

## 2017 Junior Olympics with Cincinnati Moose Water Polo Club



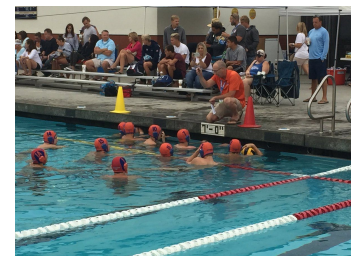
Sun, sand and skip shots? That is why the boys travel out to California. There are tons of tournaments that feature great teams across the country, but none are like the Junior Olympics put on by USA Water Polo in Southern California. For the 2017 Cincinnati Moose Water Polo Club, the trip does not begin in California, but in Michigan. With only 110 slots for tournament for every team in the US, the country is divided into regions with allotted number of teams allowed to go. In the case of the Cincinnati Moose WPC, they are in the Midwest Zone competing with powerhouse teams from Michigan, Illinois and Missouri.

The tournament itself is broken down into three major groups: Championship (Top 48 teams in the tournament), Classic (Middle 48 Teams in the tournament) and Invite (bottom 12 in the tournament)- all based on how you qualify in your region. Not every region has a qualifier if there are not enough teams, but for boys 18 and under, the majority of them do including the midwest zone. So 13 boys trekked up Ann Arbor to compete in the Junior Olympic Qualifier lead by Coach Johann Perera and secured their spot with a victory over NorthWest Chicago in the Classic Division.



“I have always believed that the Cincinnati Moose Water Polo Club is first and foremost a way to develop Cincinnati players and any player who wants to play on the team.” Says coach Hellwig. “It is why we search for opportunities such as the JO’s for our players to compete against opponents they do not see during the high school season. It is the same reason for our Cincinnati Shoot-Out.” This year was a little different for the Cincinnati Moose Squad. They have had some stellar standouts from outside the Cincinnati area last year in Drew Wilson from Upper Arlington and Lance Bockbrader from St. Francis, but both had played with the program all summer long. This summer with numbers short, they open the doors up. “Boys wanted to go but not enough from just our squad. I won’t deny a position on the JO team from a Moose player to bring in outside talent, but I am welcoming to players from other teams if we have room.” Carter Dwyer (St. X) who played with the Marlins in the summer joined the squad in the qualifier and in California to help bring strength to the team. Also joining up in the summer was Michael Semenov who travelled from Louisville each night to train with the Moose team. From even further away, former Moose Player Bennet Link and his two teammates from Mesa, Arizona, Trent and Trey Leeper, came to play. The rest of the squad was composed of 5 Sycamore players (Zach Marks, Kevin Berghoff, Connor McGowan, Jason Merkel, and Jack Gawin) and 1 Princeton player (Sean Fetick). Helping them get there at the qualifier, but did not make the trip was Mason’s Mike McDonald, Sycamore’s Bryce Gwyn and Max Diehl and Princeton’s Justin McDaniel. At the same time, Mason Goalie Brian Karl headed out to California with Rockford Aquatics from Michigan who placed in the top 48 of the tournament.

Heading to California is as much about fun as it competing and early on, the boys made sure that they enjoyed themselves. Heading out on Thursday the boys spent time exploring Southern California and heading to the Beach before getting down to business on Saturday morning against two tough California competitors. The team faced #3 SET and #22 DACA both with rock wall goalies and a strong physical presence on defense. “They just out muscled us.” commented Coach Kent Rasmussen “We were able to play pretty decently against their set offense, but their pressure defense gave them plenty of counter attacks.” The two losses early opened the eyes of the players and really set the stage for what the team needed to do.





The team stepped up their game and increased their shots on cage significantly but a solid goalie from Mid Michigan and the post prevented the win. “We really outplayed and outshot Michigan, but where their shots found the back of the net, ours did not” said Coach Rasmussen. The next game the Moose had the win in sight only to lose in a heart breaker overtime shoot out to Oregon’s Empire. Hungry for a win and energized after that shoot out loss, Moose brought the storm to the Texan team Thunder for their first win of the tournament. “We were pumped. We have played so hard in the tournament and we needed that win”

remarked Sycamore Senior Connor McGowan. The team tried to ride the momentum in the next but the physical match with Blue Crush from Oregon was just too much as they edged out a victory of Moose. This matched up Moose with Herriman Mustangs of Utah in what has now become the Bi-Annual Battle of the Hooves. “We have matched up with them multiple times in the past and have come out on top” said Coach Hellwig and again Moose did. To wrap up 8 games in 4 days, the squad earned their second win. “We went out there to compete but also to learn” reflected Sycamore Junior Jason Merkel. “There is just so much great water polo to be played and watch. You can’t help but up your game and carry that to the high school season.”