

Niagara Gazette Story by Mike Meiler 12/20/13

Grand Island

The Vikings sit second in the NFL at 6-1, their only loss coming to undefeated Lockport.

Unlike most of the other teams in the league, though, the Vikings have won on depth. GI doesn't have one swimmer that's qualified for states, but it boasts 13 qualifications for the sectional championships already and two more for the Section VI Class A meet.

"We've spent the past four or five years really working at building a team," head coach Joseph Mentor said. "For the first time in about four years we've got some frontline guys that can go out and win and the depth to back it up."

The depth starts at the top with seniors Nathan Link and Jake Stromberg. Though neither has qualified in an individual event, both are members of GI's sectional-qualified relay teams and have earned key points despite a lack of first-place finishes.

"A lot of second- and third-place finishes can win a meet," Mentor said. "Without guys like Nathan and Jake, it can be tough to win."

A strong junior class has scored the most wins, thanks in part to Jordan Piershalski, Ian Eisenberger, Kurt Laschinger, Steven White and Tim Winder. Piershalski, Eisenberger and Winder have combined for seven sectional qualifications, not including relays, while Laschinger and Piershalski both qualified for the Class A meet in the 100-yard breaststroke.

Eighth-grader Jake Ruffalo has also made an impact, holding the second-best time in the NFL in the 200-yard individual medley. He's qualified for sectionals in the medley, the 100-yard butterfly and the 100-yard freestyle, and Mentor said a big part of his success has been the presence of the upperclassmen around him.

"(Jake's) got good speed in the water," Mentor said. "He's a big kid and he can really move. He also has some good kids to look up to, and he's had a chance to see how things are done."