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CBA's accidental sprinter

Mishap at home forces Ehle to change specialty

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It's a good thing that there are no right angles involved in swim meets, because Christian Brothers Academy senior Kayla Ehle has trouble with corners.

Ehle swam two lengths of the pool in 25.38 seconds to win the Class B 50-yard freestyle title in the Section III girls championship meet at Nottingham High School on Friday.

If you had asked her a year ago, she would more likely have predicted a title in the 200-yard freestyle.

Ehle's efforts helped push CBA into first place among Class B schools after the meet's first day. The Brothers already have scored enough points to defend their sectional title regardless of what happens during diver Eileen McMahon's routine today.

Last April, Ehle slipped and fell on a hardwood floor while turning a corner in her home, breaking her left elbow. The injury required surgery to insert a screw into the joint and kept her out of the pool for a month.

The combination of an opening on the CBA roster for a sprinter and the fact that the sprint events put less sustained pressure on her elbow led her to the 50-yard freestyle.

And if she manages to out-kick defending Section III champion Sarah Blair (Auburn) and top-seeded Cat Scharf (New Hartford) during Saturday's individual finals, she'll consider the fall a happy accident.

Ehle gave Blair her only loss of the season in the event during a regular-season meet last week, and she knows Scharf has a well-deserved reputation as one of the best sprinters in the section.

"There's not really a rivalry, because I haven't been doing the event for a long time," Ehle said. "There's always competition, but no ill-will."

The 50-yard freestyle is just one of today's finals that should be tightly contested.

The 200-yard individual medley will match up CBA's Allie Speidel (2:14.90) and West Genesee's Nicole Murphy (2:15.54), two swimmers who qualified for the state championship meet with their times on Friday.

Today's final will be the top-ranked swimmers' first meeting of the weekend because Friday's qualifying round was broken down by school size. There were separate meets for Class A, B and C schools.

Since CBA is a Class B school in swimming, Speidel didn't have much competition in her heat, winning the event by three-fourths of a pool length over Mexico's Cali DeSanto. She said she is looking forward to facing off against Murphy, her teammate with the Syracuse Chargers club team, for the sectional title.

"That will be interesting," Speidel said. "(Good competition) always makes me swim faster."

One swimmer who won't get much competition for the sectional title today is Ashley Twichell (Fayetteville-Manlius) who won the 500-yard freestyle by more than seven seconds at 5:08.86. Twichell, who won the event as a freshman in 2003, is back at the sectional meet after spending last season away from high school competition while focusing on swimming for the Chargers.

"I missed it a lot," she said after the meet, during which she also won the 200-yard freestyle by one second over New Hartford's Alyssa Cortese. "High school is more about doing really well as a team, where club swimming is more individual."

Twichell's cousin, Laura, is looking to better her pair of 2004 sixth-place finishes in the 100-yard butterfly and the individual medley. She heads into Saturday seeded third in the butterfly, just 1.5 seconds behind top-seeded Scharf.

At the conclusion of Friday's swimming, New Hartford (417 points) had a substantial lead over Liverpool (324.50) and Auburn (243.50). Even with the sectional diving finals, which will be factored into the team scores, still to come on this afternoon, New Hartford and Liverpool's rankings cannot change.

However, F-M could move into third place ahead of Auburn with strong efforts from divers Lisa Goyette and Sarah Langkammerer, because the Maroons do not dive.

Skaneateles pulled out a half-second victory over Lowville in the last event of the day, the 400-yard freestyle relay, to clinch the first-ever Class C sectional title regardless of what happens during today's diving.

Senior Abby Duggan anchored the team of Britton Weber, Maddie Halstead and Meg Clary.

"It feels like it's my birthday, I'm so excited," Duggan said while waiting with her teammates to ascend the podium. "We've only had a team for three years and we won sectionals. Last year our lacrosse team won states, and this feels just as good, if not better."

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