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IHSA STATE SWIMMING

'Perfect' DeWall is state champ

Freeport junior Deidre DeWall wins state 100 backstroke title, takes second in 200 IM.

BY MATT BEARDMORE
For The Journal-Standard

EVANSTON — How does it feel to defeat the two-time defending state champion and the state record holder in the state finals of the 100 backstroke? Just ask Freeport junior Deidre DeWall.

The Pretzel junior swam a time of :56.24 in the finals of the 100 backstroke on Saturday at the 2004 Girls State Swimming Meet at Evanston Township High School,

fending off Champaign Centennial senior Alison Gschwend (:56.50) and Neuqua Valley junior Melissa Marik (:56.69), the defending champion, to win Freeport's first girls swimming state championship since 1999.

"I think I'm still in shock a little bit. I really didn't know I won until people shouted it at me," said DeWall, who finished second to Marik in last year's 100 backstroke finals. "I really didn't expect to do this good, but it feels really great."



DeWall

DeWall, who had the fourth fastest time entering the finals (:57.08), behind both Gschwend and Marik, swam the first 50 on Saturday in :27.39.

"The first half of the race I wasn't feeling that good," DeWall said. "I was kind of thinking, 'You've got to go faster, this is the last race of the season.'"

Freeport coach Mike Pisula wasn't surprised at the result, but said that any one of the top three or four girls had a legitimate shot to win the race.

"I'm kind of speechless right now," Pisula said. "She swam in my opinion, a perfect race."

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DeWall nearly got the best of Minooka junior Ashley Jones for the second straight afternoon in the 200 individual medley.

"I think Deidre and Ashley were probably the two kids who were going to battle it out," Pisula said.

But DeWall, who had the fastest swim in Friday's preliminaries (2:05.74) — .09 seconds quicker than Jones — fell off the pace in the final 50 and earned a second place medal.

"She's very strong," DeWall said of Jones, who finished second in the 200 IM last year. "I don't think she's very rested for this, but she's very strong and she had a lot at the end. I guess I wasn't as strong as she was."

DeWall touched the wall at 1:33.50 after 150 yards, and held a slight lead over Jones, who was swimming in the lane to her right.

"Ashley is such a strong freestyler, so I knew it was going to be very hard for (Deidre) to hold the lead," Pisula said.

DeWall's 2:04.27 was more than a second faster than her preliminary time (2:05.74) and about a half a second faster than her seventh place finish (2:04.78) at last year's finals at New Trier.

"I'm happy I made it this far, and happy I was able to finish with a decent time," DeWall said. "I didn't even think I'd be able to be here at the beginning of the season."

Naperville Central broke two state records in the first two events on Saturday — the 200 medley relay (1:45.70)

and the 200 freestyle (1:47.26). DeWall has one year left to break the state record in the 200 IM — a mark set by coach Pisula's daughter, Emily, in the 1999 state preliminaries (2:00.67).

"I don't know, it's a pretty fast record," DeWall said.

Don't put it past her. "She's such a strong competitor and has such a huge heart and desire to want to do well," Pisula said.

Freeport finished 18th in the overall team standings with 29 points.