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Kasten, LaSalle lead charge to state

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By [ROB VALENTIN](#) | Sports Editor

Northside/Sullivan coop may not have won the city title but that didn't mean their season was over.

The Mustangs swim team had the best day in school history last Saturday at the Evanston Sectional. Both Corey Kasten and Lissi LaSalle had strong meets as they qualified for this weekend's state meet. They, along with a swimmer from Whitney Young, were the only girls to qualify for state from Chicago Public League schools.

"It does feel good but in a way I wish we could have more girls competing there," Northside head coach Carlos Ceja said. "I just wish the CPS program was better because we want to make the Public League competitive with the rest of the state."

Kasten came into the meet hoping to qualify in the 50 freestyle and the 100 breaststroke but after missing out in the 50 she was more than a little nervous.

"I had worked all year for this race," Kasten said. "The past week my start was the main thing I've been working on. I finally perfected my start and all I was thinking was 'Go out.' I knew I had a good start and my first 50 is normally pretty good.

"At the first turn I saw I was at the lead and then on the third turn we were pretty even. I was just thinking you have to sprint and I normally tire in the last 25. I kind of had a bad finish so I was scared but then I saw I had the qualifying time."

Kasten finished the 100 breaststroke in third but her time of 1:08.48 was under state-cut.

LaSalle navigates to state

LaSalle's trip to state is quite interesting. She swam at the state meet for Loyola during her freshman and sophomore seasons before taking a year off. Then she transferred to Sullivan, which doesn't have a team. She decided to swim in her senior season and Northside and Sullivan formed a coop.

"She took almost two years off swimming and she came back looking to get back in top-notch swimming," Ceja said. "Just after city she missed six days with strep. It was a little difficult to tell whether or not she would make it. But I knew she would because she's just that kind of person."

It wasn't an easy season for LaSalle. She would get up in the morning and head to Northside for practice, then to Sullivan for school and back to Northside for nightly practice. That transition was difficult but it made her state qualification in the 100 butterfly (5th, 1:00.18) that much more satisfying.

"When I was at Loyola there was so much pressure to do well and swimming with Northside no one was expecting me to make it," LaSalle said. "When I made it, it was that much better. You don't need a big team, you just need a few girls to push you."

Ridgeway cruises to state

St. Ignatius sophomore Lydia Ridgeway easily swam to a pair of sectional titles at the St. Ignatius Sectional.

The North Sider picked up victories in the 50 freestyle (25.05) and the 100 backstroke (59.92) while helping her team qualify in the 400 freestyle relay (1st, 3:46.48) and the 200 medley relay (2nd, 1:52.01).

"I wasn't really tapered for this meet because I just wanted to get the time and get in," Ridgeway said. "I was

lucky to have fast girls swimming next to me and they really pushed me."

Ridgeway will now turn her attention to the state meet. She's shooting for 24.2 in the 50 freestyle and 58.9 in the 100 backstroke.

It's doubtful she'll have any nerves at state, at least that's what her family history says. Her oldest brother Paul swam at Texas and her older sister Rachel won four state titles at Loyola. Last year her older brother James won the state title at St. Patrick.

"Being to so many state meets there's a lot of pressure but they guide me through and tell me how to stay relaxed," Ridgeway said. "I just chill out and listen to music on my I-Pod. Then I get psyched up with my teammates."

Rowland dives in

Loyola's Elysse Rowland nabbed second place in diving (425.95) at the Loyola Sectional.

The junior from Rogers Park took second at sectionals last season but saved her best for state as she captured the state title. As a freshman Rowland took third at state after placing second at sectionals.

Disappointment for Lane

While many girls from the North Side shined at sectionals, that wasn't the case for Lane Tech's swimmers.

The Indians entered the Fenwick Sectional hoping to get three swimmers to state but all three fell short.

Jill Schmucker swam a great race in the 100 backstroke as she took second in a time of 1:01.47, but it was too slow by the bat of an eye as she missed state by .18.

"It's really frustrating because I just missed it," Schmucker said. "It was so close, just one turn or a start. It makes me mad but it will make me work harder next year."

Morgan Monroe missed state in the 50 freestyle after getting off to a slow start. In a speed race like the 50, getting off to a slow start is almost impossible to overcome.

"It was a lot of pressure because I made state last year and people were expecting me to make it again," said Monroe, who finished the race in a time of 25.3, just 3-tenths off the state-cut time. "We've been practicing my starts a lot. Coach told me I went down way too deep."

Freshman Usah Sontep grabbed second place in the 500 (5:21.53) and is definitely going to be a factor in the future.

"I did a slow time but overall I think I did well this season," Sontep said. "This is the only meet that you can make it to state so it kind of bothered me the last few days. I was really nervous, I was shaking. I knew if I didn't make it my season was over."