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Wednesday, July 23, 2008

National swimmers relish local meet

Friedland leads bevy of stars at MCSL divisionals

by Jennifer Beekman | Staff Writer

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After setting Washington Metropolitan Interscholastic Swimming Championships meet records in the 200-yard individual medley and 100 breaststroke last winter, recent Walter Johnson graduate Eric Friedland has had a busy summer.

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The University of Texas-bound swimmer, 17, finished 16th of 65 athletes in the 200-meter breaststroke at the 2008 Olympic Trials, June 29-July 6 in Omaha, Neb. He didn't make this year's Olympic squad, but earned an invitation to represent the United States at the FINA Youth World Championships in Monterrey, Mexico July 7-14, where he finished sixth in the 100 breaststroke and was part of the bronze medal-winning 400 freestyle relay.

Despite his success at the national and international levels, Friedland hasn't forgotten his swimming roots. He was at the Upper County Swim Club at 7 a.m. Saturday, representing Tilden Woods at the Montgomery County Swim League Division A meet.

"I grew up with Tilden Woods, these guys are like my second family," Friedland said. "I don't know where I'd be if it weren't for them, so it's important for me to come back."

Friedland won four races: 100 free, 100 IM, 100 backstroke and 100 breaststroke, setting a league record in the latter. It wasn't enough to push Tilden Woods into first, though.

Rockville won its fourth consecutive divisional meet Saturday, with a 1029.5-960 advantage over TW. Mill Creek Towne finished third with 807.5 points and Bethesda (688.5), Upper County (649) and Flower Valley (492.5) placed fourth, fifth and sixth.

"I'm not disappointed with second," Friedland said. "We knew it was a long shot to win. But we all worked our butts off and put our heart and soul into the meet. We did better than we were supposed to do."

The MCSL consists of 89 teams, spread throughout Montgomery County and split into 15 divisions. The six-week season culminated over the weekend with the divisional meets.

Friedland wasn't the only national-caliber swimmer to make it out to divisionals Saturday. Rising Poolesville junior Cara Chuang, rising Georgetown Prep senior Brady Fox and recent Wootton graduate and University of Maryland-bound Sean Stewart, who all competed at Olympic Trials this month, were back representing their communities, as well.

MCSL is not the same environment as U.S. Swimming competitions, but it's where most of these swimmers' careers were cultivated. The league is ripe with friendly neighborhood rivalries, and these swimmers relish in the opportunity to represent their communities.

Chuang won four events — 100 free, 100 backstroke, 100 IM, 50 butterfly — to lead Rockville to victory. Fox set three MCSL records in helping Hallowell to first place in the Division B meet and Stewart won four races — 100 freestyle, 100 backstroke, 100 individual medley, 50 butterfly — to lead Woodley Gardens to the Division C title.

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“[Saturday’s] meet was definitely close, my heart was pounding as they read the scores out,” Chuang said. “Division A has a lot of top swimmers, so I think it came down to the small details, whoever had better turns, better finishes. ...

“Around here we may be the top dogs but you go to a big meet like Olympic Trials and it’s very humbling and puts you in your place. Meets like this give you confidence. You always try hard to win.”

MCSL divisionals

MCSL Records

Lila Vera (Stonebridge): Girls 11-12, 50 freestyle

Brady Fox (Hallowell): Boys 15-18, 100 freestyle, 50 butterfly, 100 individual medley

Eric Friedland (Tilden Woods): Boys 15-18, 100 breaststroke

Divisional champions

Division A: Rockville

Division B: Hallowell

Division C: Woodley Gardens

Division D: Seven Locks

Division E: Potomac Woods

Division F: Regency Estates

Division G: Old Georgetown

Division H: Garrett Park

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