

Tenaflly boys swimming races past Northern Highlands, wins third straight sectional title



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WAYNE – The pieces all fit like a puzzle.

Aaron Baltaytis in the butterfly. Hayoung Choe in the backstroke. Jason Yi in the breaststroke.

Three seniors with their own specialties and a shared love of swimming have raised the profile of Tenaflly since joining high school. On Friday, they added to their legacy by bringing another piece of hardware back to town.

Tenaflly came out hot with five straight wins and rolled past Northern Highlands, 99-71, in the North 1, Group B boys swimming final at Passaic Tech.

It's the third straight sectional title for the top-seeded Tigers, who may have gotten one more if the state tournament was held in 2021 COVID season.

"It would have been nice to get four, but there's nothing else I could ask for," Baltaytis said. "It's really nice. We just have to win a state championship now."



Tenaflly (10-0) has never won a state championship, but the win over Northern Highlands brought the program one step closer to its ultimate goal. This was the first time that someone held the Tigers under 100 points this season, but part of that was due to the nature of Tenaflly's lineup during a school break.

Coach Matthew White said that eight or nine swimmers were missing in the championship, including Yi (illness) and key scorers Roy Dafinoiu and Edward Kim. White expects to have his full team back on Wednesday when Tenaflly swims in the Group B semifinal at Gloucester County Institute of Technology.

"We still are expecting to go pretty far in the team state tournament," White said. "We'll see what ends up happening. We'll take it one meet at a time. Last year's semifinals was rough. But they're ready to go and excited for what's left in the season."

Baltaytis stepped up for the short-handed Tigers with wins in the butterfly and 200 freestyle in his final sectional meet before heading to Northwestern. Choe added two more victories with fast times in the backstroke and 200 IM. The championship was decided with one race to go when junior Andrew Lee touched the wall first in the breaststroke.

"(It's nice) to see all the work that every swimmer has done all season," White said. "They all work really hard whether that's at a club practice or high school practices. We have many, many kids who contributed today that are not just club swimmers. It's the whole team."

The dominance by the Tiger seniors has been unparalleled. Tenaflly is unbeaten against Bergen County public schools since losing in the 2019 sectional finals – a run of 28 straight wins since Baltaytis came on board. It wasn't long ago when Tenaflly had only one sectional title on the wall, but now its 2015 trophy has plenty of company.

Baltaytis said he started to sense the potential in his group around eighth grade when Yi took his game to another level.

"Hayoung and I have known each other since we were 9 years old," Baltaytis said. "I think once Jason started to get fast, get really fast, I knew that our high school team would be special."

All three won state medals last year, including Baltaytis with gold in the butterfly. Baltaytis is hoping for even more speed when his team returns to action next week.

"I think we were lacking a bit of a sense of urgency," Baltaytis said. "I was happy that we won and we won by a good margin at 99-71, but I feel like we could have shown out a little bit more. So we have some things to fix before our meet on Wednesday."