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Sunday, February 22, 2009 6:22 AM EST

By DENNY DYROFF

For the Reporter

TOWAMENCIN TOWNSHIP — North Penn's Julia Tate found herself in somewhat of a precarious position when the 2009 District 1 Girls' Class AAA Diving Championships moved into the final round of three dives Saturday morning at North Penn High.

West Chester East's Kate Sheldon was in seventh place at 264.35 and Owen J. Roberts' Morgan Kleinfelter was in ninth at 261.55. Sandwiched in between was Tate —the defending district champion —with a score of 262.30 after eight dives. District 1 has eight berths for the PIAA Championships, which will be held at Bucknell University in March. So, all three girls knew that a lot was riding on their final three dives. When the final scores were announced, Tate had moved up to fourth place with 369.15 points. Sheldon finished eighth (355.70) and Kleinfelter ninth (348.45).

"I was first last year so finishing fourth today was a little disappointing," said Tate. "But, I've been pretty sick lately. I know a lot of people have gotten sick this season. For me, it came at an inopportune time. Considering everything, my diving was O.K. today. I'm a senior so I'm just happy to be going to states again."

Tate's dives in the prelims were inward, inward-and-a-half, back double, back one-and-one-half with one-and-one-half twists and back dive. She followed with a front one-and-one-half, front two-and-one-half and reverse in the semifinals and a final round featuring a reverse double, back somersault with two-and-one-half twists and front one-and-one-half with one twist.

"Normally, my inwards are my good dives but they were just average today," said Tate, who finished fifth in the state last year and eighth in the state as a sophomore. "I didn't have a good start. My dives in the semis were just average too."

"I did have a good final round. I knew I was in eighth place and I was upset. One mess-up and you're finished. But, I dove well in the final round and pulled through. My front twister got me a lot of points."

North Penn placed two other girls in the top 12 — Shauna Hennings, who was

11th at 345.50 and Ashley Liss, who took 12th place with a score of 340.70. Methacton's Elena Cosenza finished 16th at 319.90.

"I liked my inward, my inward-and-a-half and my double today," said Cosenza. "I had good height on my inward. On my inward-and-a-half, I got as lot higher than I usually do - and I had a food entry. On my double, I got it in straight."

Perkiomen Valley's Cara Lord checked out after the semifinals and placed 17th with a score of 240.80 for eight dives.

"This wasn't my best but I did better than I did last year here," said Lord, a sophomore. "My best dive was my front double. I had good height and I got good scores. All my dives today were so-so — not bad but just O.K."

Plymouth Whitemarsh's Lize Keefer placed 21st and her Colonial teammate Michaela Lapent finished 29th. Norristown's Kim Detwiler took 25th while her Eagle teammate Gwen Utz was 34th.

"My reverse and my front one-and-one-half went better than I expected," said Keefer. "On the one-and-one-half, my takeoff was pretty good. And, I had a clean entry."

In Class AA action, Upper Merion' Gwen Alvord nailed down a fourth-place finish at 310.80 and her Viking teammate Danielle Esposito placed seventh at 266.65. Lansdale Catholic's Jacqueline Pedersen was 10th at 211.85.

"In the final round, I had to do my reverse — and it wasn't bad," said Alvord, who is also a top-flight gymnast for Phoenixville YMCA's team. "And, my inward one-and-one-half was better than usual. My last dive was a back somersault with a full twist and I got around well."

"Last year, I finished sixth here so this year was definitely better. I had more experience — and better dives. I started strong in the early rounds. I got 7s on my inward. I also scored well on my front pike. That dive got 7s too." Esposito said, "I'm a senior and this is my last meet so I had fun."

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