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Freshman swimmer qualifies in two races, leads medley and freestyle teams that also advance on record-setting day

Riding a wave powered by a first-year standout, the Grafton boys' swimming team rose to the occasion last Saturday and made sure it will be well represented at this week's WIAA Division 2 state meet in Madison.

Freshman Al Nennig, whose record-setting efforts have fueled the Black Hawks throughout the season, continued his run by participating in all four of his team's state-qualifying performances at the Plymouth Sectional.

Nennig advanced in two individual events by winning the 200-yard individual medley in 2 minutes, 0.31 seconds and having a second-place qualifying time in the 100 backstroke (55.01).

He also swam the first leg on two state-bounded relays — the 200 medley team, whose other members were Josh Govek, Taylor Paddock and Frank Borden (fourth place in 1:45.88) and the 200 freestyle team, along with Paddock, Chris Rose and Borden (third in 1:32.84).

The freestyle team's effort produced a pair of Grafton records. Nennig's 22.84 leg broke the 50 freestyle mark of 22.87 set in 1989 and helped the team lower its own school mark of 1:34.84 set at the
North Shore Conference meet Feb. 6.

Paddock and Borden are seniors. Govek and Rose are juniors.

"It was very well done. All the guys did a heck of a job," said Grafton coach Mark Minz, whose squad showed a marked improvement in sectional competition after failing to qualify anyone for state last year.

"We're very happy to get this many kids through to Madison. They were focused in practice during the week and stayed focused in the meet."

Grafton finished well back in the sectional team standings, placing sixth out of 11 squads with 187.5 points and trailing local rival Port Washington, which was fifth with 215 points. However, Port didn't
have any state qualifiers after advancing a diver and its medley relay team last

year.

“It was definitely disappointing,” said Port coach Mike Styles. “It’s pretty much the goal of our whole season to try and get some kids through, but we just didn’t swim as well as we needed to.”

Plymouth won the meet with 360 points, edging Berlin/Green Lake (352) and Cedarburg (350) in a three-team battle for the title.

The Pirates’ top sectional finish was a fifth place by the 400 freestyle relay of Jared Sandlin, David Antoine, Matt Walch and Jared Burris (3:40.77).

Port’s other top-eight finishes were sixths by the 200 medley team of Antoine, Kevin Winker, Raymond Polgar and Joe Ruth (1:51.21) and the 200 freestyle team of Ruth, Sandlin, Burris and Polgar
(1:36.75), sevenths by Matt Walch in the 200 freestyle (2:00.17) and Polgar in the 100 butterfly (1:00.6) and eighths by Polgar in the individual medley (2:15.66), Ruth in the 50 freestyle (24.02) and
Burris in the butterfly (1:00.89).

Grafton’s other top-eight performances were a fifth by Borden in the 50 freestyle (23.58) and a seventh by Paddock in the individual medley (2:15.03).

“Everyone who swam in an individual event for us scored points, so we’re very happy with that,” Minz said.

The winners of each sectional event advanced to Madison along with the next 12 top sectional performers statewide.

Nennig will be the fourth seed in each of his individual races at state, where the Hawks’ freestyle team is seeded ninth and their medley team is seeded 15th.

As is customary for state-qualifying relays, Minz has chosen alternates for each team — junior Brandon Marshall for the medley relay, and freshman Brad Kempka for the freestyle relay.

The Division 2 state meet will be Friday, Feb. 19, at the University of Wisconsin-Madison Natatorium. Diving starts at 2:30 p.m., followed by swimming at 6:30 p.m.