

2011 LHSAA State Swimming Championships

Swimmers compete on both the individual and team levels, like many other sports. Unlike other athletes...swimmers can drown. Perhaps in no other sport is breathing so important...*how* one breathes (left side or right side), *when* one breathes (every stroke, every other stroke, every six strokes) and *if* one breathes (when reaching for the wall); all help make the difference in the hundredths of a second that often separate winners from losers. This is why swimmers practice breathing, or rather, holding their breath. With such slim margins, sometimes you just don't have time to breathe....

The 2011 LHSAA State Swimming Championships were once again hosted by an experienced crew at the SPAR center in Sulphur, La., Nov. 16-19. Allen Anderson, a supervisor and coach at SPAR, said more than 100 teams competed in the four-day meet. Four division championships and runner-up trophies were awarded to both boys' and girls' teams along with individual medals to the top three finishers in each of 11 different events. Anderson says even though Louisiana is a "football state," it should not be embarrassed by its swimming accomplishments. He says he has 37 years of experience in high school swimming, and Louisiana ranks in the top tier for its program. "We have great coaches with great dedication to the sport....We'll have some kids get scholarships to swim for some of the best colleges in America," he adds.

Anderson says there is certainly room for growth and more publicity. Since the high school swimming season competes with football, cross country and volleyball, swimmers have to make a choice. Several coaches readily acknowledged that they lose some of their best athletes to other activities. Though it is rare for a swimmer to compete in other sports, those who do will tell you their training regimen is more difficult than that for any other sport. Their coaches will also tell you privately that other sports offer "less pain with more gain," meaning the workouts are less rigorous and the student-athletes often receive more recognition for participating in those sports. "We have administrators who don't even know we are gone from school now. They've never been to a swim meet," laments one coach.

Swimmers are the Rodney Dangerfields of high school athletics—they get no respect. It starts with "the look." How does a swimmer ever find clothes that fit? Their chests and shoulders are massive, strong and wide. They are anatomical anomalies. The guys look like human triangles whose torsos taper down to nothing but skinny little legs. The girls, with powerfully sculpted upper bodies, are often confused for gymnasts, except that their tans are real. All are incredible athletes.

The life of a competitive swimmer is like being in the Army—they get more work done before six in the morning than most students get done all day. It means getting up at 4:30 a.m. three to five days a week and hitting the pool for a couple of hours...before school starts. "Practice" often consists of hours of monotonous laps, and unlike other athletes who can plug in the latest tunes to accompany them on conditioning runs, the swimmer is left to his or her own thoughts. Meets are held on nights or weekends. State Representative Brett Geymann, whose daughter, Katy, swims for Sam Houston, says it's "brutal on parents," but acknowledges that it is exponentially "more brutal" on the student-athlete.

Considering the inconveniences and the tedious, lonely practices, it seems swimmers can be among the most content of all championship-caliber athletes, even those who lose. Perhaps it is because points are

awarded to the top 16 finishers with qualifying times in each event, so a mediocre swimmer can still provide valuable points in the team's scoring.

Or maybe it is because swimming is, ultimately, an individual sport where the individual competes not only against the guy or gal in the next lane, but against that wretched clock. One competitor, who finished near the back of the pack in a consolation final, gleefully rejoiced afterward with family and friends, "I smashed my PR (personal record)." It was heartwarming to see swimmer after swimmer take delight in beating that clock.

The sense of accomplishment grows when a swimmer can "beat the clock" AND provide valuable points for his or her team. Take Caroline Bergeron, for instance, a sophomore breaststroker for St. Joseph's Academy in Division 1. She's been swimming since she was 4 years old. "We just want to beat Northshore," she said, referring to her team's top competition. Her qualifying time placed her near the back of the pack for the first day of competition. But in the prelims, she swam the race of her young life, exiting the pool with wide-eyed amazement.

"I knocked off four seconds," she said in disbelief. More importantly, her eighth place finish guaranteed the Redstickers 11 valuable points...valuable because her team won the state title, over Northshore High School, by 2.5 points.

