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Crean Lutheran girls, Foothill boys aiming for history in Division 2 swimming finals

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RIVERSIDE >> Crean Lutheran's girls swimming team wants to keep its championship habits alive. Foothill's boys hope to revive their proud tradition of collecting titles.

Both squads progressed toward those goals Friday at the CIF-SS Division 2 prelims at Riverside City College.

The Saints, seeking their fifth consecutive section crown, blazed to four Division 2 records in qualifying for Saturday's 11 a.m. finals.

They also appeared to maximize their scoring opportunities for an anticipated duel against Redlands East Valley and Glendora, among others.

"We've done so well in the past, I think that's a motivator for us to keep going," said Elise Garcia, who was part of three Crean Lutheran records set Friday.

Foothill is chasing its first CIF-SS crown since 1989, which marked the fifth and final crown for legendary coach Tom De Long.

De Long, 79, now coaches the Knights' girls but discreetly flashed a No. 6 sign at the end of the prelims session.

De Long cheered on Foothill's boys as they unleashed their deep fleet of freestylers, which will clash against Redlands' well-balanced lineup in the finals.

"It would mean a lot (to win)," Foothill boys coach Jim Brumm said. "The kids got into it. They trained really hard, kind of with CIF in mind the whole season."

Crean Lutheran's 200 medley relay of Eva Merrell, Jimena Martinez, Mandy Brenner and Garcia opened the meet by slicing more than a second off the Division 2 record with a time of 1 minute, 42.22 seconds. The time would have topped the top time in the Division 1 prelims.

Garcia and Merrell, both juniors, followed with Division 2 records in the 50 free (22.71) and 100 butterfly (52.57), respectively.

Brenner, a freshman, qualified fourth in the 50 (23.82) and fifth in the butterfly (lifetime-best 55.26).

The Saints also broke the Division 2 standard in 200 free relay. Garcia, Brenner, Journey Werner and Merrell (22.80 anchor) clocked a 1:34.89.

Crean Lutheran, winners of the past two Division 2 titles, extended its depth in the 100 breaststroke with Martinez (1:04.07) and Rachel Taylor (1:04.15) qualifying third and fourth, respectively.

"I'm super proud of these girls," Garcia said. "They put in so much hard work. ... I can't wait to see what they do (Saturday)."

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Merrell, slowed recently by shoulder discomfort, said she raced pain-free. The national team member slipped at the start of her backstroke and qualified third (54.29) behind surging Mira Costa sophomore Alexandra Crisena (meet-record 53.65) and Chaparral of Temecula freshman Liberty Gilbert (54.21).

"It's feeling a lot better," Merrell said of her shoulder. "Didn't hurt at all when I swam."

Foothill's boys collected its lone top seed in the 400 free relay. Hunter Ingram, Chris Mykkanen, Sam Harrison and anchor Zane Scott combined for a 3:06.95, just over 1½ seconds ahead of Damien of La Verne.

The Knights placed two racers in the top final of the 200 free, Scott in the final of the 50 (20.96) and two swimmers in the finals of the 100 and 500 freestyles. They also grabbed the No. 2 seed in the 200 free relay (1:26.57) behind Redlands (1:25.82).

Redlands placed all three of its relays in the A final.

Andrew Koustik of Calvary Chapel helped pace the county by qualifying first in the 200 free (1:39.56) and 100 butterfly (48.74). Sonora's Taylor Ault wore a training suit and qualified sixth in the 500 free with a 4:53.11, well off league rival and top-seeded Courtney Tseng of Sunny Hills (4:48.64). Villa Park's Dash Farr grabbed the No. 1 position in the breaststroke with a lifetime-best 55.34.

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