

**Colleen Stiles, North Penn**

**Posted by:** D Weaver, on 12/28/2007

Colleen Stiles stands out in a crowd on a North Penn Maiden squad loaded with talent.

Not only because she's a standout swimmer – those are a dime a dozen in one of the state's top programs, but rather because of her immense drive to excel.

After qualifying for districts in one event last year – the 100 backstroke, Stiles has already posted district qualifying times in the 100 backstroke, the 200 freestyle, the 200 individual medley and the 500 freestyle. In the 500 free, she's trimmed 16 seconds off her time from last season, swimming a 5:33 in her first meet this season after a personal best of 5:49 last year.

In her specialty – the 100 backstroke, her time is already faster than it was at districts last year.

"She's setting the tone," Maiden coach Kristen Bartlewitz said. "She doesn't even have to tell me what her goals are – I can tell that she's working towards them every day.

"She's self-motivated. She's fun to be around, and she talks very positively. She's the type of kid you want on your team."

The North Penn sophomore has been swimming competitively for 10 years. She didn't have to look far to find her toughest competition – older sister Emily Stiles, three years her senior who is now excelling at Bloomsburg University.

"She actually pushed me to work harder," Colleen said. "We have this natural sibling rivalry. We want to see who is faster. It definitely pushed me to my limits last year and this year.

"Even though she's in college, we're still competing to see who's faster."

One thing is certain – Colleen is getting faster in the pool every day. Some of that, according to Bartlewitz, is simply because she has a year of high school experience under her belt and no longer needs to make the daily commute from middle school for practices and meets.

"She knows what the plan is, what to expect," the Maidens' coach said. "The freshmen come 45 minutes late to every practice. It's not any fault of their own – their school doesn't end until three, so they miss 45 minutes every day. Add it up, and they miss three hours and 45 minutes out of every afternoon practice all week. That's a lot of practice.

"When they're sophomores, they're not traveling back and forth. Plus, they know the expectations, and they have a better understanding of what's going to happen."

Stiles says she has changed her mindset as well.

"I took a lot more responsibility this year in swimming," she said. "Playing water polo helped me train. I have just been focusing so much harder on it, and I just want to be the best swimmer I can possibly be."

Ask Stiles the best part of swimming, and it's not the wins.

"Being with the team is one of my favorite things," she said. "They're like a second family to me because I see them more than I see my own family most of the time.

"Even walking through the hallway at school and seeing someone from the team puts a smile on your face."

Bartlewitz's biggest dilemma is trying to figure out which events Stiles should focus on this season.



"I'd like to see her swim some more events, see where she is and then figure out what her events will be at the end of the year," she said. "She's been doing a pretty fantastic job."

According to the Maidens' coach, Stiles sets high goals for herself and then works hard to attain them.

"She wants to have a school record time by the time she leaves our team," Bartlewitz said. "In the history of our team, we've won two state titles, so that's a pretty bold statement for a kid that's a sophomore.

"Quite frankly, I love it that she put it out there because then I can always go back and talk about her goals."

Stiles admits she has her sights set on one day breaking the 100 backstroke record of 2005 North Penn graduate Emily Watts.

"I also want to go to states in at least one of my events – I'm hoping either the 500 or the 100 back," she said. "I'm also hoping to drop my times.

"I work my hardest every practice and hope each day that if I practice hard, it will help me out in the end. So far it's helped me out pretty well."

---