And then again, maybe swimmers aren't all that different from other athletes. Sure, their physiques are different; their training regimens are different; but they share a familiar joy in personal and team accomplishments; and they, too, feel the pain and disappointment of a loss or a poor performance. Perhaps it's the chlorine that masks their tears?

In any event, swimmers deserve better...better recognition from the media, their school administrators and their peers. There were no cheerleaders, no bands, and no TV cameras. These talented athletes performed primarily before teammates, family and friends. But for those who participated and those who watched these phenomenal athletes compete in the 2011 State Swimming Championships it was...well, breathtaking.

Division 4 Championships

Colleen Barczyk once swam for the University of Auburn. She now coaches the boys' and girls' teams at Ascension Episcopal High. A tall blonde who also coaches several club teams and individuals in and around the Lafayette area, she's used to being noticed. When an observer came up to congratulate her and her daughters, who both swim on the girls' team, she answered with a perky, "Thank you for noticing," genuinely appreciative of the attention.

If swimmers in general receive little attention, Division IV swimmers are nearly invisible. Of course it doesn't help that within the division of smallest schools in the state, there stands a giant—Isidore Newman. The Greenies, best known for producing NFL quarterbacks Peyton and Eli Manning, have also done a pretty fair job of sacking their competition in the pool. This year, under the direction of Coach Alissa Dundes, both the boys' and girls' team won state championships—the first time a school has won

both titles in the same year since Newman accomplished the rare feat in 2004. More bad news for the competition...half the Greenie swimmers are middle-school students.

Both the boys' and girls' teams started strong, each winning the 200 yard medley relay and maintaining that momentum throughout the meet. In fact, both teams dominated the competition, each winning seven of the 11 contested events.

The girls' team featured the Cherbonnier sisters, Angele (first in 50-yd. freestyle; first in breaststroke; two relay firsts) and Annie Laura (second in 200 individual medley; third in breaststroke; two relay firsts). Both return next year. Lexi Mod provided senior leadership, as well as points, as she came in first in the backstroke, fourth in the butterfly, and participated in two winning relay teams. Helen Keyes, a junior, took first in the 100 freestyle and second in the 200 freestyle. She also participated in two winning relays. Sara Bahat, a seventh grader, rounded out the medal winners for Newman with a third place finish in the 200 IM.

On the boys' side, balanced scoring helped the Greenies to the victory. They were lead by Patrick Riess (first in 100 freestyle; first in backstroke; two relay firsts), Aleksandar Bahat (first in 200 IM ; second in 100 breaststroke; and two relay firsts), and Harry Browne (first in the 500 freestyle; second in 200 freestyle; two relay firsts). Other medalists for Newman included: Robyn Krieger (first in 200 medley relay; third in 100 butterfly) Joren Grue (first in medley relay; second in 50-yd freestyle; third in 100 freestyle), Tarik Anwar (first in two relays; third in 100 backstroke), and senior Maxwell Wang (first in 400 freestyle relay).

The Dunham School, runner-ups on the girls' side, got an emotional lift from the inspiring story of their coach Rebekah Myers, who missed much of the season recovering from thyroid cancer surgery. The Dunham Tigers did not have an individual winner throughout the meet but scored heavily by taking a third and two seconds in the three relays.

For the boys, St. Martins looked to restore some of its lost glory as Coach Mike Falati had nothing but praise for the six young men who carried his Saints to a second place finish. He says his team will miss senior Will Farber, but hopes to return a strong team next year.

One of the great things about Division IV, as Falati says, is that very young kids get to participate at an early age. "If you don't get them by ninth grade, you probably can't get them." He offered praise to the other teams and coaches that were encouraging young swimmers to join the sport and acknowledged that he would likely try to bring some younger talent with him in the coming years.

