

Naylor Wins 50-Yard Freestyle, Team Depth Paves Way For Tigers' Seventh Straight Sectional Title, Kotzamanis Leads Redbird Swimmers

by Colin Feeney, Contributing Sports Writer
October 25 2020 2:56 PM



EDWARDSVILLE - It's become old hat for Edwardsville girls swimming head coach Christian Rhoten to get dunked in the pool after the Tigers win the Illinois High School Association girls swimming sectional meet, and Saturday was no different, as the Tigers used their depth and senior leadership to win the sectional title for the seventh consecutive season.

Edwardsville won the meet with 170 points, with Springfield Sacred Heart-Griffin Catholic coming in second with 63 points, and Quincy Notre Dame Catholic placing third with 39 points, Springfield High was fourth with 27 points, Quincy came in fifth with 23 points, Collinsville was sixth at 15 points, and Chatham Glenwood was seventh with nine points.

Needless to say, Rhoten was very happy to have won another sectional and get tossed into the pool by his swimmers at the end in a very comical scene, along with his assistant coach, who was also thrown in the pool as well.

"This is number seven in a row for us," Rhoten said, "so super-excited to be able to win the meet, and even more excited to have the meet, and provide this opportunity for some of the swimmers in the state to have a championship meet this season."

To even have the sectional meet this season, given the circumstances around the COVID-19 pandemic that has affected the entire state sporting season, was very good indeed, with many teams around central and Southern Illinois gathering to have the sectional, despite the fact that the state meet was canceled because of the pandemic.

"When we started the season in August, I was guessing there was no way we would have a sectional," Rhoten said. "So, to be able to do it is awesome, no matter how much work it took to put it together, and all that. It's fine to be able to provide it for the kids, and have some fun swimming; that's what it's all about."

Although the Tigers had only one first-place winner in Allison Naylor, who took the 50-yard freestyle, the Tigers depth and leadership helped win the day for them, being able to score points in every event.

"With the change in the rule that you could swim four individual events, that made the top end a lot faster on pretty much every event," Rhoten said, "because you've got your people like Elani Kotzamanis (of Alton, who won the 100-yard backstroke and finished second in two other events), Maddie Huggins (from Carbondale, who won the 200-yard individual medley, the 100-yard freestyle, the 100-yard butterfly and the 100-yard breaststroke, the day's only triple winner), who are swimming four events. And usually, you can win only two events, because that's all they can do. We weren't getting the wins, because we had a couple of those people in every event, but points-wise, it went pretty darn good, and the difference between our score and everyone else's score was pretty large."

It was a season that won't be soon forgotten by everyone involved, and Rhoten was happy for his seniors, who got to swim one final meet at home and do well.

"It's definitely a season none of us will forget anytime soon," Rhoten said. "And let's hope by next fall, we return back to normal, and we forget this season and go forward with normal life."

It was only the second meet of the season for Alton, the first being the Southern Illinois Championships last week in Edwardsville, and the Redbirds performed exceptionally

well, especially Kotzamanis, with her win and two seconds. It was a team performance that made head coach Nancy Miller very proud of her swimmers.

"I really am," Miller said. "We had some outstanding swims today, we had some great races themselves, plus some big time drops."

As with everyone else, Miller is very happy and grateful that the season was held, especially for her swimmers.

"Oh my gosh, absolutely," Miller said. "I'm so happy for the girls that they get to have a season. So especially, the senior, Elani Kotzamanis, this is her last time. So it's very satisfying to be here."

Kotzamanis is the Redbirds' only senior, and the Redbirds will return many top swimmers for 2021, making them a team to watch out for.

"Yes, absolutely," Miller said. "Only Elani is leaving next year; next year, the team will be even stronger."

The prospects do indeed look very promising for Alton for next season.

"Oh, I think they're excellent," Miller said. "I've got three girls that will be juniors, and four girls that will be seniors, so they'll be stronger than ever."

The very long layoff for many of the Alton swimmers took its toll, but Miller also knew that to see the swimmers back in the pool was a blessing.

"Absolutely," Miller said. "I know it's been very rough on the athletes to not have swim meets. But first, we didn't train for a long time. Then to train, but not have any meets, to use the competition to sharpen them up. So it's a great, great thing to be able to come here today."

The first event, the 200-yard freestyle, went to Trenton Wesclin's Chloe Brede, who won with a time of 1:51.91, with Kotzamanis second at 1:53.53, Hazel Konkel of Nashville third at 1:58.50, Edwardsville's Ava Whittaker fourth at 2:01.92, and Quincy's Maggie Mahoney fifth at 2:02.63. The Tigers' Ally Janson had a time of 2:02.80, while Triad's Amanda Beauth came in at 2:03.87, and teammate Rylee Sitton had a time of 2:07.75. Alton's Maddie Ingram had a time of 2:34.22, while Granite City's Leah Hale came in at 2:41.96, and Carlee Wright had a time of 2:46.61. Another Warrior swimmer, Riley Hatfield, was scratched.

In the 200-yard individual medley, Huggins won with a time of 2:05.48. with Salem's Caroline Foltz second at 2:10.42, Edwardsville's Phoebe Gremaud third with a time of 2:10.89, Ruby Nussbaum of Belleville East fourth at 2:11.97, and Shelby Bushong of Mascoutah fifth with a time of 2:15.67. Pera Onal of Edwardsville had a time of 2:20.43, while Sitton came in at 2:23.99, Father McGivney Catholic's Anna Henke had a time of 2:35.63, the Redbirds' Claire Paule was in at 2:36.53, and teammate Caroline Stobbs had a time of 2:54.29. Granite's Mara Withers was disqualified, while teammate Peyton Hatfield was scratched.

