

Program Spotlight

Mountain Crest High School

Hyrum, Utah

Editors Note: This is the first in a series highlighting several programs across the country. Participants were chosen at random from our NISCA Membership Lists. We hope that you find this series not only informative, but entertaining as well. Congratulations and thanks to Mountain Crest High School, Hyrum Utah, home of the Mustangs As our first installment in this new NISCA Journal Series.

Sue Hodgkinson is the head coach of Mountain Crest High School of Hyrum, Utah. Mountain Crest is located in rural northern Utah in the Cache Valley. It is home to 1,390 students in grades 10 - 12.

Coach Hodgkinson tells us that they have a public user friendly pool that has a moveable bulkhead and allows the swimmers to swim either 25 meters or 25 yards. Coach Hodgkinson has been coaching since 1979 and says, "I first started coaching because I wanted my kids to be on a swim team. The town that I began my coaching career in did not have a coach. I learned to coach the hard way."

Coach went on to say that she watched the best of the best, walked the deck for ten years with University coaches and decided that they had it pretty easy because their swimmers already knew how to swim. They didn't have the parental problems, they had assistants who knew what they were doing, and their pools were well maintained.

Vernal, Utah was the home of her first team, the Vernal Vipers. She coached that team for six years before starting the high school program at Uintah High School. She then formed another team called the Water Warriors. For the sake of the team, she applied for and took the job of pool manager. She commented, "I loved high school swimming, mainly because the formats were not marathon events and the kids shared a common age."

At the time she began coaching high school, state rules stated that to be a head high school coach, one must be a teacher. So she attended classes for six years and finally graduated with a teaching degree in Sociology major and English minor. Because the pool was a school/county/city organization, it was hard to be the manager, since every entity maintained the pool for three years, passing the fixing job on to the next faction. Finally, after two years of the school district shutting down the pool a week before regions, her family decided if they were to be a swimming family, they needed to move.

As Coach Hodgkinson stated, "We moved to Cache Valley and the school (just my luck) didn't even have a pool, but used the university pool." She joined the campaign with many others and finally convinced the school board, by of course earning half the money that was needed, to build a pool. During the interim, she coached several USA teams including Cache Valley Tritons, Sea Stangs, and currently, along with her daughter, coach the Shark Attack Swim Team. She currently coaches the Mountain Crest

High School Mustangs and she manages the Stang Aquatic Center where the team practices.

Coach made mention that her sons assisted her with coaching and her youngest son, Jerry, is now teaching at Ogden High School, managing the Ogden City Pool, and coaching the Ogden High School Team. Her daughter coaches with her, both with the USA team and the High School team. Together, all three, have started the Shark Attack Team that is very much alive and kicking in Ogden, Bear River, and Hyrum.

During her years of coaching, Coach Hodgkinson has had some great uplifting, negative, heartbreaking, and exciting experiences during and throughout the years. One of their swimmers was involved in a car accident and sadly and unfortunately killed. Their team of three cars was involved in an accident going to summer games resulting in life flight and ended up with a boy who was supposedly supposed to walk with a limp forever, taking first in region six months later in the breaststroke. During one of their “fun” outings at a water park, the team was caught in a tornado in down town Salt Lake City. One year they had a swimmer out with an appendectomy, one with a broken elbow, one had a stroke, and one had open heart surgery. Surprisingly, they took region that year. Their team unexpectedly took second at 4A State, and two years ago eleven girls won state by over 100 points. Last year, Drew Jenks, earned All-American honors with a :57.91 in the breaststroke.

The Mustangs are a strong team in their region and state. Coach Hodgkinson emphasizes TEAM and they set many goals. She does wish she had more swimmers on their team. “To add members,” she states, “of course we use our USA team and I plaster posters for try outs in the high school and junior high walls, advertise in the paper, on the radio, and I send flyers home with every school child in our area.” Every time their high school performs, they announce the results on the school announcements. During Pep Assemblies, they announce scores, and she encourages her English classes to time for their meets.

The Mustangs have several team traditions. At the first of the year, when they have try outs, she gives a huge parent meeting with a power point presentation. She writes the text for her skills class, a 70 minute class with just team members. This includes everything a new swimmer needs to know about high school swimming, and some great tips on nutrition, team camaraderie, times needed for state, how to become a champion, and some past experiences of the team. In this book are assignments, that include stretch bands, dry land, and imagery. Each swimmer receives a Secret Santa and they anonymously write good luck notes before every meet and usually include a Gator Aid or a nutrition bar with the note. At their swimming Christmas Party, they have a pot luck dinner, find out who the secret swimmer is, play White Elephant Games, and have a great time. Before region, they always have a pump up dinner and every year they have a Pepsi Challenge where they invite 10 teams to compete for trophies and great awards. “We always wear new T-shirts to region and state. All of our kids participate in fund raisers and a percentage goes in their personal account that they can spend on swimming,” she said.

Coach Hodgkinson went on to say that her kids like several drills, usually involving relays. Fastest relay out of ten goes home. They also give prizes to kids who do not get their names on the board. Names go on the board for not streamlining, breathing off the walls, breaking stroke, not making times, or getting out during drills. They give dollar

swim caps, dollar items from the dollar store, and sometimes Gator Aid. “The kids really like it and it makes my job easier,” she concluded.

Every now and then she likes to do a 25 no-breather-breaststroke, under water with only one pull down. They also like to be hooked up to a bungie belt. They like dry land with medicine balls and bands, especially when the water is chilly.

Coach finished with telling us that something that really works for them is their swimmer of the week. Each week they choose a swimmer who has excelled in something - it may be reaching their goal, it may be team spirit, or working hard on fund raising project. They take a five by seven picture, write a little article about them, laminate it and put in on the board. Each week, one more picture is added to the board. At the end of the year they honor their swimmer of the week people. Trophies and plaques go for the Most Improved, Mustang of the Year, and the Top 3 Point Winners in both boys and girls. They give plaques for Record Breakers and for their Captains. They also give a True Grit Award and each swimmer receives a certificate with their picture on it and a tribute to them. They have a big banquet that the parents prepare and invite their administration to attend. She states that, “No swimmer ever misses the banquet.”

It should be noted that Coach Sue Hodgkinson was the 2002 High School Coach of the year, which she says, “...was a great honor.”