There were certainly plenty of young swimmers on hand this year. The Academy of the Sacred Heart fielded a relay team of two fifth graders, a seventh grader and a ninth grader. They came in 12th place—good enough for 10 points and a lifetime of memories. And then there was Victoria Barczyk, a ninth grader whose Division IV winning 200 freestyle time would have made her the overall winner in both Divisions II and III, and was the sixth fastest in the entire meet. Her winning 500 freestyle time, which was 12 seconds better than her qualifying time, was faster than the Division IV boys winner—by 4 seconds!

When asked about the competition at Ascension Episcopal, a K-12 school in Youngsville, La., Victoria (don't call her 'Vicky') Barczyk pointed to her little sister. Jillian Barczyk, a 10-year-old fifth grader, anchors her team's 200 yard medley relay. She was seen eating a candy bar just before leading off her team's 400 yard relay--so much for the old adage about not going in the water on a full stomach! The Barczyk girls led their Blue Gators to a third place finish in the relay and fifth place overall.

Newman dominance...St Martins' resurgence...an emotional surprise for the Dunham School...and lots of great talent waiting in the wings...all just a few reasons Division IV LHSAA swimming was worth noticing.

Division 3 Championships

Perhaps nothing exemplifies the commitment, determination and drive of the LHSAA swimmer more than the story of Kristen Salles. The Parkview Baptist senior has experienced all the highs and most of the lows that an athlete can endure. She was a state backstroke champion in her sophomore year. Then, like many kids her age, the interest in swimming waned.

It wasn't that she didn't want to put in the long, hard hours of practice required of all exceptional athletes...it was simply that she wanted to be a "normal" kid; she wanted to do other things as well—like student government, where she's a class officer. She maintains a solid 3.9 average in her classes. Kristin loves to sing and participates in a "Praise Group" each week at church. She tried out for the track team and made it as a javelin thrower. She even qualified for the district meet. But despite all the distractions, she always knew she could rely on swimming to fill that special void for competition.

"I love being with the team...being part of a team...trying to beat my times," she remembered. So she began preparations for the 2011 State Championships. Unlike some, she was blessed with a talent that didn't require 24/7 attention. So she did not begin training in earnest until much later than usual. Such talent also carries a curse...you'll never know just how good you could really be if you had given it your all. In her senior year, Kristen Salles wanted to know just how good she could really be.

Fast forward to Thursday, one week before the state swim meet. Salles had been having pains deep in her abdomen. She also had been nursing problems with a torn hip flexor. Assuming the pain was related, she went to the doctor to check it out. The news was startling. She had a 6.3 cm mass twisted around her ovary. She would have surgery the next morning.

"I can do all things through Christ who strengthens me. Philippians 4:13." Salles recited the verse then explained her thoughts at the time. Could it be cancer? Would she lose her ovary? Would she be able to swim? "That's up to you," said the doctors who offered every warning possible—infection, tearing, scar tissue to name just a few. When she insisted on swimming, they glued her laparoscopic incisions shut. And then they all prayed.

After four days of recovery in bed, Salles was ready to test the glue. She jumped in a pool and quickly became concerned about her ability, or inability, to perform the flip turns so critical to a swimmer's

success. She also found that in her weakened state, she was unable to pull herself out of the pool...a problem that lingered throughout the weekend.

She fought through the preliminaries, just a week after her surgery, placing in the final grouping for both the butterfly and backstroke competitions. Then, in the finals, she gutted out (thankfully not literally) four more races—perhaps the last of her career—a second place finish in the butterfly and a third place finish (.04 from second place) in the backstroke. She also helped her team to a sixth place finish in the 200 medley relay and a ninth in the 200 freestyle relay.

Afterward, she reflected on her incredible accomplishment. “Bittersweet, but mostly sad,” she would say. “I’d like to swim in college...this makes me wonder how good I could really be,” she paused, and then lit up with that wonderful smile. “But I know God has great things planned for me....”

