

Utica schools gearing up for Challenge Cup

Who rules Utica Community Schools? That's exactly what Lee Jenkins, the head ice hockey coach at Ford, is trying to find out. Jenkins – along with the coaches at Stevenson, Eisenhower and Utica – are vying to see who will take home the first Challenge Cup, in a tournament to be held on Feb. 6 and 7 at Great Lakes Sports City in Fraser.

The idea to conduct this type of tournament percolated for the last few seasons, but getting all four coaches on board

proved to be too big a challenge to pull off. This season was different and Jenkins especially is excited to see the event go on for the first time.

“Utica Community Schools has been pretty competitive in a lot of different sports, and hockey is kind of a minor one after football and basketball,” Jenkins explained. “We all thought that it would be a good thing for the four schools to compete in a local tournament where we could generate some interest among our communi-



Fred Costello

SLAP SHOTS

ties as well as in our teams.”

The Challenge Cup, as it will be known until a more creative moniker is found, will be held in much the same way as the Central Collegiate Hockey Association's Great Lakes Invitational. Friday, Feb. 6 will pit Ford against Eisenhower at 6:15 p.m., followed by Stevenson and Utica at approximately 8:15 p.m. The following day, the pair of losing teams from Friday will square off in the consolation game at 2:15 p.m., with the championship to start at around 4:15 p.m. All games are slated for the Superior Rink at GLSC. Admission is \$5 for adults and \$3 for students and children.

The good news for Jenkins is that his team could not be playing better heading into the tournament. While the Falcons sit at 2-2-1 in the Macomb Area Conference Blue Division and 5-9-1 overall, they are fresh off the biggest upset of the season.

Last Saturday, a day after knocking off L'Anse Creuse, Ford stunned MAC White leader L'Anse Creuse North in a 3-1 cross-over shocker. The Crusaders have the most wins of any team in the MAC, including the four teams that play outside of the county.

“It was the most awesome game I've seen our kids play,” Jenkins said. “All the scoring came in the first period. We were able to shut out the highest-powered offense in the county for two periods.”

Jenkins gave credit to senior forwards Kyle Hautala and Eric Alexandrowicz, and junior forwards Josh Quick and Mike Graham for their outstanding play the entire weekend – including the massive amount of penalty killing they did against the Lancers.

Jenkins had some special praise, however, for goalie Alex Stickney. Described by his coach as a quiet, conservative kind

Power Five

1. **Saint Clair Shores** – Idle Lakers face lowly St. Clair twice before Trenton tourney

2. **De La Salle** – Could claim top spot, depending on the brutal week ahead

3. **Stevenson** – Titans have a five-game unbeaten streak going

4. **L'Anse Creuse North** – Re-bounded nicely against Utica, after bizarre loss to Ford

5. **Ford** – We'll know very soon if the Falcons can keep this up

— Fred Costello

of kid with a traditional stand-up goaltending style, the 6-foot-1 freshman made an impression.

“All I can say is the word ‘outstanding’ in capital letters,” Jenkins said. “He'd given up some questionable goals recently, but against North he was cool and calm in the net. Five-on-five and short-handed, we were just phenomenal. They had some opportunities, but Kyle barely gave them a sniff at anything.”

Stickney finished the game with 26 saves on 27 shots and likely earned himself a start in the Challenge Cup.

Getting the team to not play down to its competition has been a major hurdle for Jenkins this season. The Falcons seem to have no problems getting up for the big games, as the LCN victory and a one-goal loss to Ike would suggest. However, Ford has inexplicable losses to Warren-Mott and Port Huron on its resume this season.

Luckily, it would seem, the upcoming tournament should provide plenty of resistance. Eisenhower and Stevenson both have reached double-digit win totals, while Utica is hovering around .500 – a bit deceiving because the Chieftains play in the strenuous MAC Red.

So, it appears that Ford will go to the tournament labeled with the underdog

See HOCKEY, Page 7

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Romeo hopes for another Peake performance **HOCKEY: UCS will play for Challenge Cup**

Bulldogs have won eight county titles since 1998

By John Hetzler

Macomb Daily Sports Writer

Kendall Peake's passion has helped Romeo become a Macomb County swimming and diving power.

Macomb Swim Meet

Peake guided Romeo to the title at last year's

Macomb County Swimming and Diving Championships, the Bulldogs' eighth county crown since 1998, and his team enters as one of the favorites at next week's county meet at L'Anse Creuse North.

"I don't know," Peake said when asked the reasons for his team's success. "Swimming always has been a passion of mine since high school."

Now in his 20th season as Romeo's coach, Peake has seen

triumph and tragedy.

His son, Kyle, a two-time county breaststroke champion in 2005 and '06, died two years ago at the age of 18.

"It's been tough," Kendall Peake said.

Coaching has kept him going, and though he has thought of retiring, swimming remains in his blood.

"It just seems like I can't get enough of it," Peake said. "It's seeing a 14-year-old child going to be an 18-year-old adult - that's the most important part of their life. ... It's worth it."

He said he has watched some of his swimmers go on to be doctors and scientists, and found that as rewarding as winning championships.

Peake even has seen his swimmers go into coaching. Matt Rohloff, a captain on Romeo's first county championship squad in 1998, now is the coach at Warren Woods-Tower.

In addition, Peake takes great pride in the Bulldogs' success out of the pool. In particu-

lar, he points to last year's team's fifth-place ranking in MISCA's Academic All-State Team Award.

Now Peake hopes for big things from this year's senior-dominated team.

Senior captains Devon Compeau, Tyler Laurain and Mike Glinski all return from last year's county championship team, and together with senior Max Hensel have formed a 200-yard medley relay team that already has posted the eighth-fastest time in the state.

Glinski and Laurain have qualified for the state meet in the breaststroke and backstroke, respectively, and junior Matt Ruman adds depth to the Bulldogs.

"We always target the state meet, of course," Peake said. "And what we get in the meantime is a bonus."

The Bulldogs have been bonus babies over the last decade. But Romeo's quest for another county championship will not be easy as the Bulldogs will face tough challenges from

Past team champions

- 2008 - Romeo, 263 points.
- 2007 - L'Anse Creuse, 281 points.
- 2006 - Romeo, 315 points.
- 2005 - Romeo, 311 points.
- 2004 - Fraser, 186 points.
- 2003 - Romeo, 275 points.
- 2002 - Romeo, 294 points.
- 2001 - Romeo, 279 points.
- 2000 - Romeo, 240 points.
- 1999 - Eisenhower, 238 points.
- 1998 - Romeo, 183 points.
- 1997 - Ford, 284 points.
- 1996 - Ford, 324.5 points.
- 1995 - Ford, 386 points.
- 1994 - Ford, 324 points.

Anchor Bay, Chippewa Valley, Dakota and De La Salle.

"Macomb County is very, very tough," Peake said. "It's not like it used to be. You have some really good coaches out there now."

Continued from Page 6

role it seems to cherish so much. All Jenkins can hope for is that recent history repeats itself and that his boys will come out fired up and ready to play.

"I think that these are going to be extremely competitive games," Jenkins said. "I know everyone on all the teams is really geeked up for this. I don't see (Utica coach) Mike (Nye) very much now that they're in the Red, but I know he has an axe to grind with us after we knocked them off (in a MAC crossover) last season."

The first Challenge Cup should be a fun event and Jenkins is hopeful that participation in the event from a fan standpoint will be high. He referenced the heated rivalry games he's witnessed in which Troy and Troy Athens each brings its war-painted, loudest and proudest students to pack the stands.

Soon enough, the Challenge will be under way and we'll find out who really does rule Utica Community Schools.

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