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LOS ANGELES TIMES

SPORTS

High Schools

Ojai Renews Itself

Tennis tournament, in its 103rd year, offers prize money for first time, court renovations.

By LAUREN PETERSON Times Staff Writer

Change is as new watchword for the Ojai Valley tennis tournament, the way tradition has been in the past, and will remain, organizers insist...

The Ojai tournament is the Ojai Tournament," said Bob Jacobson, president of the Ojai Valley Tennis Club...

All the staff were always done, we're going to do this year. I don't think anybody's going to be disappointed about anything...

The 103rd annual tournament runs today through Sunday at Libbey Park and other sites around western Ventura County.

Organizers hope an offer of prize money for the first time in the men's and women's open divisions, as well as the reconstruction of five of the eight courts at Libbey Park...

The men's open singles draw of 32 attracted more than 60 entrants, according to Anne Williamson, the tournament's competition chair...

The open division reached a low point in 2001 when the men's singles draw of 16 included 31 boys and the women's bracket of 16 drew only 19 entrants.

"We really want the open division to stick around, and we had a need to get a little more interest built up," she said.

The Big West Conference championships, which had been played in conjunction with the Ojai tournament since 1983, will not be continued there after being bumped from the Ojai Valley Athletic Club by tournament officials in another effort aimed at bolstering the open divisions.

Open matches have been played at Spanish Hills Country Club in Camarillo and Los Peñas Country Club in Santa Ines in recent years, but are scheduled to be played this time at the Ojai Valley Inn, with Pacific 10 Conference women's play at the Ojai Valley Athletic Club.

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DOING HER PART: Eiko Heimbach, who soon will return home to Tokyo, is the top girls' butterfly swimmer at Irvine. The Times' top-ranked team is the Southland.

AT HOME ON FAST LANE Heimbach, on a year-long visit from Tokyo, is thriving at Irvine

By DAN ARBUTT Times Staff Writer

Just as swiftly as Eiko Heimbach made a name for herself on the Irvine High girls' swim team, she will soon be another one simply to remember.

Although she knew nothing about Irvine when she arrived last summer from her lifelong home on the Yokota Air Base in Tokyo, Heimbach has become the top butterfly competitor on a Laguna team that's not only No. 1 in the Times' Southland rankings but is favored to win its seventh consecutive Southern Section Division 1 title.

But Heimbach, a sophomore, is nearing the end of her family's one-year stay in Southern California.

Her mother, Naomi, is a former Masters world record holder in the 50-meter breaststroke, and her 19-year-old sister, Martin, is an aspiring figure skater.

Shortly after the family's arrival in July, Heimbach and her parents searched the Internet for swim opportunities and came upon the Irvine Novogatics.

One of the premier clubs in the nation, the Novogatics immediately accepted Heimbach, who had been ranked No. 1 in the world in the 100 freestyle for the 9-10 age group by USA Swimming.

During her first workout, Heimbach shared a knee with Aaron Peirce, the world record holder in the 200-meter backstroke. She tried to keep up.

"All of a sudden, I was with all these people I had only seen in swimming magazines," Heimbach said. "I thought I had to be as fast as everybody, so I swam a lot faster. It was hard for me. I was out of breath."

When it later became time to choose a high school, Heimbach had options. Irvine University was the closest to Heimbach's home, but she had befriended several teammates on the Novogatics and followed them to Irvine.

Heimbach is one of the favorites to win the Division 1 title in the 100 butterfly. Her personal-best time of 56.41 seconds is second in the Southland this season.

Heimbach also has produced one of the season's best times in the 200 freestyle at 1:52.25.

Heimbach's high school in Japan does not have a swim team. She said some of her biggest thrills have come from competing against other high schools and hearing her name announced before races.

They always said these funny comments that make me laugh before a race," she said. "One time, my teammates wrote that I have the worst record for asking too many questions."

Before Wednesday's 114.66 victory over sixth-ranked Foothill, Himman said of Heimbach: "What's refreshing is how naive she is about these types of questions. This is a big reason why she wanted to experience high school swimming, because of meets like these."

Heimbach swam the 100 and 500 free against the Knights, winning the races in 1:37.87 and 5:06.75.

Heimbach's high school in Irvine has offered her room and board, and while she says the invitations are tempting, she also misses her friends and her grandmother in Japan.

She doesn't plan to leave California permanently, however. "Knowing I can come back for college makes it a little easier to leave," she said.

SCOREBOARD TABLE with columns for SWIMMING, SOFTBALL, BASEBALL, and VOLLEYBALL, listing various teams and scores.

TOP PERFORMANCES TABLE listing individual athletes and their achievements in various sports.

Table listing various sports teams and their performance metrics, including basketball and volleyball.

DAILY REPORT Southern Section Might Eliminate Contact Rule

The Southern Section will vote today in Long Beach whether to strike down a rule that limits the amount of off-season contact high school coaches are allowed to have with their players...

A current Southern Section rule curbs the amount of year-round interaction coaches can have with players, although some school administrators have proposed a repeal of the rule.

The proposal to strike down the rule sponsored by the Almont League and was originally scheduled to be put to a vote in February but was tabled for now supporters more time to lobby their cause.

If all the other sections does away with it, it's our section willing to do away with it," said Vice Principal Jim Valentino of San Gabriel High, a school in the Almont League.

Currently, Southern Section coaches are not allowed to coach their players on club teams.

Don Manalastas, longtime assistant girls' basketball coach at Inglewood, has been selected to take over the program from Eric Olson, who resigned at the end of the season.

Sara Radabaugh, a softball pitcher for Westlake Village Oaks Christian, has committed to UC Riverside.

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