Salles helped her Parkview Baptist Eagles to a fifth place finish in the newly revised Division III of Louisiana High School swimming. The division had recently undergone restructuring as some of the state’s larger schools were asked to drop down while some of the smaller schools were moved up. As a result, Division III hosted the largest number of athletes (417) and total entries (726).

It also meant records were at risk and, indeed, three division records fell. John Miller, a sophomore from Parkview Baptist clipped nearly two seconds off the division record of 4:50:31 in the 500 freestyle finals. Clay Furr, a senior from University High, took two records: 200 freestyle, 1:45.53; 100 butterfly, 51.19.

For the team titles, Vandebilt Catholic matched Newman’s feat from Division IV by taking both the boys and girls titles, both by wide margins. In the girls’ finals, Parkview Baptist took fifth place with 134 pts, just one point more than Ursuline Academy; University High took fourth with 160.50; St. Charles Catholic placed third at 215; Episcopal High School of Baton Rouge took second with 227 points; and the Terriers of Vandebilt Catholic won with 277 points.

In the boys’ finals, Parkview Baptist tallied 202 points for fifth place; Lutchter took fourth with 227 pts.; E.D. White placed third with 231; St. Charles Catholic took second with 250 pts.; and Vandebilt Catholic won with 277 points.

The Terrier Girls’ team won with depth and quantity over quality. Their 18 female swimmers were the most of any school in Division III. And, were it not for the relays, the Terriers would not have had a top three finish in the finals. The team of Lani Rouse, Abby Knight, Madison Guarino and Francoise Bourgeois narrowly missed breaking the 2:00 mark in the 200 yard medley relay, taking second to the team from St. Charles Catholic. Naomi Hill joined Rouse, Bourgeois and Knight to take third in the 400 freestyle relay.

Despite the lack of wins, Coach Duane Ring was extremely proud of the effort of his team. He said it was rare to win a meet of this size without having individual superstars but that his girls’ efforts were truly a “team” effort.

On the boys' side, the relays were equally as important as Ring's team took second in the medley relay, third in the 200 freestyle relay and first in the 400 freestyle relay. The combination of senior leadership and a strong underclass helped the boys to a relatively easy 77 point victory. Michael Peters took third in the 200 IM, and second in the 400 freestyle while Eli McRae notched a second in the 100 fly and a first in the 100 breaststroke. Brennan Page was the only contestant under 50 seconds (49.99) in the 100 freestyle as he took home a first in that event to go along with his second in the 100 backstroke. Garrett Marcell, another senior, also garnered a second in the 100 breaststroke. Fellow senior Trent Yopp joined Peters, McRae and Page in winning the 400 yard freestyle relay. The foursome also won the 200 yard medley relay. Marcel and Yopp teamed up with sophomore Matthew Bergeron and junior Beau Brady to take third in the 200 freestyle relay.

Division III swimming offered great individual efforts, inspirational stories and showcased the dominance of the Vandebilt Catholic swim program. While there was some modest grumbling about the realignment of teams, it's clear that great things are ahead for Division III swimming.

Division II

If you had to make a comparison for the 2011 LSU Football Team to a Louisiana High School Swim Team, you would have to look at the Saint Scholastica Girls Team. The Doves were anything but docile--they were, in fact, the most dominant swim team at the meet, scoring 495 points to their nearest competitor, Pineville High, with 205 points. Coach Chris Prator's team won every event in the finals except the 500 freestyle, which was won by Caddo Magnet High's Marin Tichenor, a sophomore. South Lafourche, Baton Rouge Magnet and Alexandria Senior High rounded-out the top five teams.

The domination for the Doves began with the 200 yard medley relay and served notice that these girls will be a team to be reckoned with in the future, as the quartet, which included freshman Madeleine Rawls (first in 100 freestyle; first breaststroke; first in 200 freestyle relay) and three sophomores Kristen Jennings (first in 200 IM; first in 100 backstroke; first in 400 freestyle relay), Brooke Vinturella (second in 500 freestyle; first in 400 freestyle relay), and Emily Prieto (first in 50 yard freestyle; first in 200 freestyle relay; second in 100 backstroke), won the leadoff event by almost 14 seconds.