In the 50-yard freestyle, Naylor gained the Tigers' only win of the day with a time of 24.04 seconds, with Konkel second at 24.69 seconds, Edwardsville's Autumn Grinter was third at 24.77 seconds, Sacred Heart-Griffin's Mary Claire Mizuer was fourth at 25.11 seconds, and Nancy Olson of Pittsfield came in fifth at 25.53 seconds. The Knights' Maddy Schmidt had a time of 25.79 seconds, with teammate Mia Poe coming in at 30.23 seconds, Collinsville's Kylee Strong-Chasteen had a time of 26.09 seconds, Alton's Ceci Parker was clocked in 26.23 seconds, with teammate Riley Clancy coming in at 27.74 seconds, Henke came in at 28.45 seconds, with Granite's Alivia Vaughn coming in at 31.03 seconds, teammate Carmen Williams was at 35.48 seconds, and Marquette Catholic's Marissa Statos came in at 40.83 seconds.

Huggins won her second event of the day in the 100-yard butterfly with a time of 57.74 seconds, with Naylor in second at 58.50, Whittaker third with a time of 59.44 seconds, Olson fourth at 59.54 seconds, and Brittney Brown of Mt. Vernon fifth at 1:00.67. Beauth had a time of 1:04.78, Alton's Eleanor Schuler had a time of 1:07.10, while teammate Savannah Scheffel came in at 1:14.17, Emily Sykes of Granite City had a time of 1:32.56, while Williams came in at 1:38.53.

Konkel took her second event in the 100-yard freestyle with a time of 52.96 seconds, with Huggins second at 53.54 seconds, Grinter third at 53.69 seconds, Foltz came in fourth with a time of 54.51 seconds, and Janson was fifth at 56.06 seconds. Schmidt came in at 57.76 seconds, with Poe having a time of 1:06.71, Strong-Chasteen was clocked in 58.04 seconds, Clancy had a time of 1:02.92, with teammate Grace Middleton coming in at 1:10.18, Henke was clocked in 1:03.16, Sykes was timed in 1:05.25, with Whitney Klee coming in at 1:13.89, and Riley Hatfield again being scratched.

Brede won her second event of the day in the 500-yard freestyle, coming in at a time of 4:59.38, with Kotzamanis second at 5:07.01, Nussbaum third with a time of 5:15.33, QND's Emily Streiker fourth at 5:33.59, and Jordan Mercer of Edwardsville fifth with a

time of 5:47.10. Teammate Maddie Milburn came in with a time of 5:49.42, the Kahoks' Addie Bicanic had a time of 6:06.42, Paule came in at 6:15.57, Poe had a time of 6:32.31, and Erin Van Middendorp of Metro-East Lutheran was clocked in 6:36.79.

Kotzamanis won the 100-yard backstroke with a time of 57.57 seconds, with Gremaud second at 58.21 seconds, Naylor was third at 58.78 seconds, Nussbaum placed fourth at 1:00.08, and fifth place went to Brown at 1:00.59. Beauth came in at 1:02.19, with Schmidt having a time of 1:08.70, Schuler had a time of 1:06.73, Strong-Chasteen was in at 1:07.43, with Bicanic having a time of 1:12.66, Vaughn had a time of 1:20.05, with Klee coming in at 1:29.14, and Statos having a time of 1:46.98.

In the final event of the day, Huggins won her third race of the day in the 100-yard breaststroke, winning with a time of 1:02.59. Foltz was second at 1:06.21, Brede third at 1:06.68, Mizeur placed fourth at 1:08.90, and Bushong was fifth at 1:10.35. Onal had a time of 1:12.79, with teammate Olivia Ramirez coming in at 1:15.16, Sitton had a time of 1:12.93, Parker came in at 1:13.78, with teammate Leah Pohlman having a time of 1:21.00, Henke had a time of 1:20.60, the Explorers' Monica Wendle was clocked in 1:30.93, Granite's Leah Hale came in at 1:33.00, while Withers was again disqualified, and Peyton Hatfield was scratched.

For Alton, the future looks bright, as the Redbirds add a talented group of eighth grade swimmers to the roster, and along with the older swimmers, look to make a big impact.

"Oh, absolutely," Miller said. "We're going to get a bunch of eighth-grade girls next year, too, that are coming to Alton High. So I'm very excited about them, a very talented group. So it'll be an interesting makeup of the team next year, interesting girls, a lot of talent. I again just want to congratulate my girls; we had one girl drop four seconds, that was Claire Paule in the 200 IM. That's a huge time drop. And then, Savannah Scheffel dropped two seconds in the 100 butterfly, which is huge in a 100 race. So that's just a snippet of how our girls performed today."

Rhoten was very pleased with how the meet turned out overall, with everyone involved cooperating to make the meet go as smooth as possible.

"We just put a lot of planning in, we thought things through," Rhoten said, "and we prepared a lot. We sent a lot of E-mails out ahead of time, so everyone was aware. And everyone participated today, and did their best to follow the rules. And without that, without everyone coming in and following all the protocols, it would have been a disaster. So we're thankful that everyone put in the time to read the E-mails, and the diagrams, and knowing what they were doing when they got here, so that were were able to safely and successfully have this event."

[Dan Brannan also contributed to this story.](#)