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Intelligencer swimming notebook: Wood's Gnias brings energy

By: **Drew Markol**
phillyBurbs.com

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By Bill Keen
Staff Writer

There comes a point every season when swimming coaches suddenly remember what it was like when they were kids and were handed a present for their birthday. The memories are usually triggered when they see an athlete who has improved from the previous season, continually dropping times or excelling in a new event.

Archbishop Wood coach Charlie Stillwell is like a kid with a new toy, thanks in part to junior Andrew Gnias. The veteran coach can cite different individuals who have him feeling good about his boys and girls programs, but Gnias is special for a number of reasons.

For one, this is only the third year he has been swimming competitively.

"He never swam a race before his freshman year, but he decided to try out because his sisters, Elizabeth and Rachel, were in the program," Stillwell said. "Already this season, he has done his personal best in breaststroke (1 minute, 15.06 seconds) and the butterfly (1:06.29), and it shouldn't be long before he gets the qualifying time in both for the District 12 championships."

There is another reason Gnias has helped make the boys' team better, and for that one, he could pose on a poster like Uncle Sam saying, "I want you."

"He's probably the reason our boys' team is as large as it is numbers wise," the coach said. "Last year, he started recruiting others to join the team and kept it up this year. We went from 12 to 21 on this year's roster."

A tale of two dynasties

This is going to come as absolutely no surprise to fans that have been paying attention for the last 25 years or so, but North Penn has a mighty successful swimming program. Excellent coaches and outstanding athletes have come and gone, but while there have been years when one or both have seemed vulnerable, the wins and the titles just keep on coming.

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I thought about the Towamencin Township Aquatics Factory as I was watching my favorite string band, Fralinger, win first place again in the 2010 Mummers Parade (eight is great, but nine would be fine). I asked myself, "How do they do it? How do they constantly meet the challenges and just keep rolling along year after year?"

That's when a little light went on in my head; Fralinger is the North Penn swimming of the Mummers' Parade.

The difference is Fralinger only has to fight off the challengers once every 365 days. The Knights and the Maidens have to do it every time they step up to the blocks.

A matter of dedication



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Members of the **Souderton** boys and girls' teams got a bit of a break, thanks to the weather the morning of New Year's Eve. Head coach Todd Bauer had scheduled a mandatory practice, but had to cancel it when conditions made travel dangerous. Later, as conditions improved, he put out the word by phone and the Internet — there would be an optional practice at 5 p.m. for anybody who wanted to put in the extra work.

"We had at least 25 who showed up," said a still surprised Bauer on Saturday. "To get a bunch of high school kids to come out at 5 p.m. on New Year's Eve, it's amazing; I was surprised we got that many, but that just shows how dedicated they are to the program."

*Meet to watch

n The Central Bucks East boys and girls are both off to excellent starts; Friday they'll have a chance to face an opponent from the SOL National when they host Council Rock North at 3:30 p.m.

Bill Keen can be reached at 215-345-3185 or bkeen@phillyBurbs.com.

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