

Blue Devil Swim Girls Seize 15th Straight County Crown

By J.B. RAYMOND
Specially Written for The Westfield Leader and The Times

With archrival Scotch Plains-Fanwood wounded and hurting, the Westfield girls swim team got big swims from just about every girl and rolled to its 15th consecutive Union County Championship last Saturday at Elizabeth High School.

Scotch Plains, which tied WHS for the county title in 2005 and lost a year ago on the final relay, was hampered by a wrist injury to senior star Jill Murphy, who gamely swam on three relays wearing a soft cast wrapped in a plastic bag, and the absence of Becca Fox, who came down with mononucleosis earlier in the week.

Westfield piled up 348 points to the Raiders' 262.5, but it's doubtful a healthy Murphy and Fox would've made up that difference, especially with the way coach Jaime Ruzsala's girls were swimming.

The star of the meet was WHS junior Alexi Kuska. A year ago she was being pushed around the deck to the starting block in a wheelchair, following surgery on her leg in December. Last Saturday she swam like a girl possessed, winning two individual events, swimming on two winning relays, setting one school record and two meet records.

"Alexi had a great day," Ruzsala said. "She's been swimming really well. I was hoping she'd get the (school) 500 record by Mei-Mei (Caroe, who went 5:04-plus), or May-May or Mee-Mee. I don't how her name is pronounced."

Kuska won the 200 freestyle in a meet record 1:56.06. Later in the meet she won the 500 free in 5:07.61, a personal best, and third fastest in WHS history. But she was not done. Anchoring the 200-freestyle relay, she split a 24.43 to pull out first place from SP-F. And then, to top it off, she led off the meet-record-breaking 400-freestyle relay in 53.86, her second school record in last two weeks (the 200 free was set on January 23 against Mount St. Mary). Liz Hawkins, Kylie Fraser and Suzanne Lemberg finished off the record relay in a 3:42.03, smashing a 20-year-old record set by Union Catholic.

Another key swimmer for WHS was Brittany Reyes. Bouncing back from surgery to remove a toe following a freak summer accident at work, the senior captain captured the 100 butterfly in a solid 1:01.72. She also swam key third legs on the winning 200-medley and 200-freestyle relays.

"It feels so good to win, finally, as a senior," Reyes said. "I took it out as

fast as I could and, luckily, had enough to hang on for the win. It would have been nicer if Jill (Murphy, a club teammate) had been able to swim. But, then again, if she swam she would've won."

WHS also picked up firsts from Lemberg in the 50 free and Fraser in the 100 backstroke. SP-F won the other three events, with Melissa Helock edging Fraser in the 200 individual medley and then touching out Lemberg in the 100 free, and freshman Kelsey Rossi beating WHS's Katie Morgan, the 2006 champion, and Catherine Maguire in a thrilling 100 breaststroke.

Among the other top-six efforts by the Blue Devils were: Jill Kandigan (fourth in the 100 fly, third 500 free), Darrell Ann Smith (fourth 200 IM), Meredith Smith (fifth 200 free, sixth 100 back), Chrissy Isabella (fifth 100 fly), Maguire (fifth 200 IM), Hawkins (sixth 500 free, fourth 100 free) and Kate Heffernan (fifth 100 breast).

Westfield's other winning relays were: Hawkins, Morgan, Reyes and Lemberg on the medley, Emily Budnick, Morgan, Reyes and Kuska in the 200 free.

SP-F's other top-six efforts were: Kelly Gajdzisz (second 200 free, fourth 500 free), Mary Henkels (fifth 50 free, second 100 back), Brittany Larkin (third 100 fly, fifth 100 back), Kim Rizzo (fourth 200 free, sixth 500 free), Kate Johnson (fourth 100 back) and Stephanie Baliko (fourth 100 breast).

Following yesterday's meet at Peddie and today's meet at Elizabeth, WHS will prepare for the upcoming state tournament. As the state's No. 2-ranked team, and top-rated public school, Ruzsala's crew is the favorite to win Public A and bring home the first girls state title since 1999. But it won't be easy, with teams like West Windsor-Plainsboro South, Cherry Hill East and 2006 champion Cherry Hill West on the horizon.

And don't forget Scotch Plains! If the Raiders, who won the last two Public B state titles before moving up to A this year, get healthy in the next two weeks, they will definitely be a contender.

"I just want the girls to have fun and swim fast," Ruzsala said. "Whatever happens, happens. But I do like our chances."

