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Upper Dublin saves its best for last at Wilson Relays

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For the Times Herald

SPRING TOWNSHIP — When the annual Wilson Relays arrive at their final event each year, there are two constants. The first is the yearly ritual of dusting off clichés to describe Upper Dublin’s attitude concerning in the meet’s finale. The second is watching the Cardinals touch first in the event — the 200-yard mixed freestyle relay.

The most apropos clichés are “He who laughs last, laughs best”, “Saving the best for last” and “All’s well that ends well.”

As usual, the meet ended well for Upper Dublin. The Cardinals saved their best for last and were all smiles and laughs after the conclusion of the race.

The four-girl, four-boy team of Carolyn Meier, Ellie Houser, Erin Regan, Lindsey Schmidt, Alex Stine, Dave Derr, Tyler Huffman and Gerben Scherpbier touched first with a clocking of 1:26.85 — just shy of the meet record time of 1:26.68 set by Wilson in 1988.

“Our coaches put a lot of pressure on us to win this race,” said Scherpbier. “We’ve won it for the last few years and we needed to keep the streak going.”

The mixed 200 freestyle relay is always a highly-competitive race in the big 12-team meet at Wilson High. Upper Dublin has captured first place in the event with such consistency that meet director Roy Snyder has unofficially dubbed it “The Upper Dublin Relay.”

The Cardinals had a win streak that went back well over a dozen years until Emmaus provided a nasty interruption four years ago. Three years ago, the Cards’ seed time got mixed up and they were placed in the slower heat. They won the heat but finished second in the event. Upper Dublin climbed back to the top in 2008 and has stayed there ever since.

“With our boys’ team, this relay is always for the seniors,” said Stine. “Not all of the girls were seniors – but they’re all really good. We always load this relay every year.”

Derr said, “This is what we shoot for. We’re all tired because we’re doing a lot of yardage in practice. But, this is the race we really get excited about. This is the race we have to win.”

Upper Dublin’s boys were able to register just one other top three-finish at the talent-laden invitational. The

foursome of Ashton Leyens, Derr, Stine and Huffman placed third in the 200 free relay with a time of 1:30.77.

The Cardinal girls finished in the money in two other events. The team of Mieke Scherpbier, Houser, Meier and Schmidt grabbed the silver medal in the grade 9-10 200 free relay at 1:44.08 and the quartet of Emmeline Leyens, Houser, Schmidt and Meier touched third in the grade 9-10 200 medley relay at 1:55.20.

“The free relay was a good race for us,” said Scherpbier. “This is always a fun meet to compete in. We see teams that we never see and we swim a lot of different races. We always look forward to it.”

Saturday’s meet was the 35th Annual Wilson Relays and the host Bulldogs celebrated in style. The boys set four meet records and scored 276 points to finish a close runnerup to Hershey at 285. Emmaus was third at 449 followed by LaSalle (206), North Penn (198) and Upper Dublin (188).

The Wilson girls really celebrated. The Bulldogs, who are one of the favorites to win this year’s PIAA Girls Class AAA championship, won the meet with 320 points while Hershey was a distant runnerup with 253. North Penn took third at 214, followed by Emmaus (211), State College (201) and Upper Dublin (192). Wilson placed second in two of the 10 events and won all the rest – with a pair of meet records along the way.

North Penn’s girls had just two finishes in the top three. But, the Maidens still scored well with their impressive depth – well enough to rack up enough points to place third in the team standings.

The Maidens’ top finishes were second in the 200 free relay at 1:40.39 with the team of Sam Deana, Sarah Hannings, Mary Morris and Casey O’Neill and second in the 200 butterfly relay at 1:50.56 with the foursome of Morris, Brooke Else, Katie Patterson and Jan Ikeda.

“This was our third meet this week so we’re all pretty tired,” said Ikeda. “But, we were seeded first in the fly relay so we all wanted to do really well in the event. We were excited for this race.”

The Maidens staged an intense battle with the host Bulldogs. Each team pushed the other hard and Wilson finished in first by less than two seconds – and by just one second away from the meet record.

“We were definitely ready for this race,” said Morris. “We had our swag on.”

In the boys’ meet, the Knights finished consistently between fourth and seventh place – with just two events out of this range. North Penn’s best placement was a second-place showing in the 800 free relay. The quartet of Sean McDonald, Eugene Feeley, Peter Kolokithias and Jack Else clocked a time of 7:19.55.

“Before the 800 free relay, none of our teams had finished in the top two so that was a motivator for us,” said Kolokithias. “We had really good splits. We all had our best times of the season.”

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