

Fast times

By Bill Keen Staff writer | Posted: Friday, March 2, 2012 5:00 am

PHILADELPHIA — The way Laureana Zrada saw it, her job was simple.

"I pretty much tried to swim my own race, stay calm and go after it; I was feeling good, so I just kept going," the Souderton junior said Thursday after winning Class AAA 200-yard freestyle gold at the first day of the PIAA District One swimming championships.

"The last lap, I thought, 'Hey, this could be close,' so I just went after it."

Swimming in Lane 5 in the last of 12 heats, the fourth-seeded Zrada passed two competitors over the final 25 yards. Her effort of 1 minute, 53.31 seconds clipped nearly three seconds off her 1:56.14 seed time, even though her tank was on empty at the end.

"I was dead," Zrada said with a laugh. "I was tired, but I was excited, so it was all good."

One of only three area girls in the individual events to secure a trip to states, Zrada credited the competition she faced in the Suburban One League Continental Conference for helping her prepare for districts.

"It motivated me, and it also made me really excited because I knew a lot of girls were going to go in and swim really fast," Zrada said. "I was glad I had the chance to race them."

Area competitors collected one other gold medal when North Penn's foursome of Eve Kosten, Olivia Distefano, Tara Rogers and Brooke Else won the closing 200 free relay in 1:37.10, just nipping runner-up Upper Dublin's 1:37.24.

"I was feeling the pressure but, at the same time, I was excited because I like anchoring," said Else, who was in Lane 3 and really couldn't see the Flying Cardinals' anchor, Carolyn Meier, in Lane 1.

"I was trying to look, but it was hard to see because they were all the way over in Lane 1. But it felt great. I was really happy for our team, definitely."

Also advancing to states was Zrada's teammate, Ann Fadden. With the top four finishers in each event automatically qualifying for states, her second-place time of 24.04 in the 50 free was off her season's best 23.88, but she was happy to have extended her high school career.

"I thought my start was great, but my breakout could use more work," said the senior, who added that most of the race was a blur. "You know, I can't really remember it. I remember going into the water, and that was it. I think what you need to do is practice, and then it becomes a habit and you'll stop thinking about it."

Fadden swam the anchor leg of the Indians' opening 200 medley relay that finished second behind West Chester East and also moved on, as does Central Bucks East's freshman Hannah Wittman.

The first-year sensation was fourth in the 200 individual medley after the backstroke second leg, but moved up to second on her specialty, the breaststroke, and stayed there. Her 2:08.94 was a personal best by more than two seconds.

"Right after the first 100, I knew on breaststroke I needed to make up time," Wittman said. "I knew that (eventual winner) Christina (Leander of West Chester East) was an unbelievable butterflyer and backstroker, and I saw that she was miles ahead of me.

"I wanted to give it everything I had, so I kicked it into high gear and gave it everything I could."

In Class AA, where only the winner gets an automatic trip to states, the best the area could do was Gwynedd-Mercy Academy's third place in the 200 free relay. Upper Moreland's Anna Hakes was fifth in the 200 free.