

# Sports

## Matt Edkins is one of state's best divers

By TOM ROBINSON  
For The Dallas Post

Matthew Edkins merged two sporting interests together as a young boy.

Six years later, the Lake-Lehman sophomore has established himself as one of the best high school athletes in the state at his new endeavor.

Edkins earned his second Pennsylvania Interscholastic Athletic Association state medal in Class AA boys diving March 14 at Bucknell University with a third-place finish at the PIAA Swimming and Diving Championships.

The son of Lake-Lehman swimming coach Nancy Edkins, Edkins was used to being around the pool when his mother was coaching the sport at Misericordia University. After spending four early years in gymnastics, he took many of the skills and traits necessary for success in

that sport and brought them back to the pool.

"During gymnastics, I got an injury with my heel," said Edkins, who made the switch in 2007. "Mom knew a diving coach and signed me up for that. I kind of got right into it."

While the Lake-Lehman swimming program, which does not have its own pool, struggles, Edkins will jump into a swim event and do the best he can to help the team.

His training time, however, goes into perfecting his skills as a diver. And, that is where he has been able to help the Black Knights make an impact at the state level.

"You have to make sure you get all the fine stuff down before you can get into the more complex skills," Edkins said. "You just have to practice a lot."

That practice has paid off.

Edkins won District 2 titles in both his freshman and sophomore seasons. At Bucknell, Edkins picked up a sixth-place state finish as a freshman.

"I think I was just kind of going to do my best and the medal was a nice addition," Edkins said.

Expectations were higher this season. "Especially with my seed, seeded third, I wanted to make sure I stayed at my seed or finished higher," he said. "I'm happy I did that."

Like top high school athletes in other sports, Edkins will continue his training year-round. He coaches and participates in the Back Mountain Dive Club. That participation means practice for the entire spring, summer and most of the fall until high school competition returns in early December.

Edkins will work the same dives repeatedly, trying to perfect them, while

doing abdominal work, push-ups for arm strength and training to increase his leg strength and push off from the diving board.

In essence, he will still perform some of the same flipping and twisting he started as a gymnast, only he will land in water.

Edkins led the way at the state meet but was not the only Back Mountain medalist at the PIAA Swimming and Diving Championships.

Brian Stepniak took seventh in the 50-yard and 100-yard freestyle events and was part of a 200 freestyle relay team that also finished seventh in Class AA for Dallas. Marcus Wagner, Patrick Gelson and Jack Matusiak were also on the relay team.

Dallas placed ninth in the team standings out of 60 teams that scored points at the state level.



Lake-Lehman diver Matt Edkins has established himself as one of the best high school athletes in the state.

### BACK MOUNTAIN ICE HOCKEY TEAM

## HOCKEY HEATS UP



Back Mountain's Logan Obes, left, and Pittston Area's Tommy Schwab battle for position.

BILL TARUTIS/FOR THE DALLAS POST

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Casey McAndrew, David Payne and Eric Gotoweski provided the leadership for a successful season by the Back Mountain Blackhawks.

The three Dallas High School students will be back together on the ice Friday night when the Northeast Pennsylvania Scholastic Hockey League conducts its All-Star Game at the Mohegan Sun Arena.

McAndrew, the team captain, was selected to the all-star team along with alternate captains Payne and Gotoweski and Lake-Lehman student Hunter Hackling. The Blackhawks also had Tom Brady, an Easton player who joined the team last season, selected and Northwest's Logan Obes listed as an alternate.

McAndrew, Payne and Gotoweski captained Back Mountain to a 9-5-0 record and third place in the varsity stand-



Senior members of the Blackhawks hockey team are, front, Sean Jenkins. From left, second row, David Payne, Hunter Hackling, Casey McAndrew, Dylan Pilger, Eric Gotoweski and John Butler.

ings. The Blackhawks then routed Susquehanna Valley, 11-0, in the quarterfinals before having their season end with a 9-3 semifinal loss to Wyoming Valley West.

"It was disappointing to lose in the semis, but it was a good season," Back Mountain coach Jack Ciaccia said.

McAndrew centered the top line.

