

The 5 teams to Watch

By Bill Keen Staff writer | Posted: Monday, December 5, 2011 12:00 am

Teams to Watch

(listed in order of strength)

Germantown Academy: A half-dozen outstanding seniors graduated but the Patriots should be just as strong if not stronger. Freshmen and sophomores contributed mightily to the team title at Easterns last spring; with Madeline Maher and Rachel Zilinskas leading the way, this is the team to beat in the area.

North Penn: Some teams lose seniors and struggle to replace them. The Maidens simply reach down into their crew of talented underclassmen and seldom miss a beat. Until somebody proves it in the pool, the SOL Continental Conference title is North Penn's to lose.

Souderton: OK, the Indians are in the same league as North Penn and, yes, North Penn has another strong team and is the justifiable favorite to repeat. But it says here the Indians have more than a "puncher's chance" to knock the Maidens off their pedestal. It won't be easy, but it could happen.

Central Bucks East: The creme-de-la-creme of area leagues is the SOL Continental and just about everybody expects North Penn and Souderton to battle for the team title. However, if the Maidens and Indians are smart, they will not take the Patriots lightly. Definitely a dark horse but this is a deep, talented team.

Hatboro-Horsham: Numbers-wise, this is the smallest team the Hatters have ever had since Kip Emig took over as head coach two decades ago. That said, the roster is jammed solid with talent in freestyle and the breaststroke. The key to how many wins the team will have is developing depth in the other events.

Swimmers to Watch

(listed alphabetically)

Tara Rogers, North Penn: She came out of nowhere last season to become the most talented freshman in the area. A certifiable threat in the sprint free events, she finished fourth in the district and 20th in the state in the 100.

Rachel Saunders, Central Bucks West: After finishing a disappointing seventh at district diving and just barely qualifying for states, Saunders was on the verge of a top-three finish at Bucknell until she slipped a bit in the final round but still finished fourth. She's bigger, stronger and a definite threat in the league and beyond.

Lyndsey Schmidt, Central Bucks South: This is "The Year of the Diver" in the area and Schmidt is the reigning queen in class AAA. She won the silver to a senior in districts and took home the bronze at states. This year she could easily win it all.

Natalee Szopo, Upper Moreland: In the small school diving ranks, Szopo is the best the area has to offer. In fact, her point total last season was tops in both classes. She won districts and was leading at states, eventually settling for the silver. This season she won't settle for anything less than gold.

Rachel Zilinskas, Germantown Academy: In a long line of truly great swimmers at GA, Zilinskas is the latest to stamp herself one of the best in the nation. She is an Olympic Trials qualifier after taking gold in IM and 500 free at Easterns. And to think she's only a junior.

Meets to Watch

Abington at Upper Moreland, Dec. 12, 3:30 p.m.: A crossover meet pitting the SOL National Galloping Ghosts against the American Conference Golden Bears. Despite the size difference, they appear fairly evenly matched.

Central Bucks East at Souderton, Dec. 21, 3:45 p.m.: The Patriots and Indians meet to see which will stay in the hunt for the SOL Continental title as they jockey for early position behind North Penn. This could be a dandy.

Hatboro-Horsham at William Tennent, Dec. 22, 5:30 p.m.: The later start should enable fans of each team to get home from work so they can watch an interesting non-league battle between neighboring schools. The winner will get some much needed momentum heading into the holiday break.

Germantown Academy at Peddie School, Jan. 25, 4 p.m.: The meet swimmers from both schools prepare for from day one, even if their coaches won't let them admit it. Nobody in the Inter-Ac League should come close to the Patriots; a win here and they should finish undefeated.

Souderton at North Penn, Feb. 1, 3:45 p.m.: We saved the best for last. If Souderton gets past CB East, both it and the Maidens should be perfect in the league coming into this traditional grudge match. If you see only one meet all year, make it this one.