



IHSA SWIM AND DIVE SECTIONAL



By Randy Whalen

For Alyssa Wengel, there was a finality after each one of the events that she competed in last Saturday.

"When I got out after every race I was like, 'that's my last one,'" Wengel said.

That's because Wengel, who is not planning to swim in college, is one of two seniors on the Lockport Township girls swimming team this season. The Porters, along with every other team, saw their season end on Saturday, Oct. 24 at the Lockport Sectional. Due to the COVID-19 pandemic, there is not a State Finals this season.

So while there was a finality to the season and her swimming career, Wengel was happy that she got the opportunity to have one. Especially in her home pool.

"It was good, it was bittersweet," she said of the sectional. "I've been swimming in the pool since I was five. Now we got an end to it. We went into the season not knowing if we'd have a sectional or even be able to finish it. But we just pushed each race."

The Porters did that in the sectional too. But with the coronavirus going on, the sectional assignments changed this year. Lockport has hosted numerous times in the past but this season brought the Lincoln-Way schools into the mix. That proved to be too much for the Porters to overcome and they saw their streak of sectional titles end at five straight and six in the past seven seasons.

Led by a pair of wins from Grace Hagemaster, the Griffins upset District 210 sister school Lincoln-Way West to win their 12th sectional title in the past 14 years and 13th in school history.

The Griffins registered 194 points to capture the title. SouthWest Suburban Conference champion Lincoln-Way West (171) was second. Lincoln-Way Central (123) placed third, followed by Lockport (89), Homewood-Flossmoor (72.5), Andrew (68), Joliet West (44), Kankakee (35), Tinley Park (21), Morris (14), and Bradley-Bourbonnais (5.5) rounded out the 11-team field.

"I'm happy for the girls," Lockport coach Grant Ferkaluk said. "We saw the opportunity to host and have a day to positively culminate the season and have an exciting experience."

"Alyssa Wengel was our only senior and she did incredibly well in motivating the other girls."

Wengel went to state as part of a pair of Porter relays last fall. But because of the COVID-19 concerns, no relays were run this season. That meant the sectional only consisted of nine events, with eight of them run at Lockport. The diving took place that Saturday morning at Lincoln-Way West.

Last weekend Wengel was in three events. The 100-yard backstroke (13th, 1 minute: 06.57 seconds), the 50-yard freestyle (6th, :25.56 seconds), and the 100-yard freestyle (6th, :56.05).

Lockport's only other senior was Kaycee Siers, who placed fifth in diving with a score of 359.35. Sophomore Elle Berg (13th, 222.25) was also in the diving competition for the Porters.

The highest Porter place on the day was fifth, which happened four times. Juniors Hayley Bogdan and Monika Mikuckas both did it twice. Bogdan was fifth in the 200-individual medley (2:20.40) and the 100-yard breaststroke (1:10.19). She also placed sixth (1:01.79 in the 100-yard butterfly).

"We knew the unknown was always there," Bogdan said of the season. "At first we didn't know if we were able to compete and then we didn't know if we would have a sectional. But as a team, we rose to the challenge and did well.

"The Lincoln-Way's did well and I know a lot of those girls so I'm happy for them. We have some goals that we want to accomplish next year and almost everyone back. So I'm looking forward to that."

Mikuckas was fifth in the 200-yard freestyle (2:02.73) as well as the 500-yard freestyle (5:30.82).

Junior Alyssa Bates had a pair of Top 10 places for the Porters. She was seventh (2:05.30) in the 200-yard freestyle and ninth (5:43.90) in the 500-yard freestyle.

Also competing in two events for Lockport was junior Maryam Ajibola in the 50-yard freestyle (13th, :26.37) and 100-yard freestyle (16th, :58.68), and sophomore Maddie Yehling in the 100-yard butterfly (12th, 1:08.02) and 100-yard backstroke (17th, 1:08.93). Sophomore Abigail McCarthy was in the 100-yard breaststroke (13th, 1:15.75) and junior Grace Christopher swam the 200-yard individual medley (16th, 2:34.02) for the Porters.

"We lost some significant talent in the last two years," Ferkaluk said. "But we have the core talent from this season's team coming back. Hayley Bogdan and Monika Mikuckas both did really well. The girls were happy to have a season. We were the only indoor sport to have a season in the fall and it was a good experience for them."

Kate Mitchell, a junior, won her second straight sectional diving title for Lincoln-Way East with 459.4 points. Senior Reese Parchem (366.60) was fourth for the Griffins. Lincoln-Way Central junior Abby Hawksworth (447.30) and senior Sarah Rosinski (420.80) placed second and third in the diving.

But it was certainly the performance of Hagemaster that spurred the Griffins. Because of the COVID-19 concerns, there were no relays run this fall and no State Finals meet this season, But if there was a state final, both Hagemaster, a junior, and Lincoln-Way Central senior Keara McGowan would have qualified in four events.

Hagemaster was especially happy to win her final race, the 100-yard backstroke. There she set a new school and pool record with a time of :56.65 seconds.

"The school record has been on my mind since I just missed it at state last year by .18 seconds," Hagemaster said. "It's been my goal all year. It's really rewarding. I didn't even realize it was the pool record. It was a very good day for myself and the team."

Michaela Mitchell, a 2017 graduate who is now swimming at Miami (Ohio) University, held the previous school record with a time of :56.74 seconds. The previous pool record of :57.25 seconds was set in 2013 by Lockport's Amanda Moran.

The other win for Hagemaster was a mark of 1 minute: 53.78 seconds in the 200 freestyle. She was the runner-up in the 50-free (:24.32), and placed third in the 100-free (:52.38).

McGowan, was named Sectional Athlete of the Year. A fitting honor for someone who broke 10 school records and had a ninth-place finish in the 50-yard freestyle at state last year. In this seasons sectional she won the 50 free (:24.11) and the 100 free (52.33). She was the runner-up in the backstroke (:57.85) and the 100-yard breaststroke (1:05.22).

"I just wanted to end my last meet on a high note," said McGowan, who will continue her swim career at the University of Pennsylvania. "It was obviously very different this year, but it this was a super fun meet. This year, I tried to leave it all in the pool at every meet and put everything into every swim."

So was Lincoln-Way West's Lea Moeller. The senior would have qualified for state in a trio of events. She finished second in the 100 free (:52.36) and third in the 50 free (:24.33). But she saved her best for last when she won the 100-yard breaststroke with a time of 1:04.74 and broke the pool record, which was 1:05.37 and held by Emily Friel from Andrew from 2013.

Freshman Hailey Fris won the 200-yard individual medley (2:11.82) for the Warriors.

Homewood-Flossmoor senior Ella Bolling won a pair of events. Those were the 100-yard butterfly (:57.99) and the 500-yard freestyle (5:16.60).

Lockport junior Ellie Fontanetta would have qualified for state in three Athletes with Disabilities events. The 50-yard freestyle (1:13.85), the 100-yard-freestyle (2:24.60) and the 100-yard breaststroke, which she won with a time of 3:34.59. Andrew freshman Tessa Vanwyk, who won the 50 (:46.13) and 100 (1:47.13) freestyle races was the other Athlete with Disabilities swimmer.

"I'm glad we got to have a season this year," said Fontanetta, who has been a member of the team since she was a freshman. "I was looking forward to state but I'm glad I'm here."

"Overall we did well. I'm looking forward to beating my times and getting better next year."