



Leader-Post photo by Don Healy

Special Olympics swim coach Terrie Wiebe primes her athletes at the Lawson

Special day in the pool

By DAVID MOSER
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Something special can happen with just one little phone call.

That's all it took for Bill Pratt, head coach of the Regina Y's Men's Marlins Swim Club, to invite the Saskatchewan Special Olympics swim team to compete in the RYMM's annual developmental meet Saturday and Sunday at the Lawson Aquatic Centre.

It was the first time that Special Olympic athletes competed in integrated events with regular swimmers from other clubs. Usually when Special O athletes compete at a meet — be it athletics or swimming — they have their own events.

"We like it this way," said Regina's Terrie Wiebe, Special Olympics volunteer swimming coach. "Our athletes are having a really good time. I like them to compete and do well. A lot of them have posted their best times."

Wiebe has a team of 12 swimmers from across the province — six from Regina, three from Estevan, two from Prince Albert and one from Saskatoon — who are preparing for the Canadian Special Olympic Summer Games in Halifax, July 11-17.

"We needed the meet to be integrated because we needed the times

and the experience," Wiebe said. "They are learning from the other swimmers. They look up to track stars and TV personalities, so why wouldn't they look up to swimmers in an event such as this?"

Pratt and Wiebe had discussed the possibility of an integrated meet for some time. When Pratt called in January about the meet, Wiebe jumped at the opportunity.



Wiebe

"It was that simple," Pratt said. "There was no great policy decision or boardroom meetings. It was a simple invitation. "When you consider the whole concept of sport for all, that's what everyone is working towards here. We have to bring everyone together because sport is a great equalizer. If you're a swimmer, you're a swimmer. When you're in the water, everyone is the same size and background from the neck up. There's no difference."

Sure, Special O athletes finished last in some races, but that is no reflection on their abilities.

"Nothing has stood out," Pratt said. "In some heats, a swimmer

might come in a little later than others, but that happens in all meets. There's always a kid who comes in last. If nobody notices, that's probably the best estimate to see if this is a success."

The developmental meet, which emphasizes the opportunity for all swimmers to improve their times, was a great chance for the regular swimmers to get to know their Special Olympic counterparts.

"I've noticed a lot of swimmers coming over to our swimmers and saying, 'You swam really well,'" said Regina's Kate Roberts, an assistant coach with Special Olympics. "It just gives our guys the biggest high that another athlete would come over and say, 'It was a good swim' or, 'You had a strong backstroke.'

"Our swimmers are pushing themselves a lot harder. They are seeing the times of the other swimmers and going, 'I can beat my time.' They are starting to pick up on the competitive side of it when they are integrated."

Pratt hopes that other sports, such as athletics and bowling, can become integrated.

"I hope that a lot of other sports can learn from us," Pratt said. "It's sports for all and we did it over a phone call."

Results in Scoreboard.