

Nelson falls short of three-peat despite strong effort

BY HAP FRY • HapFry@coloradoan.com • February 15, 2009

Patricia Nelson's bid to three-peat as the state's fastest swimmer was denied Saturday at the Class 5A state girls swimming and diving championships.

It was not for lack of effort.

The Fort Collins High School junior did everything in her power to be the first swimmer to win three consecutive state titles in the 50-yard freestyle since Montrose's Carrie Nixon completed the triple in 1997.

Nelson smashed her personal record with a time of 23.78 seconds. That mark would have been good enough to give Nelson gold in 41 of the past 46 finales at the Class 5A/4A level, but it was only good for second place Saturday.

Cherry Creek freshman Bonnie Brandon threw out the ultimate trump card with a time of 23.47 to win the event.

"That race went really well, and I felt really good," Nelson said. "I did everything that I thought I could. I focused on it. That's just the way it played out. You really can't complain much about second place."

No you cannot, especially when you take into consideration just how fast this year's field was in the 50.

Brandon's time of 23.47 not only set a state record, it met automatic All-American standards. Nelson's mark also was good enough for AAA standards, while Chatfield's Shelley Perkins (23.95) and Rampart's Jenna Gregoire (23.96) posted marks that will get All-American consideration.

"It for sure was one of the toughest races, but that makes it all the more exciting," Nelson said.

"It wouldn't be fun if it was like: 'They are gonna get that place, they're gonna get this place, she'll get that place.' I think it's a lot cooler when you dive in not knowing who is going to come out on top or who is going to come out on bottom."

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There certainly should be no shame in finishing second to Brandon.

The Cherry Creek freshman proved she could be one for the ages in just her first state meet. Brandon also set a state record in the 100 backstroke (54.77), while her older sister Loren won the 200 and 500 freestyles.

Bonnie Brandon also was on Cherry Creek's wining 200-medley and 400-freestyle relay teams, which helped lead the Bruins to their second consecutive state title. Fairview and Regis followed, while Fort Collins came in 12th.

"I'm just so happy I made it to state and got two state records," Bonnie Brandon said. "I'm really happy right now. I've never swum like that before. It felt like I was going really fast."

Nelson came back in the 100 freestyle and set another personal record with a 51.84 mark that also met AAA standards and easily gave her a consolation championship.

Had Nelson been in the championship heat, her time would have tied her for second place.

"I think I would take the better time over winning with a slower time," Nelson said. "I mean, it's cool to win and all. But it's cool to accomplish something for yourself and do better than you've ever done before."

The Fort Collins 200- and 400-freestyle relay teams did just that by posting their best times of the season.

The 200 team of Nelson, Laura Kollar, Lexy Lowery and Maddi Tyler took eighth with a time of 1:40.59 in an uber fast field that featured five teams that earned All-American consideration or better.

Nelson, Kollar, Tyler and Kendall VanValkenburg moved up four spots in the 400 relay with a time of 3:41.58 to finish 12th.

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"I just really, really enjoy relays because it's all about the team and helping each other," Tyler said. "Everyone relies on each other to do their very best, and I think we did the best we could. I'm really happy with how we did. We just really brought it out in the 400. That was really cool."

Rocky Mountain also had a team compete in the 200 free relay, and like their crosstown rivals the Lobos swam a personal-best time.

Gabby Smith, Abby Ney, Geneva Mueller and Callie Anstett turned in a time of 1:43.21, which moved them up a spot from Friday and into 13th place.

"It was intense, but it was so exciting," Ney said. "I'm just so happy I got to make it here as a freshman. We were just so excited to come back (Saturday) and swim one last race with (senior Anstett). This is the relay we always know we can do well in."

Fort Collins' Courtney Hawker also competed Saturday in the diving preliminaries. She finished 21st with 140.8 points.