"He's a well-rounded, excellent hockey player," Ciaccia said.

Payne played both forward

and defense.

"He was tremendous for us in tough situations," Ciaccia said. "He has a great wrist shot that is very accurate."

Gotoweski led the defense. "He's a very physical player," Ciaccia said. "For any team, it's nice to have that physical player on defense that keeps an offense on its toes when it tries to enter your defensive zone."

Hackling played defense. Ciaccia praised his all-around ability, including his work on the special teams.

The Blackhawks drew players from eight school districts on the varsity level and six on the junior varsity level where about half the team was made up of Tunkhannock players.

Most of the team's games were played at the Revolution Ice Centre in Pittston, although some games were also held at the Coal Street Complex in Wilkes-Barre.

Dylan Pilger, Eric Yencheck and goalie Corey McAndrew were the other Dallas players on the varsity roster.

John Butler, Alex Hoyt and Jimmy Loeffel were the other varsity players from Lake-Lehman.

The Blackhawks also had some swing players, who were available for both the varsity and junior varsity rosters. Those players included Patrick Newhart and Liam Barrett from Dallas, J.P. Natishan and Zacharia Ouladelhadjahmed from Lake-Lehman and Paul Ciaccia, a home-schooled student from the Lake-Lehman district.

The junior varsity team had similar results, finishing third in the standings with an 8-3-1 record and winning a quarterfinal playoff before losing in the semifinals.

The JV team included J.D. Barrett from Dallas and Drew Poslock from Lake-Lehman.

## Dallas native runs for laptops for students

Special education teacher Liz Byron, originally from Dallas, is giving new meaning to "going the extra mile" to support her students.

This spring, Byron will run 155 miles through the Sahara Desert to raise \$50,000 for the urban public school where she teaches.

Byron has qualified to run in Marathon de Sables ("Marathon of the Sands"), a six-day, 155-mile self-supported "ultra-marathon" - the equivalent of six consecutive marathons - considered the toughest foot race on the planet.

She is running to raise funds to buy a classroom set of laptop computers for her students at Gardner Pilot Academy (GPA), a public school in Boston, MA where she works as a learning specialist in GPA's new sixth grade, as the former elementary school begins expansion of a K-8 school.

Byron, 28, was raised in Dallas and now lives in Allston, MA. She is a graduate of Bishop Hoban High School where she competed for the Argents in swimming, volleyball, cross-country, track and javelin while also participating in an indoor soccer league.

She is a 15-time High School All-American and Academic All American, a Pennsylvania high school state champion, a five-time state runner-up and has won seven other state medals.

She was named All-State 16 times and is a 16-time high school district champion, making her the most decorated high school district athlete of all time in Northeastern Pennsylvania.

While in high school, she broke or reset more than 75 team and area pool records.

She was named Scholar-Athlete of her graduating class, was captain of the swim team for two years and finished her high school career undefeated in the dual meet season.

A former member of the Bloomsburg Area YMCA, she is a two-time YMCA national



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### HOW TO HELP

To make a tax-deductible contribution to Liz Byron's fundraising campaign, visit [www.runforlaptops.org](http://www.runforlaptops.org).

champion, runner-up and has placed in the top 16 at YMCA Nationals numerous times.

Her parents, Tom and Joan Byron, live in Dallas.

Byron began teaching full-time in 2008. She earned her undergraduate degree from Boston College where she was a four-year Division 1 All-American swimmer and master's degrees from Harvard Graduate School of Education and Lesley University.

She has competed in numerous other endurance challenges, including six marathons, an Ironman triathlon and several other running, biking and swimming events.

The race begins in southern Morocco on April 5. Competitors must carry all personal belongings and food for the entire event in their backpacks, running across sand dunes and rocky terrain.

Event organizers provide only water and tents. Even in early April, midday temperatures in the Sahara can reach 120° F. Only 50-60 of the estimated 800 runners are Americans, with most competitors coming from European and African nations.

All of the funds Byron raise will go directly to the laptop initiative.

She is covering all of her own travel and registration costs. Marathon Sports is helping to publicize her efforts.