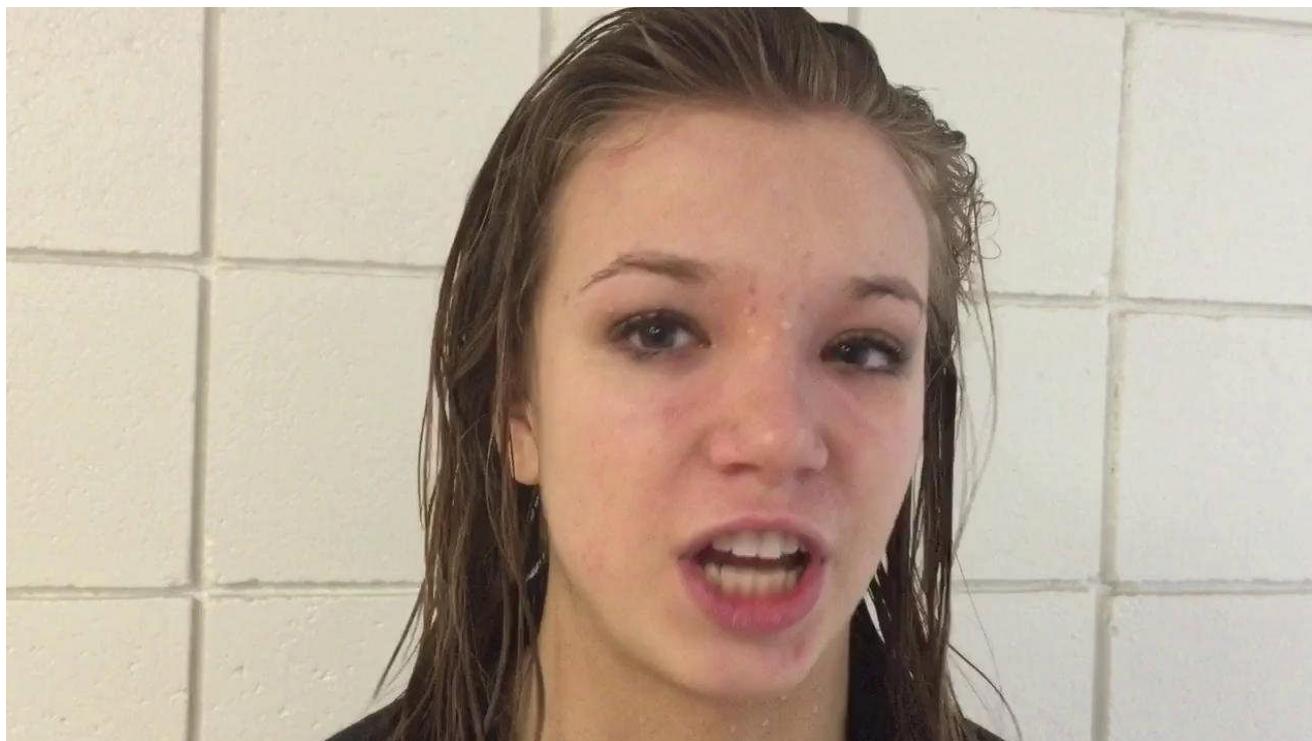


Area swim standouts perform well in relaxed atmosphere



Newark Catholic's Megan Stanton is eyeing a strong postseason in the pool Kurt Snyder, The Advocate



Kurt Snyder, ksnyder@newarkadvocate.com 8:36 a.m. EST January 25, 2015



(Photo: Jessica Phelps/The Advocate)

NEWARK – Nathaniel Graham and Megan Stanton have attempted to face the best competition possible to prepare themselves for a run to the Division II state meet.

Saturday, however, was not one of those days. The area standouts had a chance to compete in a relaxed environment as Lakewood and Newark Catholic each celebrated their senior day at the Licking County Family YMCA.

"These meets where it is one heat per event, it's not very good for getting your times down," said Graham, a Lakewood senior. "Here, you are being conservative, trying to save your energy because you aren't sure of how much time you have for breaks."

Graham won the 100-yard freestyle (1:00.83) and 100 backstroke (1:14.78).

Stanton, an NC sophomore, won the 200 individual medley (2:52.24) and 100 breaststroke (1:27.74), an impressive showing given she was less than a second off each of her seed times. She also teamed up with Katelyn Zimpher, Rose Amore and Skylar Yonker to win the 200 medley relay (2:38.85), again just missing the seed time.

"Definitely with smaller meets, it is more relaxed, but we try to work as hard as we can in practice so that every time we can show up," Stanton said. "I feel we had a pretty good day. We can always do better, and we keep working at practice at technique and getting stronger and definitely getting together as a team."



Lakewood's Nathaniel Graham won two events Saturday Kurt Snyder, The Advocate

A lack of competition was not a problem for Stanton a week ago. She competed in the 50 free and 100 free in the Northeast Classic in Canton, which draws the top swimmers from across the state.

Stanton competed in four events during the 2014 district meet and placed ninth in the 100 free. She likely is dropping the breaststroke from her postseason lineup because with having been a part of another state tournament run with the volleyball team, she has not had time to fine-tune her stroke.

"It was nice swimming against good competition, especially in my two freestyle events, where everything is really tight and being able to have more than one person ... that have those times was good and really helped me become a better swimmer," Stanton said.

Zimpher added victories in the 50 free (33.64) and 100 free (1:16.13), and Curtis Boren, the Green Wave's only boy, won the 50 free (29.67).

Graham placed seventh in the 200 free and 13th in the 500 free in the district meet a year ago. He had a taste of what the district meet will be like earlier this season when he placed in two events in the B flight finals of the Ned Reeb Memorial at Ohio State.

"Those higher-level meets help you get your times down lower," Graham said. "I had a meet last week where I dropped a second in my 100 free and (a Big Walnut swimmer) dropped a second, too. Even though we were competing, we help each other. It is a good opportunity to see what you can actually do.

"If I didn't swim against (top competitors), I would probably think, 'Oh man, their school has a pool, and they have so much more extra time than we do,' but knowing that I have swam against them, it is definitely reassuring."

Other winners for the Lakewood boys were John Hoffman in the 200 free (2:36.37) and 100 butterfly (1:14.79) and Caleb Aleshire in the 100 breaststroke (2:05.94). Winners for the girls were Allie Rose in the 500 free (6:34.94); Savannah Cloud in the 100 back (1:38.37) and the foursome of Rose, Cloud, Shelby Graham and Elana Preston in the 200 free (2:22.10).

While celebrating senior day with Rose and Tucker Bevard, Graham had a chance to reminisce on how far the Lakewood program has come in his four years. Before entering high school, Rose's older brother Jarod was it.

"Five years ago, we had Jarod, and he was the one-man team," Graham said. "My freshman and sophomore years, we had six guys, and then last year, we went to 16. This year, we started out with 21 and end with 20. It has been a great time for Lakewood swimming."

Competing for the Licking Valley girls was freshman Alex Nethers in the 200 IM (3:08.12) and 100 breaststroke (1:37.51).

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