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Intell swimmingnotebook: NP's Gimenez shoulders district meet just fine

By: Edward Kracz
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By Bill Keen

Some athletes come to the PIAA District One Championships expecting to qualify for states, while others are just happy to have the chance to compete on the district level.

For Tomas Gimenez of North Penn, this year's experience was a little bit of both because of the way he reached districts last season as a freshman.

"Last year, I was out most of the year because of a shoulder injury," said Gimenez, who was sidelined by tendonitis in his rotator cuff from August until early February of the 2008-2009 school year. "I had a couple of practices and luckily I qualified (for districts) when I swam at the Last Chance Meet at Horsham-Horsham. I came here, I was very nervous but I got that year out of the way...and swam about a 1:05 (in the 100-yard breaststroke)."

Being forced to watch from the stands fueled his competitive fires and he swam throughout the off-season to make sure he was ready to put forth his best effort when the 2009-2010 season rolled around.

Saturday at La Salle University found him in lane one for the 11th and final heat of the breaststroke. Unfortunately, he missed out on an automatic trip to states when he finished fifth in 1 minute, 0.42 seconds. However, that was more than good enough to capture one of 16 at-large berths which were announced Sunday.

Incidentally, the breaststroke is a family specialty—Tomas's older brother, Nico, was the Knights' top breaststroker until he graduated last June.

"My brother had a big impact on me," said Tomas after cooling down from his Saturday swim. "He called me earlier (Saturday), wished me luck and said, 'Go out there and do your best.' He really motivated me and I don't know if I would be where I am without him."

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Not everybody who competes at districts is fast enough to qualify for a trip to states. That's why the heats are a mini-battlefield where up to six swimmers compete for the right to say they chalked up one more victory, even if it takes them no farther.

That explains why Upper Moreland freshman Patrick Smith was so happy after winning his heat in the AA 100 breaststroke in 1:06.41, especially since 1:09.05 was his seeding time.

He knew his chances of an at-large berth in the state meet were miniscule, but that didn't stop him from wearing a smile that reached from ear to ear as he shook hands with the others in the race.

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"I actually grew up naturally swimming breaststroke; it was the first stroke I learned even before freestyle," said Smith, whose win was extra special because he trailed after 75 yards and won because he blistered the final lap. "I pull these kind of things off occasionally, this is just one of them...it was really nice because I thought I was going to come in second when I came off the wall (for the last lap).

"Then I saw my time and I saw a '1' after it (for first place), I just could not believe it."

And the best part is, he has three more years to drop time and earn that trip to Lewisburg.

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