

GLENBROOK SOUTH VS. NEW TRIER

MYTHICAL DUAL MEET

It was a bone-chilling day in December when the GBS and New Trier All-Time Greats met in a Central Suburban League showdown of giants. After weeks of negotiating, the coaches brought in a moderator to determine the best site for the monumental swim meet. The moderator chose the old dome pool at GBS as the best old-school venue for the meet. ESPN7 was given broadcast rights, and the meet was set.

Mark Onstott and Josh Runkle patrolled the narrow deck on the one side, while Keith MacDonald slowly paced the other. The stands were packed with parents and alumni, making the already small natatorium seem cramped. A small pocket of ETHS swimmers sat in the top corner of the stands, disgusted they were overlooked for this CSL Meet-of-the-Century. Tickets were impossible to get; some even tried to bluff their way in with fake credentials.

After a roof-raising rendition of the national anthem by Keith MacDonald's three kids, the meet was ready to begin. While Vegas had the Trevians as the meet favorite, the scrappy Titans were hoping to use the home pool to their advantage. The Trevians intimidation factor began earlier in the day as each swimmer and diver carried a state trophy off the bus. Not to be outdone, the Titan's Olivia Smoliga sat at the pool entrance wearing her Olympic gold medal.

Referee Joe Plack and starter Bob Richter spent almost five minutes quieting the crowd as the backstrokers readied themselves for the 200 Medley Relay. The Trev's relays were in lanes 2 and 4, while the Titan's were in lanes 3 and 5. Adrenaline was running high as New Trier got out fast with both relays and actually looked on the verge of going 1-2 until a massive anchor leg by GBS freestyler Mike Hadjiivanov surpassed Joe Jeffers to get 2nd. New Trier went 1-3, racking up enough NISCA points to take a substantial lead in the meet.

The next event didn't fare any better for the Titans, as Reed Malone dominated with a 1:35.60. Teammate Murphy McQuet out-touched 2008 state champion Colin Cordes 1:37.71 to 1.38.19.

New Trier was in control of the meet, but the 200 IM swung momentum back in the Titans direction as the Iida brothers won going away, with Sam at 1:46.02 and Max 1:47.40. Charlie Schienfeld was two seconds behind in third place at 1:49.4.

The 50 Free promised to be another GBS win as state champions Dominik Cubelic (2009) and Jon Salomon (2015) stood behind the blocks hoping to take down New Trier's top sprinter Max Grodecki, the 2012 50 Free state champion. Tensions were running high as the swimmers were asked to step down from the blocks, the PA announcer begging the crowd to remain silent for the start. Slowly, the swimmers stepped back on the blocks.

The race was tight as all three top swimmers lunged for the pad with Dominik Cubelic winning the event at 20.18. Grodecki barely touched out Salomon, 20.24 to 20.32. Cubelic exploded out of the water and sat on the lane line, repeatedly raising his arms and inciting the crowd into a frenzy. A stern Mark Onstott met briefly with the officials after the race, complaining Cubelic's full-body BlueSeventy suit should be disallowed. The protest fell on deaf ears as they set up the pool for diving.

Diving was bound to be a GBS strength, as they had 3-time state champion Wes Villaflor (05,06,07) and 2-time state champion Matt Whitfield (93,94). New Trier countered with state champions of their own: Jordan Sacks (2012) and Mike Ross (2009). But GBS's Aaron Ach

earned top spot with a 590.75. It was sweet redemption for Ach, who broke his hand during the state meet his senior year, knocking him out of the meet.

GBS was riding high with wins in the last three events. The crowd barely settled into their seats before seeing a dominating performance by Mike Dominski in the 100 Fly. Dominski won by almost 2 seconds (48.19) and was followed by Matt Gagne (49.85) as the Trevians took 1st and 2nd.

This set up a showdown in the 100 Free that will be talked about for years to come. Dominik Cubelic and Max Grodecki stared each other down before the race, Grodecki seething over his loss in the 50 and Cubelic ready to become a double winner. Cubelic was out fast and turned first, closely followed by Grodecki, Murphy McQuet, and Jon Salomon. Grodecki and Cubelic, swimming in lanes 3 and 4, were almost on top of one another as they came under the flags for the final five yards. Right with them was McQuet; Salomon had dropped back.

At the finish it was too close to call, but a #1 was posted by Cubelic's name with his 44.61 to Grodecki's 44.66. The Titan side erupted in cheers with towels being thrown in the air in celebration....but it was only temporary. While Cubelic had out touched Grodecki, Murphy McQuet's time had not registered on the scoreboard. A silence fell over the crowd as the PA announcer slowly read off, "The official time in lane 2 is 44.58!" McQuet won the event by .03, and now it was New Trier's turn to dance in celebration.

The 500 Free was almost anticlimactic, as Reed Malone went out fast and didn't give Sam Iida a chance to catch up, beating him 4:19 to 4:23.

Needing a win, the Titans turned to their 2009 national record-setting 200 Free Relay of Cubelic, Hengels, Ryan Bach and Chris DeLetto. The Titans won with a 1:22.15, but it wasn't a blowout as the team of Sam Skinner, Nels Snyder, David Schreisman and Grodecki came in at 1:22.92. The exchange of back-and-forth victories between the two teams was exhausting for both athletes and fans.

The next event, the 100 Back, featured only one state champion, the Titan's Colin Cordes (2007), but even Cordes couldn't stop the Trevian tide as Patrick Gridley (49.08), Jack Mangan (49.37) and Michael Dominski (50.17) quieted the GBS crowd with the meet's first 1-2-3 sweep of an event.

The Trevians seemingly put the nail in the coffin in the penultimate event, the 100 Breast, by taking 1-3-4. Charlie Schienfeld led the way (53.60), followed by GBS's Max Iida (54.62), and Trevians Jae Park (55.86) and Konrad Von Moltke (57.55) in 3rd and 4th.

As the swimmers gathered behind the blocks for the final event, the crowd rose to its feet in applause. The meet didn't resume for five full minutes while the applause drowned out the pleas by the PA announcer for quiet. It was as if the crowd knew they had witnessed greatness in the pool and didn't want the day to end.

The Trevians put an exclamation point on the meet by going 1-2 in the last relay with Skinner, Mangan, Malone, and Grodecki breaking the 3:00.00 mark in 2:59.76. Both teams proudly lined up, shook hands, and walked off the pool deck with their heads held high. And watching it all were two young boys on opposite sides of the pool. They might have worn different logos on their t-shirts and cheered for different teams, but they shared a spark in their eyes that promised this would not be the last great showdown between two great teams.