

## A double gold show to remember

Written by STEVE OSTERMANN  
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### Nennig caps record-setting career with two Div. 2 state-meet victories for senior-led Grafton boys' team

What can a swimmer who holds virtually every record at his high school do to punctuate his career?

If you're Grafton's Al Nennig, you make sure to come home from your final meet as a double state champion.



"It was a great day. Everything went really well," said Nennig, who capped his senior season by winning the 50-yard freestyle and 100 backstroke in the WIAA Division 2 finals at the University of Wisconsin-Madison Natatorium last Friday.

"This year was really special for the team and me. We had a great group of guys who worked hard all season."

Nennig successfully defended his state title in 50 freestyle with a winning time 21.08 seconds. The time, the fourth-fastest in Division 2 state-meet history, was well ahead of runner-up Lew Hollman of Fort Atkinson (21.76) and lowered Nennig's own school mark.

In the backstroke, Nennig was clocked in 52.65, holding off a serious challenge from Shawano's Zach Soper, a sophomore who took second in 52.77.

"He's a great sophomore. He really pushed me," Nennig said of Soper. "By then, my legs were a little tired after swimming in the (200-freestyle) relay."

Although Nennig's gold-medal day stole the show, it wasn't the Black Hawks' lone bright spot.

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He was joined by three fellow seniors on a pair of relays that turned in top-three finishes.

The 200 freestyle team of Nennig, Brad Kempka, Kieran Paddock and Ben Gosselin placed second (1:27.82), narrowly losing to Monona Grove (1:27.28). In the 400 freestyle, the team of Gosselin, Paddock, Nennig and Kempka was third (3:18.94).

Grafton, which took sixth in the overall standings with 156 points, got off to a solid start in diving. Juniors Zach Greenwood (355.3 points) and Killian Mielotz (292.7) placed fourth and 11th, respectively, in a 16-diver field.

In last year's state meet, Greenwood took sixth and Mielotz was 16th.

The diving points helped set the tone for the Hawks, who stayed in or near the top five of the 30-team standings throughout the meet.

"We're pretty happy with the way things worked out," Grafton coach Mark Minz said.

"We took seventh as a team at the Small School State Invitational (Jan. 28), so we figured we would be somewhere around there in Madison."

The Hawks entered Friday's meet with a sectional-championship effort that included state-qualifying performances in 10 individual events and all three relay races. It was Grafton's largest-ever state contingent.

Rounding out the Hawks' state finishes were a ninth-place tie by Kempka in the 100 freestyle (50.17); 12th by Gosselin in the 200 freestyle (1:50.83); 13th by Kempka in the 100 breaststroke (1:03.25); 14ths by Gosselin in the 100 freestyle (50.76) and the 200 medley relay of senior Tyler Kish, senior Brett Rasmussen, Paddock and freshman Bailey Bodart (1:46.28); 15th by Kish in the 500 freestyle (5:23.26); and 16th by Paddock in the 200 individual medley (2:10.15).

Monona Grove won its first state title with 258 points. Rounding out the top five teams were Madison Edgewood with 209 points, Milton (198), McFarland (190.5) and Fort Atkinson (159).

Minz said the meet provided a fitting send-off for his senior-led squad, which will be remembered as one of the best in school history.

"Absolutely. I'm as happy as I can be with this group," he said. "I'm a little sad that I'll be losing this many good swimmers, but to see them go up and get their medals at state makes it all worthwhile."

Nennig, in particular, has been a model of talent and consistency on the way to his fourth state-meet appearance.

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“Al was very determined through all four years in high school,” Minz said. “The bigger the meet, the better he performed. He’s just been amazingly efficient and versatile.”

Nennig hold school records in the 50 and 200 freestyles, backstroke, breaststroke, butterfly and individual medley. The only individual marks held by others are the 100 and 500 freestyle and diving.

He’s also part of all three record-setting relay teams along with Kempka, Paddock and Gosselin.

“It was a great way for us to finish our careers,” said Nennig, who will take his pool talents to Denison College (Ohio) next season. In addition to having a men’s swimming program that has won back-to-back NCAA Division III championships, it’s a school that fits his priorities.

“I wanted to go somewhere that was strong academically and I was comfortable with,” he said.

“A lot of Division I schools are all athletics. At Denison, they told me right away that it was academics first.”

A similar approach has served another Nennig well. After becoming a state backstroke champion at Grafton, Al’s sister Sadie has earned Division III All-American honors at Emory University in Atlanta, where she is a senior on the women’s team.

His other sister, Bailey, was also a state champion for Grafton and swam at UW-Milwaukee.

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Image Information: THERE WAS NO SHORTAGE of medals for Grafton’s Al Nennig after last Friday’s WIAA Division 2 boys’ state swimming and diving meet in Madison. In addition to winning the 50-yard freestyle and 100 backstroke, the senior was a member of relay teams that placed second in the 200 freestyle and third in the 400 freestyle.

Photo by Sam Arendt