Senior Liana Soileau followed that with a victory in the 200 freestyle. She also won the 100 butterfly and swam a leg on the winning 200 freestyle relay team. Other medalists for St. Scholastica were: Hope Winkler, third in 200 IM and second in 100 butterfly; Gabby Regard, first in 200 freestyle relay; and Anna Thorson, first in 400 freestyle relay.

The boys' competition was quite a bit closer and included three of the top four teams which hailed from the central part of the state. Alexandria Senior High took top honors with 319 points, followed by cross-town rival Pineville High with 227. The Holy Cross Tigers came in third, just two points better than Natchitoches Central's team, scoring 188 and 186 respectively. Baton Rouge Magnet completed the top five.

Alexandria Coach Wally Fall and his Trojans used a combination of strong relay performances coupled with outstanding individual performances to take first in the division. The 200 yard medley relay team

started the competition with a win for the Trojans. The team was composed of Walter Lacroix (third place in 100 backstroke), Richard Norem (second in 200 IM; second, 200 freestyle relay; first, 100 breaststroke), Trey Hunter (second in 200 freestyle relay; second in 100 backstroke), and Zachary Harrison (first, 100 freestyle; first, 200 freestyle relay). Senior Thomas Goodwin also medaled as his 200 freestyle relay team took second.

Coach Fall said central Louisiana has had competitive swimming in Division II for several years and that many of his team members were close friends with their competitors from neighboring schools.

“I don’t know why we tend to have such good swimmers in this part of the state in this division. I do know we have good coaches and strong parental support,” he opined.

And while some coaches were rewarded with a traditional dunking in the wading pool area, Coach Fall sought to inspire his team with a pledge to shave his head if his team won the state meet. That goal was met and his pledge was kept, to the delight of everyone in the swimming community.

When asked if it was worth it—having his head shaved—the newly-shorn Coach Fall smiled broadly, “I’ll gladly do it again next year!”

Division I

“College coaches better start looking at our boys and girls swimming programs. We’ve got some kids that are going to swim in college and some that might have even greater careers,” said one prominent high school swim coach as he assessed the talent coming out of Louisiana schools. And of all the talent in the state, Division I offers the most. Not only were the team swimming competitions some of the closest in recent memory, but several individual records and qualifying standards were broken over the two-day meet.

Congratulations are due the Catholic High School Bears Boys’ Swimmers and the St. Joseph Academy Redstickers Girls’ Team for winning state championships. The Baton Rouge schools claimed victory over their New Orleans/Northshore rivals in a competition that went down to the final event on both the boys’ and girls’ sides.

Special “thanks” is due Andy Antonetz, the Sulphur High coach who doubled as the Public Address announcer for much of the meet. His enthusiasm and energetic delivery of the “play by play” offered a sense of excitement and professionalism that helped make these finals so memorable. Making it even more memorable was the following teams and individuals that broke existing records or made qualifying standards for additional competitions: Savannah Antonetz (yes, she’s Andy’s daughter!), a junior from Barbe High School broke a CAA qualifying mark and the Division 1 state record in the 100 yard girls backstroke finals eclipsing the record she set last year (57.77) by .28 of a second.

Unfortunately for Antonetz, she was only second best in the event as Emma Levendoski from Mandeville High School had an incredible meet to cap off her prep swimming career. The Skipper senior shattered the Division I record coming in at 56.22 seconds to take first place.

In addition to her record-setting backstroke performance, Levendoski also led off the Mandeville High girls record-setting 220 yard medley relay with teammates Alexandra Cloutet, Lia Joslin and Jonna Frantz. The MHS foursome broke a nine-year-old record to win the event and set Division 1 and LHSAA overall marks.

