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Maidens diver wins SOL title

MCLAUGHLIN'S TIME COMES AFTER HEROIC COMEBACK FROM INJURY

By KEV HUNTER, Staff Writer

ABINGTON — The Suburban One League National Conference Diving Championships were well worth the wait for North Penn senior Laurie McLaughlin.

She missed the event the last two years because of a knee injury, but on Thursday night at Abington High School, she made her first trip to the meet a successful one, winning the event and finishing with a gold-medal score of 424.90.

"I was a little anxious. I didn't know what to expect," McLaughlin said just moments after stepping off the board as the medalists posed for pictures.

Her nervousness didn't show, as McLaughlin led from start to finish, capping off her performance with a forward dive, two-and-a-half somersault from the tuck position, scoring a 6.5, 6, 5.5, 6, 6.5 to clinch the victory.

Pennsbury's Emily Howard got the silver, finishing with a score of 418.85. Advertisement

"Last year, she had surgery, and this year she has toughed it out, and boy has she improved," Maidens diving coach Sue McDonald said. "She's tough. Anything you ask her to do at practice, she does. She'll do it 500 times if I ask her to. She's a hard worker."

McLaughlin was solid in all 11 of her dives, pulling off a nice twist on her first dive of the final round, and a pretty reverse dive on her second of the final round.

She led a great group of divers competing for North Penn, as

Diana Vose qualified for districts, making it the first time that North Penn will be taking all eight of its divers to the event.

Vose finished sixth in the conference, and Shauna Hannings took the bronze.

The Maidens' top diver, junior Julia Tate, did not compete because of a knee injury, but is hoping to be back for districts and qualify for states for the second straight year.

McLaughlin just missed states last season, by four-tenths of a point.

Coming that close can be maddening, but she kept her head.

"I knew that I still had this year, and I feel like I've improved so much," McLaughlin said.

The senior had a big smile and received big hugs not just from her teammates, but her competition. Pennsbury's Emily Howard congratulated her as much as anyone.

It's tough to not feel good for McLaughlin, who competed in gymnastics for years but the wear-and-tear did some damage to her right knee.

Last summer, she had cartilage removed from behind her right kneecap, and judging by her performance, the surgery was a success.

"They had never done the procedure before, and they were like 'well, this could work or it couldn't.' And I was like 'just do it,'" McLaughlin said.

So her surgery was a rare one. Only fitting she was one of a kind on Thursday.

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