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Swimming Notebook: Vol. 3

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By Brian Weaver

CENTRAL BUCKS EAST**FIRST IN:** It's a familiar name but a different face making noise at Central Bucks East.

As the season passes its midway point and heads for the stretch run, freshman Kendall Kirsteier has her district cuts in eight events. The first-year Patriot is part of all three relays, as well as the 50, 200, and 500-meter Freestyles, the 200 Individual Medley, and the 100 Butterfly. Her performance has helped East to a 5-1 start.

"I knew she was a swimmer," coach Tom Kane said of Kirsteier, whose talents he had already heard about. Kirsteier's sister Caitlin – now setting records as a junior at North Carolina – Wilmington – was, in Kane's view, among the top three swimmers to have ever swum at East. "What's surprising to me is how versatile she is. At first she qualified in the 50 free, and then I put her in the 500 a couple of times and she's put in very credible times there. She can run the gamut in freestyle."

Despite her youth – in the CB district, ninth graders are still in junior high, Holicong Middle School in Kirsteier's case – the freshman is fitting right in.

"We have a very close team. The kids just really like each other, no dissension," Kane explained. "You look around in practice and they're all like having fun with each other. I see [Kendall] walking off the deck at the end of practice with juniors and seniors. She's just got such a pleasant personality, she just blends."

HAT TRICK: The Patriots knocked off Pennridge, Wissahickon, and Hatboro-Horsham in the week before Martin Luther King, Jr. Day. But with Souderton and Pennsbury looming, Kane knows the team doesn't have time to get content.

"The big bumps are coming up."

But with five swimmers and two divers qualified, as well as all three relays, Katie Dempster (districts in 100/200 free, 100/200 IM) and the Patriots are ready for action.

NORRISTOWN

AGING NICELY: The two Norristown girls to have made their district cuts are both seniors. The team only has three. Gwen Utz and Kim Detwiler are in, though Detwiler swims and dives. The backstroke specialist has her cuts in IM and back, but has a decision to make. If she dives, she can only swim one event. Junior captain Katelyn Brenner is close in the 200 and 500 free, as well.

WINTER HARVEST: Beverly Pate and Jessica Cullen are showing some real potential as freshmen. Funny, considering they're only out here out of loyalty.

"Their diving coach is the field hockey coach," head coach Beth O'Neil explained. "They came out to stay in shape, and they've come so far in just a short period of time, from never swimming competitively."

O'Neil also picked up a group of swimmers from the local aquatic club. While she admits that it's a bit of a rebuilding year, she is optimistic about the young mix she is pulling together.

"It's now a matter of fitting into the high school club," she said. "Practices so much more intense, but they're fitting into the high school mold. They're dedicated and committed, a nice group of girls."

NORTH PENN

KNIGHT WATCH: After cracking 50 in his 4x100 split in a crucial match earlier this season, Peter Kolokithias of North Penn continues to turn heads. At Pennridge, he broke the Rams' pool record in a personal best time of 1:51.6 in the 200 Free in a victory over the Knights' Continental Conference rivals.

"He's been very versatile in the lineup," head coach Brian Daly said.

He calls Kolokithias a leader in and out of the pool.

BENSALEM

VERSATILITY: Captain Tommy Konotko has been a key element in the Bensalem lineup, a senior that coach CJ Mills can count on in almost any situation.

"He's a great all-around swimmer," Mills said. "I usually throw him in the 200 IM, the 50 Free, or the 100 Free."

Konotko has qualified for districts in the breaststroke, his specialty and usual role in relay teams. He'll be joined on the girls' side of the pool by Allison Cunliffe. Cunliffe is an amphibious threat, a speedster in the pool. She district qualified in the 50 Free and put in her time in the 100 and 200 Frees – but she is equally gifted in the gym. Cunliffe splits time between the pool and her alter-ego as a standout gymnast.

FOR SHORE: After their conference week is done, the Owls head down for their annual trip to Atlantic City on Friday.

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"For some of the kids, it's the only time they get out of the area," Mills explains. "It's a tradition. We stay at the Clarion, and we'll swim against Atlantic City High School. We've been doing that probably 10-15 years. It sort of became a tradition, and the kids love it now. It's a team bonding experience."

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