

Fueled by Possibility, Bishop McDevitt Swims Away with State Championship

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Bishop McDevitt's 200 medley relay team display their PIAA 2A Boys' Swimming gold medals. From left are sophomores Lucas Hancock and John Haskins, and seniors Will Brobson and Patrick Hemingway. *(Photo by Jen Reed, The Catholic Witness.)*

Bishop McDevitt's 400-yard relay swimmers were cool and calm when they jumped into the pool for their final swim in the PIAA 2A Boys' State Championships.

A very real shot at team gold was on the line, and the 400-relay team of Patrick Hemingway, John Haskins, Lucas Hancock and Isaac Hancock knew what they had to do to secure it.

"I told the guys we needed a 3:11 to win it all," said Hemingway, a four-year swimmer for the Crusaders.

They finished second in their heat with a 3:12.77, a fast enough time to secure the program's first ever team gold, topping the leaderboard with 142.5 points at states, held March 19 at Cumberland Valley High School in Mechanicsburg.

“What McDevitt had going was a lot of depth in relays. We all contributed quite a bit, the entire team, just because of the relays, and that’s how we ultimately won states,” said Hemingway, who has committed to swim for Villanova. “We qualified a relay in each one, and I know quite a few teams weren’t able to do that.”

Winning the state team title wasn’t a given for the Crusaders, who won their fourth consecutive District 3 title a few weeks ago.

“I don’t believe we were thinking we’d win states,” said senior Will Brobson, who joined Hemingway, Haskins and Lucas Hancock in earning gold in the 200 medley relay. That team swam a 1:34.92, a school record. “We never really thought heavily on the possibility of winning. We understood that we had depth and there was a possibility, but we’d have to do a lot better than where we were initially seeded and projected to be.”

“Coming in this year, we had graduated a few seniors. I was actually a little bit worried because we graduated so many seniors, especially three who had really scored a lot of points for us,” Hemingway agreed.

But where there’s a will, there’s a way.

They started off the day with a win in the medley relay, on the backs of Hemingway, Brobson, Haskins and Lucas Hancock. But as the day went on and without a number of individual swims, McDevitt lost some points on the leader board.

“We didn’t really start keeping track of the points until halfway through the meet,” said Brobson. “We never were too focused; we were there to have a good time and were just glad to be in the water. After our 200 free relay went, and Patrick swam his 50 free, we started to realize we had a shot. Towards the back end of the meet, we started crunching numbers and figuring out what we had to do.”

Head coach Kurt Sprowls told them they had a very real chance.

“Coach said we could actually do this if we placed high in the relay. I think he was more excited than we were,” said Lucas Hancock.

And maybe that was a good thing, as the Crusaders went about doing what needed to be done.

“I don’t think the mood changed. I think it evolved into something that was more exciting, but we never got too serious. We tried to stay as calm as possible,” Brobson said.

That was a little difficult for Brobson, who had to watch from the sidelines as his 400-free teammates swam the relay that would be the deciding factor for the Crusaders.

“It was very nerve-racking to watch and wait, and see the times that were posted,” he said.

Entering their final swim, the Crusaders were in second place behind Riverside, which had held the lead for most of the day. Bishop McDevitt posted a time of 3:12.77, and waited.

“We knew it was a solid time, but we weren’t sure it was going to win it,” said Hemingway. “When we were talking with Coach, we realized that as long as we beat Riverside, who swam in the last heat, we would win the whole meet. When they ended up getting third, we knew that we had won it all.”

Riverside earned silver in states, with 137 points to McDevitt’s 142.5.

Also contributing to overall team points were the 200 free relay team of Isaac and Lucas Hancock, Luke Madden and Matt Mata (tied for sixth); Hemingway’s 50 free and 100 backstroke (placing third and fourth, respectively); and Brobson’s 100 breaststroke (seventh place).

“I love being a part of this team; it feels like a family to me,” Hemingway said.

They formed some pretty strong bonds this season, particularly because of COVID-19. The team quarantined for three weeks before states to make sure no one contracted the virus.

“Everyone said how COVID has made this year worse, but in my opinion, it has made it better in a way with athletics. I’ve gotten much closer to the swim team than I ever thought I would have. We were swimming and seeing just each other,” said Brobson, who is still waiting to make his college commitment. So far, he’s been in talks with Dickinson and Gettysburg.

Practices this year forged team bonds, too. The Crusaders practice at Central Penn Aquatics, where the pool water is a therapeutic 85 degrees and they are limited to five lanes with a restricted number of swimmers per lane – a challenge for team practices, to say the least. In an effort to help facilitate fuller practices, several of the swimmers purchased pool memberships to swim in adjacent lanes with their teammates.

“We’ve been looked at as the underdogs for quite a long time, and now other teams will be looking at us a little more,” Hemingway said. “Going forward, I think the underclassmen will step up and they certainly have a lot of potential.”

They are ready, and the rising juniors are already talking about their freshmen teammates’ potential.

“Winning the state title definitely does help bring a lot of freshmen in to the program here, and it gets us noticed,” Haskins said. “The freshman we had this year on the 200 free relay, Luke Madden, he hasn’t swam three years and he split a 22:63. That will give him hope of getting back into it.”

“My brother Isaac was on the 400-yard relay with me, John and Patrick, and split a 49:00, and was so excited,” Lucas Hancock said. “He wants to keep excelling, so I think we’re going to draw a lot more swimmers for next year.”

Summing up their successful season, the Crusaders say they couldn’t have found their success without their coaches.

“They deserve a lot of credit; Coach Sprowls, all of them,” Brobson remarked. “Our assistant coaches have shown their dedication and support to us and the program. We wouldn’t have the team we do now without them. They motivated us and pushed us to be where we are today.”

By Jen Reed, *The Catholic Witness*