

SUZANNE LEMBERG SETS WHS RECORD IN 100-FREE

Blue Devil Boys/Girls Defeat Raiders in Swim Showdown

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

It's not easy to compare teams from different eras, so for now the 1987 and '88 Westfield High School girls swim teams will be considered the best teams in school history. But after Saturday night's, 106-64, victory over two-time defending state Public B champion Scotch Plains-Fanwood, a case can start being made for the 2007 girls as the Blue Devils' best ever.

Before the biggest crowd in the history of WHS swimming (the balcony was filled by 6:15 for the 7:15 meet, and several rooms of closed circuit TV was set up for the overflow), both the WHS girls and boys swam to one season-best time after another, with the boys winning, 115-55. And the Raiders did not go down without a fight, with many outstanding times, both on relays and individually.

The tone was set early, with the Blue Devil girls going 1-3 in the opening relay. The team of Liz Hawkins, Katie Morgan, Brittany Reyes and Suzanne Lemberg went 1:52.76, just short of breaking the 24-year-old school record. Lemberg's 24.64 anchor leg pulled out the first place.

Junior Alexi Kuska won the 200 free in a fast 1:56.16 with Julie Cederroth rallying for a big second and it was 22-8. Kylie Frazer touched out Melissa Helock in the 200 IM, and Lemberg and Hawkins went 1-4

in a very fast 50 to give WHS a 39-23 advantage at the break.

Jill Murphy's quick 59.52 in the 100 fly gave SPF its first victory over the evening, but Lemberg broke a 15-year-old school record with a 54.36 in the 100 freestyle, and with Cederroth and Darrell Ann Smith going 3-4 behind her, it was 58-36.

A 1-2-3 in the 500 free (SPF standout Brittany Larkin had to scratch due to an injury) was keyed by Kuska's 5:11.11 and a pair of 5:33's by freshmen Kyle Higgins and Jill Kandigan. It was 71-39.

Kuska then anchored WHS's B200-free relay to a surprising first with a 24.41 split, touching out Murphy by .06 of a second.

Mary Henkels got a first for the Raiders in the backstroke, but Fraser, Hawkins and Meredith Smith went 2-3-4 and WHS had the meet clinched (90-50) with two events left. Becca Fox got another Raider first in the breaststroke, before the Blue Devils put the finishing touches with a sizzling 3:42.33 400 relay. Kuska's lead-off leg of 54.41 was under the old school 100 free record, but .05 behind Lemberg's earlier time. After 56-plus legs by Hawkins and Fraser, Lemberg finished it off with a 54.31 split.

"This was my first really big high school meet," said Lemberg, who is in only her fourth year of swimming at the Westfield Y. "I was just trying to go my fastest."

The girls put up a school record

4,488 power points, an almost unheard-of total.

"When you get here an hour early and the stands are packed, it's easy to get pumped up and swim fast," Kuska said.

Almost lost in the girls' effort was another solid effort by the WHS boys, who improved to 5-1 (heading into today's meet at defending state champion Bridgewater-Raritan) under first-year coach Jeff Knight.

Led by P.J. Harley's double win in the 200 (1:49.80) and 500 (4:51.36) freestyles, the boys posted a series of season-best times and had a season-best 3,787 power points.

Chris DeLaFuenta won the 200 IM and was touched out in the 100 butterfly by Raider Mike Miller, who also touched out Blue Devil Matt Green to win the 50 free. Green rebounded with a season-best 50.99 to win the 100 free.

The Raider boys swam tough all meet, including down to the final relay, where Blue Devil sophomore Matt Morgan swam a best 52.92 anchor leg to touch out Raider co-captain Matt Miller.

Other Blue Devil winners were the 200 medley (Luke Baran, Phil Anton, DeLaFuenta, Green) and 200 free (Mike Oster, Matt Gelmetti, DeLaFuenta, Green) relays, Matt Meserole in the 100 back and Anton in the 100 breast. Oster, Harley and Meserole joined Morgan on the winning 400 relay.



David B. Corbin for The Westfield Leader and The Times

HARD NOSED KILLER "BEE"...Raider senior linebacker/running back Greg Brand (All-Union County First Team) gobbled up 1,048 yards on the ground, including eight touchdowns. He was also involved in 85 tackles.

BRAND LED IN TDs, BADALA SACKS, BAKER TACKLES

Raider Football Boys Finish With Deceptive, 4-6, Season

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

Three years ago, the Scotch Plains-Fanwood High School football team had a group called "The Killer Bees" with names such as Travis Boff, Kyle Baker and Charlie Bachi. This season, a new swarm of "Bees" led by Greg Brand, John Badala and Keith Baker also packed quite a sting in the Raiders' very competitive season that qualified them for the section playoffs.

The Raiders got off to a great start with wins over East Side, Plainfield, Shabazz and Linden and a very narrow, 7-6, defeat to then No. 10 Irvington and appeared poised to receive a good seed for the upcoming playoff.

But misfortune came! Senior linebacker/fullback, Tom Pennella, who got a knee injury early in the Irvington game, was unable to play the next three games. Additionally, the Raiders fell to Union and were burned by Cranford and Westfield, resulting in a seventh seed for the playoffs where

they lost to Morristown. Then in the season finale, the Raiders were defeated by No. 5 Elizabeth, the North Jersey, Group 4, Section 2 champion to finish with a deceptive 4-6 record.

"We knew it going in that we had a very challenging schedule. We started well, 4-1, losing to Irvington only 7-6, then had bad results from injuries and some bad breaks, but that's part of the game," said Raider Head Coach Steve Ciccotelli. "Irvington, Linden, Elizabeth, Union made the playoffs and, at one time, all ranked in the top 20. We beat Linden who beat Piscataway who was ranked 14th. They got to the semis. Elizabeth won it all. Irvington got to the finals. But a tribute to our guys, no matter what happened, every game we played hard and practiced hard."

As a fullback, Pennella did rush for 222 yards with three touchdowns (TD) and had six receptions for 65 yards, including another TD. He also had the best rushing average of 6.3.

"That hurt us. It caused a little bit of a domino effect. We lost an outside

linebacker, a fullback and we lost a leader on the field. Tom is a great person! Incredible positive attitude! We thought he was done for the year. He came back at Morristown and had a couple of nice runs. He would have been All-County, All-Conference," stated Ciccotelli.

Brand (All-Area, All-Conference and All-UC First Team) had quite a sting as a hard-nosed linebacker and a running back. He rushed 1,048 yards and led the team with eight TDs. Defensively, he recorded 28 solo tackles, 57 assisted tackles and one interception.

"Your attitude will determine how you use your ability. Greg's attitude is unbelievable! His weight room work ethic was incredible! He played at a different level. Greg finished his runs. As linebacker, he made key hits, he made so many hits," Ciccotelli expressed.

Badala's sting showed aggression with five sacks to go with his 29 solo and 18 assisted tackles, along with a

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Rich Graesse for The Westfield Leader and The Times

SETTING A WHS RECORD...Blue Devil freshman Suzanne Lemberg broke a 15-year-old WHS record in the 100-freestyle with a time of 54.36. The Westfield girls defeated Scotch Plains-Fanwood, 106-64, on December 16.

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