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## Queens of the conference

MAIDENS TAKE HOME THE NATIONAL CROWN

By KEV HUNTER, Staff Writer



MARK C. PSORAS/THE REPORTER North Penn swimmer Jan Ikeda competes in the 200 IM during the SOL National Championships on Saturday.

TOWAMENCIN — Usually after a meet, the North Penn girls swim team can't wait to get out of the pool, eager to finish their warm-down and get on home.

But on Saturday, they didn't seem to want to get out of the water, swimming around well after their mandatory warm-down was over, as the seniors savored their final meet in their home pool.

They made that final meet one to remember.

The Maidens had contributions not only from those seniors but from freshmen as well, racking up a whopping 400.5 points to win the Suburban One League National Conference championship.

The Maidens had finished the dual meet season in a three-way tie with Pennsbury Council Rock North, as all three had one loss. But on Saturday at the Rick Carroll Natatorium, the Maidens proved they were the best team, outscoring their closest

competition by over 100 points — Rock North was second with 292 points, followed by Pennsbury with 210.

The busiest Maiden, and the most decorated, was senior Lauren French, who won an individual gold medal in the 100 freestyle, won silver in the 100 fly, and won two gold medals in the relays.

French led off the winning 200 free relay, and also led off the winning 400 free relay. “Lauren is a tough cookie,” Maidens coach Kristen Bartlewitz said. “She did the 100 fly, got right up, led off the 200 free relay, had a break, then got right up and did the 100 free.”

French, who will swim at Wagner College next year, helped the Maidens win half of the meet’s 12 events, as golds were also handed to Sam Deana in the 50 free, Jan Ikeda in the 100 fly, and back on Thursday, Laurie McLaughlin won the diving title.

The Maidens had a one-two

punch in the 100 fly, as Ikeda and French took first and second.

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Ikeda is just a freshman, and her time of 1:00.75 was best in the event, not only showing that she has a bright future, but also showing that future is now.

Along with French, the Maidens had another workhorse in sophomore Colleen Stiles, who swam in the meet’s most grueling event, the 500 free, placing sixth, and then she swam in the very next event, the 100 back, and placed fourth.

The Maidens were out of the pool just long enough this week to watch a movie - the team got together and watched ‘Rudy.’

It’s not that the Maidens were an underdog going into Saturday’s meet, but they do have some underdogs on their roster. And Bartlewitz wanted the team rallying around those underdogs to become stronger as a whole — a concept that transcends any sport, whether it be football or swimming.

And that unity paid off in a couple more district qualifying times — sophomore Case O’Neill and sophomore Jayme Craig made the cut in the 200 free, and O’Neill also made it in the 100 breast.

North Penn left no doubt that it was still the best team in the National Conference. The only thing up for debate afterwards was their championship T-shirts.

“We’re deciding which color we want,” French said.

The Maidens hope to add a few more names to their district roster when they head to the last chance meet Wednesday. District diving is Saturday at North Penn, with the swimming the following weekend at LaSalle University.

The Maidens are hoping to pull off a three-peat, which would be a first for the program.

“I think we’re all really excited going into districts,” French said. “Everyone’s been working so hard and I think we’re ready. We’ve been keeping a positive attitude.”

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