edmonton and Vancouver. Games run all day today (opening ceremonies at 1:30 p.m.) through Monday, concluding with the gold-medal game at 3:30 p.m.

It helps to introduce the sport at a high level to the whole community."
— Jymmi Kaye Demchuk,
Water Polo Sask.
executive director