

HIGH FIVES

By: Drew Markol [phillyBurbs.com](http://phillyburbs.com)

5 Teams to watch

(listed in order of strength)

Germantown Academy: Without question, the Patriots are the area's top team, thanks to as solid and as talented a senior class as head coach Dick Shoulberg has had in years. While they should find easy sledding in the Inter-Ac League, their real goal is winning the team championship at Easterns.

North Penn: After ceding the title of the area's top PIAA team to Souderton two years ago, the Maidens were once again queens of the Suburban One League Continental Conference last season. While they lost several key individuals to graduation, they should have more than enough talent returning and a deep class of freshmen to repeat.

Souderton: Chloe Thomas is the latest speed demon who should contend for a bunch of gold in the sprint freestyle events and give the Indians a solid shot at another individual state champion. The difference in this season's team is a switch from several girls who win two or three events to many girls who should contend for one each.

Central Bucks South: When you're coming off a season that established a school record for wins and the number of individuals advancing to districts, there is every reason to look forward to a repeat. While the top two spots in the SOL Continental are probably taken, South should lead the list of contenders for the third spot.

William Tennent: For the Panthers, everything starts with Melanie Busch, who is the area's most talented individual and could be a threat to win two golds at districts. Coming off a season that saw the team compile a 9-2 record, hopes are running high for at least a repeat for the area's darkhorse for an SOL title.

5 Performers to watch

(listed alphabetically)

Melanie Busch, William Tennent: Without question, she has the area's best shot at individual state gold. She almost had it last season, but came up .04 short in the 50 free and settled for silver, and, after having the fastest overall time after the preliminaries, she took the bronze in the backstroke.

Kacie Ciampoli, Germantown Academy: As a junior, she continued to improve as the season went on and she peaked just before Easterns. She was the only member of the Patriots to win two individual golds, taking the 200- and 500-yard freestyle. It will be a huge shock if she fails to repeat.

Taylor Kane, Archbishop Wood: She finished fifth at states in the 500 free, but her chances of winning a gold improved dramatically because the Vikings dropped from AAA to AA. After making the consolation finals in the 200 free and finishing 11th, she has to be considered a major threat in both events.

Natalee Szopo, Upper Moreland: In her first two seasons, she proved she was one of the best Class AA divers in the state. She just missed a bronze last spring, but her fourth-place finish returned her to the medal platform and made her that much more determined to finally make the top three this season.

Chloe Thomas, Souderton: There is a lot of pressure on her as the area's biggest hope for a state gold in the sprint freestyle events. In the process, she becomes the latest in a long line of Indians who have owned it before her, and that alone will push her all season.

5 Meets to watch

William Tennent at Pennsbury, Tuesday, 3:30 p.m.: It's extremely early in the schedule to have a meet as big as this one, but the Panthers will know how good they are when it's over, and if they have a shot at the SOL National title.

Central Bucks East at Central Bucks South, Jan. 18, 3:30 p.m.: Both teams have high hopes of finishing in the top three in the SOL Continental. This one will give the winner a huge boost in that direction.

Souderton at North Penn, Jan. 25, 3:30 p.m.: This is one meet that cries out to be held at night to maximize the number of fans who can see it. The winner will again have the inside track for first place in the SOL Continental.

Peddie at Germantown Academy, Jan. 26, 4 p.m.: The big one for the Patriots. A win here and they can coast the rest of the way, but it won't be easy. Third through sixth places will determine the winner.

Emmaus at North Penn, Feb. 8, 3:30 p.m.: If the Maidens are undefeated coming into this one, they'll still need a supreme effort to stay that way. This end-of-the-season gem is always a great tune-up for districts and states.

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