

S W I M M I N G

Stingrays make big splash

Foothills club hosts first event of the season

By Rick Northrop
REPORTER

Plenty of novice swimmers got their first taste of competition at the Okotoks Recreation Centre last Saturday.

Approximately 140 budding Alex Baumanns braved the roads and weather to attend the Team Photos with Santa Swim Meet hosted by the Foothills Stingray Swim Club.

Iris Jackson, one of the club's board members, said the meet was part of a developmental program to introduce young athletes to competitive swimming.

"It promotes learning the strokes, learning the techniques and reinforcing what the coaches are trying to teach the kids in practice," said Jackson.

The event builds on the

Stingrays' recent success at a meet in Edmonton where several of the club's members qualified for national level competitions.

Holly Johnson, Christyna and Kalyna Dashko, Keenan and Keely Greenfield, Cole Middtdal and Ryan Jackson all qualified to attend the Canadian Age Group Championships, July 22-25, 2010 in Winnipeg.

Todd Melton, Stingrays head coach, said meets like the Team Photos with Santa are growing in size and popularity.

Clubs from Lethbridge, Medicine Hat and the University of Calgary participated Saturday.

"The kids love to win those races but it's more focused on getting them ready for competition," said Melton.

Melton said the Stingrays club has grown from 70 youths two years ago to about 90 right now. Melton attributes the increase in enrolment to word of mouth.

Most competitive swim

meets are two to four days in length, which can be intimidating for young swimmers. Developmental meets like Saturday's event are a stepping-stone to higher level invitational-style meets.

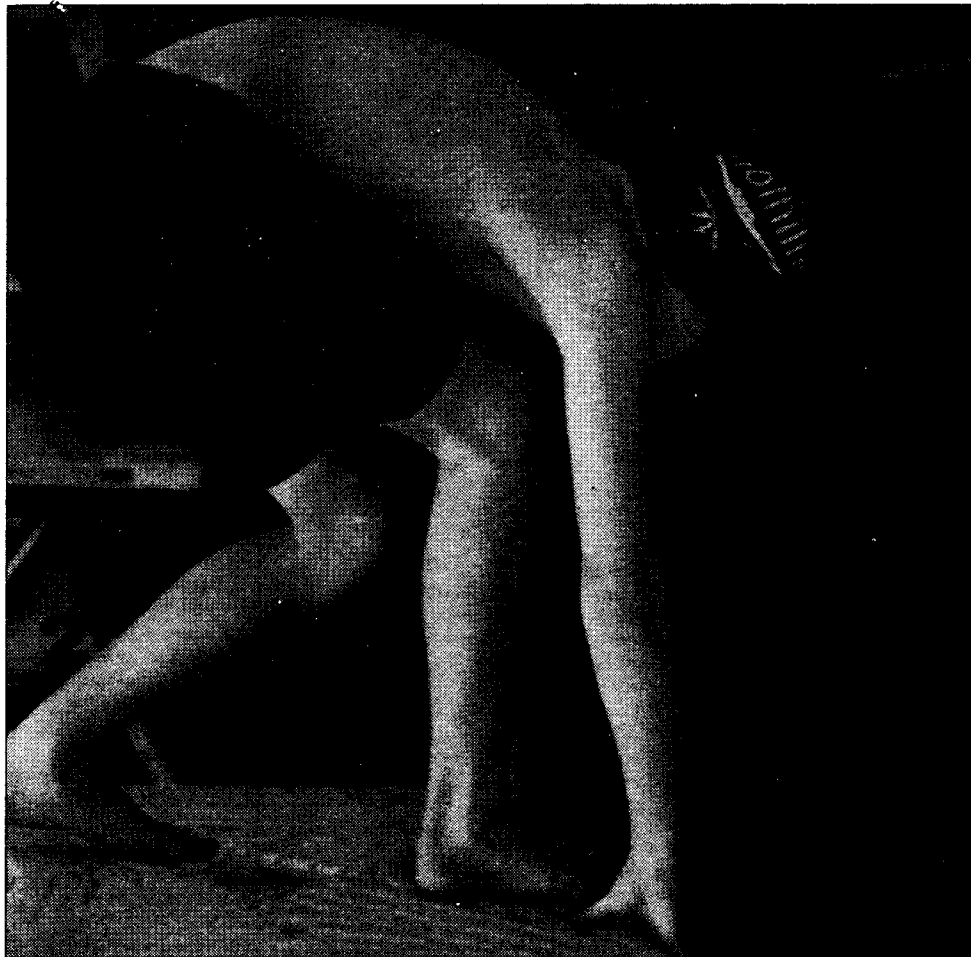
"It's all about encouraging the kids and the parents to learn what competitive swimming is about in a positive environment," said Jackson.

The Stingrays will host another three meets this season. The first, the Black and Blue Meet, will be held Feb. 6-7 at the Okotoks Recreation Centre. About 275 swimmers from Edmonton and British Columbia are expected to attend.

In conjunction with the Okotoks Masters, the Stingrays will host the Alberta Masters Provincials, April 16-18.

The swim season comes to conclusion May 8-9 with the Spring Fling Wind-Up Meet.

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Gault Bruch, 9, takes his stance on the blocks during the Foothills Stingrays Swim Meet Saturday at the Okotoks Recreation Centre.
photo by Rick Northrop