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Seniors lead Knights swimming

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By KEV HUNTER

The North Penn boys swim team was at its early-season best against Upper Dublin on Friday.

No one exemplified this better than the Knights' five seniors.

"Brendan Hatfield had tremendous drops," North Penn coach Brian Daly said. "He's one of our captains, and he didn't win any events, but he certainly chipped in huge points, in the 200 and the 500 (freestyles), and he was also on the (400 free) B relay at the end, which got third place. Every point is critical in these meets."

The Knights knew they were in for a close one against the Cardinals. Last year at districts, Upper Dublin edged the Knights for the district title by finishing ahead of them in the final event, the 400 free relay.

Well, a season later, and it was the same situation. Whoever won the 400 free would win Friday's dual meet.

"It's almost the same speech we've given every year at the Upper Dublin meet," Daly said of his words to his team before the final relay. "Every year, I think that it can't be more of an exciting finish, and every year I'm proven wrong. I just laid it out for them - they had to win the last relay to win the meet. And that's all I had to say. I kind of walked away after that, and they regrouped and took it from there."

Stephan Hoch, Jack Else, Nick Ortlieb and Craig Hennessey all had career-best splits to win the relay, and win the meet. Both teams are ahead of schedule at this point.

"Coming into the meet, we kind of scripted out what we thought was gonna happen, trying to project what their team is gonna do and what your team is gonna do, and I gotta say both teams exceeded my expectations," Daly said.

A Knights win wouldn't be complete without some solid diving. Upper Dublin preferred the diving be held first, and the Knights opened up the meet by getting a nice lead.

Zac Nees, Mike Kohler and Caleb Hill took first, second and third to outscore the Cards 13-3 in the event.

"Caleb was third in the diving, and it's his first year diving, and that might be a district-qualifying score for him," Daly said. "The team kind of saw it unfolding (that they would go 1-2-3), and once you get a little momentum rolling, they feed off each other. The divers absolutely set the tone."

The Knights obviously aren't used to finishing second at districts, so they were definitely looking forward to another shot at UD.

"We've been waiting for this since districts," Ortlieb said.

"We had it circled on the calender," Hoch added.

Ortlieb and Hoch, and the other seniors, knew they had to not only get themselves ready for a meet of this importance, but also let the younger guys know what it means.

"We pump them up every day, tell them to get mentally prepared, make sure they're not eating junk," Hoch said with a laugh.

"You gotta tell them to get out there and do their best," Ortlieb said. "Go out there and have fun with it."

Maidens looking strong

The North Penn girls look as balanced as ever, and first-year head coach Matt Weiser wants to continue their winning ways.

When asked what the team goals are for this year, he said "same thing as always. Competing for the league title, competing for the district title, and we'd like to improve our state finish from the past couple years."

The meet on Friday against Hatboro-Horsham created sort of a party atmosphere by the time things wrapped up - music was blaring, some of the team members were singing up on the diving boards, and the Maidens had improved to 3-0.

It's a winning tradition, and one with a lot of loyalty, "especially," Weiser said, "when you see all the alumni came back like they did tonight. To root everybody on and to cheer for everybody, that definitely shows the tradition there."

Weiser coached club swimming in West Chester last year, in the Golden Ram Aquatics program. He's already having a lot of fun at North Penn.

"I love it," he said. "The girls are great, the team is great, the whole tradition, and the whole aquatic and swim programs here are wonderful. It's great to be a part of."

Next up...

After going through their annual winter training, both the Maidens and Knights travel to Hatboro-Horsham on Jan. 6, in what will be the first Suburban One League Continental Conference meet between the two.

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