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District meet promises several interesting races

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Bill Keen, staff writer |

Swimming Notebook - As she closed her immensely popular variety show each week, Carol Burnett would sing a short song that said, in part, "Seems we just get started and before you know it, comes the time we have to say so long."

That sums up this swimming season. It really doesn't seem possible that we're already down to the PIAA District One Championships at La Salle University Friday and Saturday, and the PIAA state championships at Bucknell University March 16-19.

There is one burning question that swirls around both the Class AAA boys and girls meets: Will North Penn dominate the district the way it did the dual-meet season and the Suburban One League Continental Conference championships?

Once upon a time the Knights owned the race for the district team title, but a lot of other programs have improved. As swimmers from those schools steal a win here and second or third place there, it eats into North Penn's total.

Like the boys, the Maidens closed the season with a dual-meet win over Emmaus and the Continental crown, but their margin over Central Bucks East at the league meet was 21 points.

Two things I'll be looking forward to at Class AAA districts:

n On the girls' side, freshman Tara Rogers of North Penn going up against senior Chloe Thomas of Souderton in the 50- and 100-yard freestyles. Can Thomas rebound? Will Rogers give in to the pressure of her first district meet or have a sizzling start to what could be a brilliant career?

n On the boys side, the 200-yard freestyle relay. Last year CB East celebrated a memorable victory over North Penn at the district meet, but at this season's league meet, North Penn won by 0.08 seconds - 1:29.36 to 1:29.44 - which could translate into an amazing showdown at La Salle's pool, which produced some extremely fast times at Friday and Saturday's 111th Eastern Interscholastic Swimming and Diving Championships.

Patriots' power

After going through the notes from Easterns, here are a few things we weren't able to discuss.

Germantown Acacemy senior Jim McEldrew's gold medal in the 200 individual medley was a fitting way to end what was, at times, a rough season for him.

"I had a lot happen to me this year, but I never got out of the water," said McEldrew after the win. "I mean, I took it easy when I broke my foot, and I had pneumonia the week before the Peddie dual meet. (Here) I wanted to go personal best, I trusted myself that I'd be able to and I just had something left."

Now that is what you call fighting through adversity.

The girls' meet was a chance for underclassmen to shine. Freshman Meagan Dollard won the 200 free and was third in the 100 free. Sophomore Rachel Zilinskas won the IM, the 500 free and was named the meet's Outstanding Swimmer, and there were others in both classes who contributed to the team's 602 points.

Taylor Sneed was the only member of a very talented senior class to win an individual race, when she won the backstroke Saturday in 54.73, not far from Teresa Crippen's meet record 54.16 set in 2008.

"Honestly, I was just trying to go as fast as I could to win it," she said. "This is a team meet and anything I can do to help my team. That's who's up there (on the record board), Teresa Crippen, and she's one of my role models and if I can even come close to her, that's amazing."

Following Sneed to the gold was junior Madeline Maher in the breaststroke, where she beat Inter-Ac rival Rachel Repko of Episcopal Academy, 1:04.28 to 1:06.00.

"(During prelims) my pace was too choppy in the water, so I just told myself to relax," Maher said. "I (didn't) think about anybody else but just about my own race. I swam this race about a million times, so I tried not to think too much about it and just did it."

Finally, a closing thought from Dollard, GA's youngest gold medalist. She collected another gold swimming leadoff on the 400 free relay. Not that long ago, individual gold didn't seem real.

"When I was younger, not really, but I really got into the sport and I just wanted it so much," said Dollard, who couldn't believe the No. 1 next to her name. "I was pretty stunned."

Just about as stunned as the GA girls' future opponents, when they realize all but one of the Patriots' individual gold medal-winners will be back next year.

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