

# A rivalry, a rookie coach and the jitters

By **Bill Keen** Staff writer | Posted: Thursday, February 14, 2013 12:00 am

TOWAMENCIN — The instant that Jack Morris' hand slapped the wall at the end of the victorious 400-yard freestyle relay, Jeff Faikish started smiling.

His North Penn boys swimming team had just closed out Tuesday's convincing 104.5-80.5 win over regional rival Emmaus, the 10th victory of Faikish's first season as head coach.

Anyone watching the 1997 North Penn graduate during the meet saw a man who was very comfortable with what he was doing.

It was a far cry from the way he felt after the Knights closed out a perfect Suburban One League Continental Conference slate Feb. 5, with a 103-75 win over Central Bucks West. The one remaining meet was against the team that snapped North Penn's 251 dual-meet winning streak in 2005, and the rookie coach had a week to think about it.

"I was very nervous and scared," said Faikish, whose job carries with it about as much pressure as being football coach at Notre Dame.

"I sat down with my mom last Thursday, and the first time I scored the meet out on paper, I had us winning. The second time I scored it out on paper, I had them killing us after doing some more research."

Matt Weiser knows exactly how Faikish felt. The head coach of the girls' team for the past five years saw the Maidens complete their second straight 11-0 season when they drubbed the Hornets 113-73.

"I think the way Jeff was, was kind of the way I was my first couple of years here, no question," Weiser said. "Swimming Emmaus, swimming Souderton, swimming Upper Dublin have been some big meets for us, and I can certainly understand and relate to what it's like to be nervous."

Most area fans know why the annual battle against the Hornets means so much to the Knights, but they may not realize the ties between North Penn and Emmaus run a lot deeper than simple rivals.

"Back when I swam, North Penn and Emmaus traveled together to Junior National meets, so there's not only a longstanding rivalry, but also a camaraderie," Faikish said. "It's not by accident that it's always a fantastic meet. It's great coaches, a great group of kids and a great rivalry."

Tuesday's meet was also something else. According to former Knights coach Brian Faikish — Jeff's older brother — it was a veritable Faikish family reunion.

"My mom and dad were in the stands, I was in the stands, Jeff's wife was there, his nephews and his children were there, so it was definitely a family event," Brian Faikish said. "My mom had the paper that Jeff used to score out the meet, and we were kind of following along."

And you wonder why Jeff Faikish was nervous.