

Andover Defeats Deerfield with U.S. Champion Andrew Wilson '12 in Attendance

Taking a weekend break from training with the University of Texas in preparation for this summer's Olympic Trials, 2015 U.S. National Swimming Champion, and Andover alum, Andrew Wilson '12 returned to New England this weekend to work with the Boys' Varsity Swimming & Diving Team. Wilson's availability could not have been better timed as his visit coincided with the annual meeting of Andover and Deerfield, two teams that, combined, own the last nine New England championships.

In the pool, Deerfield, the defending New England Champion, is led by University of Michigan-bound Miles Smachlo '16, brother of Andover's Alex '11 and Julia '13, who is the strongest swimmer in the league since at least Exeter's Mike McLean '02. Entering the meet, though, Andover faced not only a dominant swimmer in Smachlo, but also, for the first time in many years, a New England squad with superior depth and found itself the underdog.

What transpired was a terrific dual-meet with many close races and great performances—33 out of 53 Andover performances were season-bests—that eventually yielded an Andover upset.

The meet opened as expected with Deerfield finishing first and third in the 200 Medley Relay, and Andover's Richard Zhong '17, co-captain Darren Ty '16, Jack Warden '19, and Nick Faulkner '16 breaking up the sweep with a strong 1:40.85. Michael Najem '16, Jacob Hudgins '19, Nate Cruz Walma '18, and Will Kantaros '18 were fourth with a 1:45.18. (*Andover 4 – Deerfield 10*).

Smachlo swam an “off-event”—those words do not actually seem to apply to him—and won the 200 Freestyle in a ridiculous 1:40.00. Andover's Nick Isenhower '18 (1:45.56) Marcello Rossi '16 (1:45.79), and Thomas Choi '16 (1:50.23) each submitted terrific mid-season performances to contain the damage and placed second, third, and fifth, respectively. Swimming exhibition, Dan Tran '17 swam a personal best in 1:53.15. (*Andover 12 – Deerfield 18*).

The 200 Individual Medley turned out to be an event in which Andover picked up some needed points. Ty won in 1:58.83 with Harvey Zheng '19 (2:04.82) and Rick Ono '19 (2:07.19) both swimming season bests to place fourth and fifth. Sarp Orgul was 2:13.87 in exhibition. (*Andover 21 – Deerfield 25*).

Just as Andover was excited to be well ahead of expectations, the 50 Freestyle posed challenges. After a shaky start, Christian Alberga '17 was out-touched for the win 22.05 to 22.12. Faulkner was fifth in 23.59, and Kantaros was sixth in 23.69. In exhibition, Nate Smith '18 swam 25.57. (*Andover 26 – Deerfield 36*).

As they have all season, Andover's contingent of veteran divers performed well, sweeping the event. Jack Belluche '16 (201.50), Matt Grottkau '17 (193.40), and Rob DeLaus '16 (158.65) brought valuable points to the team, and as the meet returned to the swimming competition, the teams were tied 39 – 39.

In the 100 Butterfly, co-captain Rossi did what captains are supposed to do: do what needs to be done. Rossi, who had swum the event only once before in his Andover career, posted an impressive 53.61 to win the event. Warden followed in 54.68 for third, and Cruz Walma swam 57.22 for sixth. Orgul swam 57.81 in exhibition. (*Andover 48 – Deerfield 46*).

Andover gained valuable points in the 100 Freestyle with Alberga winning the event in 48.18 and Isenhower placing second in 48.44. Faulkner swam 52.34 for sixth, and Najem swam 53.66 in exhibition. (*Andover 58 – Deerfield 52*).

Andover gambled in the 500 Freestyle, sitting its two top performers and expecting the senior, Thomas Choi, to place second behind Smachlo, who won the event in an impressive 4:38.87. Choi, the astute veteran, swam even with Deerfield's second swimmer, leading by only .09 of a second at the 450. Choi then sprinted to secure second-place in 5:03.64. Tran placed fourth in 5:10.01, and Ono placed fifth in 5:10.15. (*Andover 65 – Deerfield 61*).

Andover then gambled again with Choi, expecting him to lead-off the 200 Freestyle Relay after only five minutes of rest. Again, the senior delivered, and Rossi, Isenhower, and Alberga completed the race, out-touching Deerfield 1:28.97 to 1:29.06. Kantaros, Xue, Tran, and Faulkner placed fourth in 1:35.92. (*Andover 73 – Deerfield 67*).

Deerfield was not finished, though: not only winning the 100 Backstroke but also placing second by only .09 of a second. Zhong swam 55.97 for third; Warden swam 56.89 for fourth; and Zheng swam 58.25 for fifth. In exhibition, Smith swam 59.62. (*Andover 79 – Deerfield 77*).

Entering the 100 Breaststroke, both teams expected Ty to win and secure a needed six points for Andover, which he did in 1:00.55. The rest of the places were all up for grabs, and in an extremely close race, Hudgins gained an invaluable second-place swimming 1:03.51 to Deerfield's 1:03.57, and Xue placed fourth in 1:04.68. (*Andover 91 – Deerfield 81*).

At this point, Deerfield's best hope was a tie, which required placing first and second in the 400 Freestyle Relay. To do so, Coach John Burke split his fastest relay enough to secure third place while still competing for first in the hope that the pressure could fuel an Andover false start. Fortunately for Andover, the squad of Rossi, Isenhower, Ty, and Alberga controlled their starts and pushed on to a solid 3:13.16 for the win. Zhong, Warden, Zheng, and Choi placed fourth in 3:30.61.

Although the final score of 99 to 87 appears decisive, both teams recognize not only that the dual meet came down to a matter of milliseconds, but also that dual-meet wins and losses do not readily translate to the New England Championships.

In the coming weeks, the Big Blue will have to focus on conditioning and technique—the latter surely helped via a clinic with Andrew Wilson—because the squad, while gaining confidence, will enter the Championships, again, in the role of the underdog.

Attached: Wilson with the Boys at Deerfield

