

# Newport Beach's Merrell primed for another summer of fast swims



Newport Beach resident Eva Merrell helped Crean Lutheran girls' swimming win its fifth straight CIF Southern Section title last weekend. (Matt Szabo/Daily Pilot)



By **Matt Szabo**

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**I** had the privilege of conducting the first formal interview with Eva Merrell, then a freshman phenom girls' swimmer at Corona del Mar High, in the spring of 2015.

Since then, many more people have wanted to know what Merrell, a Newport Beach resident, has to say. And why not?

At age 17, Merrell is the youngest member of the U.S. national swim team. And, now a junior at Crean Lutheran, last weekend at Riverside City College she helped the Saints win the CIF Southern Section Division 2

title. It was Crean Lutheran's fifth straight CIF championship in girls' swimming, and third straight in Division 2.

To say that Merrell, who didn't compete in high school swimming last year to focus on the Olympic Trials, helped Crean Lutheran might actually be an understatement. She won the girls' 100-yard butterfly in 52.51 seconds, and the 100 backstroke in 53.12. She was also on the winning 200 medley relay (1:40.77) and 200 free relay (1:34.60) quartets.

All four times were Division 2 meet records, helping Crean Lutheran score 247 points and edge second-place Redlands East Valley (233).

"We weren't sure if we were going to win or not," Merrell said. "It was obviously a really close race. To be put against a wall and to have to swim fast for your team, it's like you kind of have to fight for it. It was fun to be racing with other things in mind than, 'Oh, I want to go this time.' Kind of doing it for your team and doing it for the better good, that was really exciting for me to do again."

Crean Lutheran coach Todd Brinker said he's been happy to have Merrell on his team this year, but for more reasons than just her super-fast times.

"It's great for the program, obviously, to have somebody of her caliber in swimming, but just her caliber as a person too," Brinker said. "She's really a kind, sweet person, a great part of the program and very supportive of her teammates."

Some of the Saints will be competing at the CIF State Swimming Championships this weekend at Clovis West High in Fresno, but Merrell isn't attending. It's understandable. She's training for her next meet, the World Championship trials, to be held starting June 27 in Indianapolis.

"If I get top two, I'll go to worlds this summer in Budapest, but they're also picking a junior worlds team," Merrell said. "If I'm one of the top two 18-and-unders at that meet in any event, I'll go to junior worlds."

Merrell said she's going into the meet thinking that she can make the roster for the World Championships. That's the mindset she'll need in order to have a chance to accomplish that goal, she said.

Either way, she already knows she can perform when the stakes are high. Last summer at the Olympic Trials, she competed in five events. She nearly made the "A" final in the 200-meter backstroke, placing ninth.

"Nothing will ever seem as intense or as scary to me as trials did," Merrell said. "In the fall, I went to Tokyo and Hong Kong for competition, but it wasn't nearly as nerve-wracking as trials was. It was easy for me to stay in my zone and do what I needed to do."

"I think the kind of pressure-cooker that trials is, if you can make it successfully through Olympic Trials, you'll be able to handle any other swim meet. I was talking to a couple of people who made the Olympic team, and they said trials is worse than the actual Olympics. It's just so intense."

But Merrell made it through that just fine.

Just a guess, but I think more people will want to interview her this summer.

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### **CdM swim coach Volding says goodbye**

Longtime Corona del Mar High girls' swim coach Doug Volding coached in his final high school meet last weekend at the CIF Southern Section Division 1 finals.

Volding has coached at CdM since 1984, retiring for three years before returning in 2012. He coached CdM girls' swimming to two CIF Southern Section Division 2 titles, in 2004 and 2006.

There was an announcement at Saturday's Division 1 finals during one of the breaks that acknowledged Volding and his years of coaching.

"Your mind just goes over all of the years doing it," Volding said. "I still get excited, still enjoy it. I know I'm going to miss that part of it. I feel so blessed to have all of the acquaintances over all of the years. I'm very fortunate that this was part of my life, all of the athletes and parents that I've known.

"And newspaper guys," he added to me with a smile.

Yes, Volding will be missed.

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### **Lozano, Guyot commit for women's soccer**

Local girls' soccer players from Corona del Mar and Estancia made college commitments this week.

CdM senior goalkeeper Ally Lozano is staying in-state and going to UC Merced. Estancia senior midfielder Delani Guyot is headed to Aurora University, located 40 miles west of Chicago.

Lozano was the starting goalie all season for CdM, which won the Pacific Coast League, finished 22-1-3 and advanced to the CIF Southern Section Division 2 quarterfinals.

Guyot, a Daily Pilot Dream Team selection as a junior, finished third on Estancia (15-6-2) with seven goals scored. She was a three-sport star for the Eagles, also playing tennis and basketball.

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### **Newport's Rimlinger headed to LMU**

Newport Harbor boys' water polo senior co-captain Nic Rimlinger will play next season at Loyola Marymount.

Rimlinger, a defender, was a two-year captain for the Sailors and a second-team All-Sunset League selection this past fall.

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