

Polish Olympic swimmers to jump into Cheshire's community pool

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By Ryan Kelly

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CHESHIRE -- The playful splashes of children at the Cheshire community pool will soon mingle with the methodical training of the Polish Olympic Swim team.

There will be 17 swimmers and five officials in town July 15-21 training for the 11th FINA World Championships. The competition runs from July 24 to 31 in Montreal.

"Not many people can say something like this," said Sheila Adams, pool coordinator for the town of Cheshire. The team brings with it some impressive hardware -- at the 2004 Olympic games, Polish swimmer Otylia Jedrejczak won a gold medal in the women's 200 meter butterfly, and silver medals in both the 400 meter freestyle and 100 meter butterfly.

The team is paying the town \$1,500 to use the pool for those six days. The town usually charges \$5 for a resident day pass. For the most part, the 402 families that have bought season passes, and other visitors to the pool, will not have their open swim time infringed upon. The Polish team will use four of the eight available lanes in the Olympic-sized pool from 9 a.m. to 11 a.m. each day, and will practice in the evening at Wesleyan University in Middletown. The Wesleyan pool will also be open during practice.

The team and the town of Cheshire were brought together by University of Bridgeport women's swimming and diving coach Brad Flood. When Flood was a swim coach at the University of Iowa in 1989, he worked with some athletes who eventually competed on Poland's national team. The American later became the head coach of Poland's 1992 Olympic Swim Team.

The Bridgeport coach has kept those connections alive. In May, Flood was in Poland for the country's national championship when he was told the team was having a difficult time finding a training center near Montreal. "I suggested that they come to Connecticut," Flood said. One of the appeals of Cheshire is that it is in the same time zone as Montreal, eliminating jet lag. "I remembered Cheshire had a large pool, so I made some phone calls."

Flood also brought the Polish team to the United States to train in 1993 and 1995.

The international athletes may bring out Olympic talent in Cheshire. "We have some kids in town that are great swimmers," Adams said. "They are really excited to have this caliber of a team training here."