TEAM SCORES:
1. Westfield 348, 2. Scotch Plains-Fanwood 262½, 3. New Providence 153, 4. Kent Place 128½, 5. Governor Livingston 97, 6. Union Catholic 72, 7. Summit 49, 8. Cranford 48, 9. Oak Knoll 46, 10. Union 37, 11. Plainfield 23, 12. Linden 17, 13. Roselle Catholic 8, 14. Dayton 7, 15. (tie) A.L. Johnson, Mother Seton and Rahway 2.

TOP INDIVIDUALS:
200-yard medley relay: 1. Westfield (Liz Hawkins, Katie Morgan, Brittany Reyes, Suzanne Lemberg) 1:54.53, 2. Scotch Plains 1:55.30, 3. New Providence 2:01.69.

200 free: 1. Alexi Kuska (Westfield) 1:56.06 (old meet record 1:56.75, Rachel Smith, New Providence, 1996), 2. Kelly Gajdzisz, (SP-F) 2:03.13, 3. Cassidy Bommer (Kent Place) 2:07.15.

200 IM: 1. Melissa Helock (SP-F) 2:14.85, 2. Kylie Fraser (Westfield) 2:15.30, 3. Priscilla Barletta (New Providence) 2:19.48.

50 free: 1. Suzanne Lemberg (Westfield) 25.30, 2. Brittany Cole (Linden) 25.40, 3. Nicole Colucci (Union Catholic) 25.48.

100 fly: 1. Brittany Reyes (Westfield) 1:01.72, 2. Priscilla Barletta (New Providence) 1:02.75, 3. Brittany Larkin (SP-F) 1:03.62.

100 free: 1. Melissa Helock (SP-F) 54.63, 2. Suzanne Lemberg (Westfield) 55.07, 3. Marisa Immormino (Kent Place) 55.76.

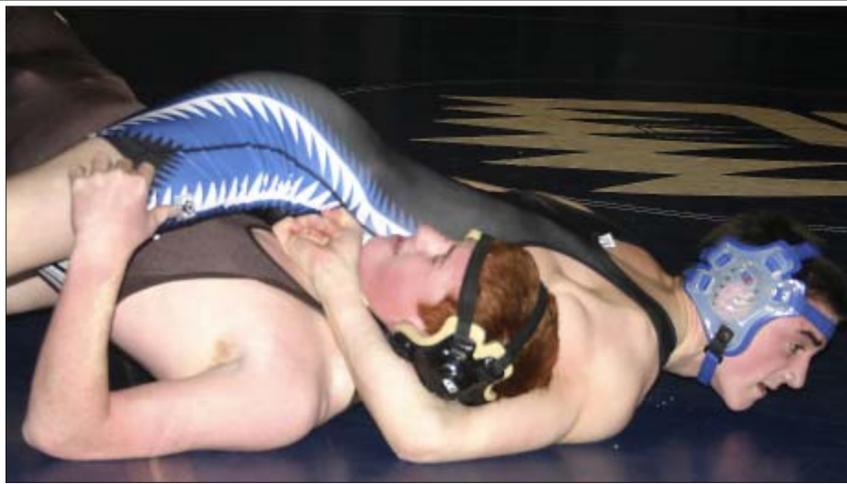
500 free: 1. Alexi Kuska (Westfield) 5:07.61, 2. Kim Kaller (New Providence) 5:25.98, 3. Jill Kandigan (Westfield) 5:29.07.

200 free relay: 1. Westfield (Emily Budnick, Katie Morgan, Brittany Reyes, Alexi Kuska) 1:43.30, 2. Scotch Plains-Fanwood 1:43.68, 3. New Providence 1:47.28.

100 back: 1. Kylie Fraser (Westfield) 1:01.92, 2. Mary Henkels (SP-F) 1:01.99, 3. Nicole Colucci (Union Catholic) 1:02.30.

100 breast: 1. Kelsey Rossi (SP-F) 1:11.68, 2. Katie Morgan (Westfield) 1:11.73, 3. Catherine Maguire (Westfield) 1:11.99.

400 free relay: 1. Westfield (Alexi Kuska, Liz Hawkins, Kylie Fraser, Suzanne Lemberg) 3:42.03 (old meet record 3:42.64, Union Catholic, 1987), 2. Scotch Plains-Fanwood 3:51.07, 3. Kent Place 3:57.69.



