

Harford County Hurricanes headed to YMCA championships

With the 2008 Olympic Games just days away, the hype and excitement from Beijing to Baltimore is beginning to mount.

The XXIX Olympiad will offer 28 summer sports to 10,500 athletes from around the world and will strive to embrace the theme of "One World One Dream."

Yet on a more local level, while Michael Phelps and Katie Hoff are gearing up for record-breaking times and multiple gold medals, so are swimmers from the Harford County Hurricanes, as the YMCA of the USA will host its summer Long Course National Swimming and Diving competition.

The event will run from July 29 through Aug. 1 at the University of Maryland's Eppley Recreation Center in College Park.

Brian Wilson, a sophomore at Calvert Hall College High School in Towson, is one of the eight Hurricane swimmers who have qualified for the YMCA Nationals.

Wilson is a butterflyer with a best time of 57.5 seconds in the 100-meter event and 2 minutes, 7.10 seconds in the 200-meter race. This is Wilson's first national competition, and he is very excited about the pace of competition and the experience.

"I started swimming at the age of 10," Wilson said. "It takes a lot of hard work, but I feel so much pride after a good practice and I am really looking forward to the week ahead."

Billy Cappuccio, another sophomore from Calvert Hall, is also a top-flight member of the Harford County Hurricane team that had put up strong qualifying times this past spring in the 200-meter breaststroke, where his best is 2:45. He will swim three events for the Hurricanes at the YMCA Long Course Nationals.

"I've been swimming since I was 4 years old," Cappuccio said. "I've been with the

Hurricanes for the past eight years, and I just like the team element and the confidence that my teammates have. We get and give a lot of support.”

Cappuccio, the team jokester, says that swimming is his life. He just takes it day by day and stays focused. He recently received the Carroll Barnes team award for team spirit, commitment to the program and sportsmanship.

The Harford County Hurricanes are committed to building for their future. “We are dedicated to become a premier competitive swimming program in the Central Maryland area,” said Head Coach Larry Dukes, who is in his 10th year with the Hurricanes and is the athletic director at The John Carroll School, Bel Air.

Dukes sees Baltimore as a “hotbed” for swimming talent. He wonders from time to time “who the next Phelps or Hoff will be. There is an incredible level of commitment by the coaches and the swimmers.”

The Hurricanes are known for their ability to develop exceptional swimming talent. But they are also focused on helping each swimmer become the best he or she can be.

Both Wilson and Cappuccio have the same goal; to one day participate in the United States Olympic Trials. There are no grand thoughts of being the next Phelps, however. They just want the experience of swimming against the nation’s best whenever and wherever that opportunity presents itself.