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CONTACT: Lauren Creiman, (909) 833-9853

Bonita Unified Alumnus Makes Big Splash as Coach of CIF Champion Swim, Water Polo Teams

SAN DIMAS/LA VERNE – When the Bonita High School boys swim team captured its first-ever CIF Southern Section (CIF-SS) Division 3 championship at Mt. San Antonio College on May 3, the triumphant Bearcat athletes gave coach Dillon Unsoeld the water polo version of the traditional Gatorade victory shower, celebrating the moment by playfully pushing their mentor into the swimming pool.

The swim team's CIF championship caps off the most successful year ever for Bonita swimmers, coming on the heels of the boys water polo team's first-ever CIF-SS Division 3 title last November. For Unsoeld, a Bonita High Class of 2010 alumnus, the twin triumphs underscore the positive energy and stability he has brought to the program since he was hired in 2016.

"To win both championships in the same year is a little unreal. I'm just trying to enjoy the moment," Unsoeld said. "I get a lot of joy helping people become the best versions of themselves, especially when it comes to young athletes. I can't say enough about our kids. They come in with a winning mindset and maintain their fitness level so that they can compete with the best. This year it all came together."

The championships also bring to a close the Bonita swim careers of three talented seniors who are the heart and soul of the teams: co-captains Max Distaso and Jake Carlson, as well as Parker Montgomery, mainstays on the water polo team who helped cement the swim team championship after the Bearcats took an overwhelming lead during the diving leg of the competition.

"The championships are very special to me, especially coming in my senior year," Carlson said. "Our team is pretty close; we all work together really well. Coach Unsoeld knows how to read situations and get us where we need to go. It was a lot of fun pushing him in the pool after we won."

The swim and water polo championships are especially sweet for Unsoeld, who competed in both sports at Bonita but did not make the playoffs in the years he attended the school. Unsoeld returned to Bonita in 2016 to coach the swim team and serve as a volunteer assistant water polo coach. Unsoeld began coaching the varsity water polo team in 2019.

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Along the way, Unsoeld recruited some familiar faces to round out his coaching staff, including his younger brother, Bonita Class of 2019 graduate Gage Unsoeld, and Bonita Class of 2021 graduate Cody Lehotsky, whom Unsoeld met while serving as a coach in the La Verne Swim League in 2009.

“The best part of coaching for me is hanging out at Warehouse Pizza with the players and families after the game,” Unsoeld said. “It’s a really tight-knit group. We all grew up in La Verne and feel a real connection. We cherish these moments, even though this year is a little bittersweet, as we will see several of our best players graduate.”

For co-captains Carlson and Distaso, their prep career may have come to a spectacular end, but may be just the beginning of a long-term college rivalry, as both players were recruited and will attend Southern California Intercollegiate Athletic Conference (SCIAC) schools, with Duncan committing to Occidental College and Distaso going to Pomona College.

“I’m looking forward to meeting up with Jake in future matchups,” Distaso said. “We’ve been teammates at the high school level but also competitors at the club level. Jake pushes me to work harder. It’s exciting. It will be fun to see where all this goes.”

PHOTOS:

BUSD_SWIM1: Bonita High School aquatics coach Dillon Unsoeld celebrates with his water polo team after winning the CIF-SS Division 3 boys water polo championship in November 2023. Combined with Bonita High’s recent CIF-SS Division 3 boys swimming championship – a squad also coached by Unsoeld – the twin titles cap off the most successful year ever for Bonita swimmers.

BUSD_SWIM2: The Bonita High School boys swim team celebrate after winning its first-ever CIF-SS Division 3 championship, capping the most successful year ever for Bonita swimmers. Led by Bonita Class of 2010 alumnus and aquatics coach Dillon Unsoeld, the Bonita boys water polo team also secured its first CIF-SS title in November 2023.

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