David B. Corbin for The Westfield Leader and The Times
TURNING THE TABLES VERY QUICKLY...Raider Mike Ferrara, top, took the opportunity to flick Warrior Kyle Aldrich to his back with a chin hook and step over maneuver to record a fall in 4:56.

FERRARA PINS BY A CHIN, CANNON GETS A 'LEG' UP

Raiders Gear Up for Sections, Stop Warrior Matmen, 39-24

By DAVID B. CORBIN
Specially Written for The Westfield Leader and The Times

Sophomore Mike Ferrara won a key bout, which seemed to spur the Scotch Plains-Fanwood High School wrestling team to a 39-24 victory over visiting Watchung Hills on February 3. The win over the tough 13-7 Warriors could be said to be a gear up match for the

section tournament, which began against Voorhees on February 6.

"They tried to scheme around us. They bumped up a few kids but everything went our way. Where they needed pins, they got decisions. We didn't give up bonuses and we got bonuses," said Ferrara.

The 16-4 Raiders won eight of the 14 bouts, including three key bouts, and managed to minimize damage in some of their losses. After Sal Gano pinned Warrior Anthony DeTorres with a pick-and-twist in 1:25 at 125-lbs, Ferrara's 130-lb bout with Kyle Aldrich was the first key bout. Aldrich initiated a single-leg takedown, yielded an escape, then added an escape to take a 3-1 lead but Ferrara pulled off a smooth step-over chin hook maneuver to pin Aldrich in 4:56.

"I was going for a sit-out and he stepped over, so I didn't really have the leverage to get the reversal. I took his head and just whipped it as hard as I could. He went to his back," explained Ferrara.

"That was sweet! He was in the match the whole way. That was huge bonus points," said Raider Head Coach John Scholz.

At 135-lbs, Raider Ricky Olsson hit a double-leg takedown and a two-point tilt in the first period then pinned Paul Muldowney in 3:29 with a walkover Olympic arm bar to put the Raiders

ahead, 18-0. Josh Alpizar earned the Warriors three team points when he used his legs to record a pair of stretcher power-half nearfalls to claim a 6-2 decision over Mike Ridge at 140-lbs.

Raider Pat Mineo picked up his 113th career victory with a forfeit at 145-lbs then, in the next key bout, Trevor Cannon gave Warrior Chris Jessen a dose of his own medicine with a torturous, entwining grapevine ride out to grab a 2-0 victory at 152-lbs.

"That was a big swing match, Trevor winning that," commented Ferrara.

"They ducked Mineo and were going to go after Trevor. Trevor never lets that happen. He knows how to work legs. He gets in trouble sometimes but he comes back," said Scholz.

Raider Joe Bachi added another key victory at 160-lbs over Yousef Janjiri to give the Raiders a 30-3 lead. Bachi performed a throw-by takedown in the first period, yielded a reversal with five seconds left in the second period but escaped in the third period to claim a 3-2 decision.

Although dropping a 9-1, majority decision at 171-lbs to sixth-ranked Brendan Ard, Raider Dave DeNichilo gave him fits with his punishing leg control from the top position.

"DeNichilo is tough on top. Ard had no way out," commented Scholz.

At 189-lbs, Warrior Rob Sciffano

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GL Highlanders Outdo Pioneer Matmen, 42-34

By FRED LECOMTE
Specially Written for The Westfield Leader and The Times

Seven of 10 contested bouts boosted the Governor Livingston High School wrestling team to a 42-34 victory over host New Providence before a packed house on January 31.

Highlanders John Manganiello (215-lbs) and Frank Colder (135-lbs) came up with key victories; however, two powerful Pioneers, Matt Nobbs and Larry Peotter were unable to compete due to injuries incurred in the Union County Tournament.

"I'm especially proud of the kids that are question marks. Manganiello, my 215-lb first-year wrestler that was huge. Bleeding profusely, he hung in there and would not quit," said Highlander Head Coach Rick Iacono.

"Colder at 135 was losing 10-0 to Gallinot before he got pinned in the counties. Tonight he came back and beat him. I am well aware they had two starters out; that's very important to them, but this was our team tonight. I'm proud of our seniors because they waited a long time for this."

Beginning at 152-lbs, the 8-5 Highlanders ripped off four-straight victories before the Pioneers got on the board via a forfeit. Mike Mattingly (152-lbs) pinned Andrew Kourakos in 46 seconds.

"I used my duck series and was able to put him to his back pretty

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