Finally, Fontainebleau's Kara Kopcsó had perhaps the best individual performance of the meet by setting two standards and winning four events. Her 2:04.88 in the 200 yard IM topped an 18-year-old record in that event and also set a CAA qualifying time. She then came back to beat Shelly Ripple's 14 year-old LHSAA record in the 100 butterfly with a CAA qualifying time of 55.70. In addition, she anchored her team's winning 200 yard freestyle relay team, beating out Levendoski's Mandeville team by .01 of a second, and she topped off her record-setting performance by swimming the last leg of her team's winning 400 yard freestyle relay team in a time (50.80) that would have easily won the 100 freestyle final. Kopcsó's final swim left coaches and teammates in amazement. "Wicked fast!" exclaimed one admiring coach.

While the individual efforts in Division I were certainly noteworthy, the team competition made for the best drama of the four-day event.

On the girls' side, St. Joseph's Academy edged Northshore High School 354-351.50. The Redstickers simply had to beat Northshore in the meet's final event to take the crown...which they did by taking a second place in the 400 yard freestyle relay to Northshore's third. Fontainebleau won the event, barely missing a Division I record, and finished fourth behind Mandeville in the final standings. Dominican High School rounded out the top five.

St. Joseph's made the most of the scoring opportunities in the relay events, placing second twice and third once. A youthful team of sophomores Vic Padial (second, 400 yard freestyle relay) and MK Miller (second, 200 Yard IM; second, 400 yard freestyle relay) joined forces with junior Cameron Balkom (first, 100 yard breaststroke; third, 200 yard freestyle relay;) and freshman MC Beaver (third, 200 yard freestyle relay) to score 34 valuable points in the first event—the 200 yard medley relay. The Academy girls scored 100 of their 354 points in the relays, relying on balanced scoring from their 17 participants.

Also earning medals for the Redstickers were sophomores Katelyn Rodriguez (second, 200 yard freestyle; third, 200 yard freestyle relay; second, 400 yard freestyle relay) and Lindsay Hagmann (third, 200 yard freestyle relay; second, 400 yard freestyle relay), and freshman MC Beaver (second, 200 yard medley relay).

The boys' finals produced equally high drama as the final outcome was not decided until the final relay. The Catholic High Bears gave Baton Rouge schools a sweep of the Division 1 championships, earning 344.50 points to runner-up Jesuit's 323. Fontainebleau's boys came in third with 288 points, while Mandeville (211 pts.) and Archbishop Rummel (180.50) rounded out the top five.

Like their counterparts on the girl's side, the Catholic High team scored well in the relays with a first (200 yard medley relay) and two thirds (200 yard freestyle relay and 400 yard freestyle relay). However, the

boys were paced by strong senior leadership and added strong individual performances to put them over the top.

Leading the Catholic High team was senior Grant Greenfell (first, 200 yard medley relay; first 100 yard butterfly; first 100 yard backstroke; and, third, 400 yard freestyle relay) and younger brother freshman Brady Greenfell (third, 200 yard freestyle; third, 200 yard freestyle relay; third, 400 yard freestyle relay). They were joined by seniors Chris Cazenave (first, 200 yard medley relay; third, 100 yard butterfly; third, 200 yard freestyle relay); Colin Finnegan (first, 200 yard medley relay; second, 200 yard IM; first, 200 yard breaststroke); Alec Vicknair (first, 200 yard medley relay); third, 200 yard freestyle relay); and, Braydon Bergeron (third, 200 yard freestyle relay; third, 400 yard freestyle relay). Junior Casey Panepint was the only other medal winner for the Bears placing third in the 500 yard freestyle final.

Catholic High Coach Doug Logsdon and St. Joseph Academy Coach Lyle Robelot both enjoyed the ceremonial dunking by their swimmers after the meet. They were joined in the warm-up pool by some 50+ teammates, family and friends who reveled in the Capitol City's first dual championships of the year.

Robelot, who dyed his beard pink to honor and encourage his girls, was all smiles after the meet. "This is great. A great meet. I wish everybody knew how great this feels," he said as he held aloft a state championship trophy.

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