

Derlein rescued Jenks at state swim

Written by Jim Ecker

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There was a remarkable piece of coaching at the girls state swimming meet Saturday in Marshalltown and a remarkable performance by a young high school athlete.

Maybe you know the story by now, but it bears repeating.

Linn-Mar sophomore Jenn Jenks was all set to compete in the 200-yard freestyle when Shawn Thomsen, one of the meet officials who is also the boys swimming coach at Kennedy, walked over just before the race and told Jenks her swimsuit was in violation of IGHS AU rules because it had two visible company logos on it instead of only one.

Jenks was told she was disqualified from swimming in that event and had no choice but to walk away. However, another meet official said she could swim if they'd black out the second logo so it could not be seen.

The folks at the IGHS AU do not want their athletes walking around like billboards and Thomsen was only doing his job when he detected the violation and informed Jenks of the rule.

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The incident could have had a sad ending - how do you black out an emblem with all the other swimmers ready to race? - but Linn-Mar Coach Chad Derlein arrived quickly on the scene with a black sharpie and they managed to get it done.

That was quick thinking by Derlein, but that was not the remarkable piece of coaching. That came next.

Think about this: Jenks is one of the top swimmers in the state and was excited about performing in Marshalltown. She's ready to step on the blocks for the 200 freestyle, but suddenly she's told she cannot swim. Then a few minutes later, she's told she can swim if they'll cover up that logo.

Some athletes might have dissolved in tears, but Jenks managed to keep her composure. And right before she went back to the blocks, Derlein knew exactly what to say to get her re-focused on the race.

"I held her face and I said, 'You know what? You've got this,'" Derlein related Saturday after the meet.

"This has nothing to do with you. You've got this race. Go get it.' And she said, 'OK.'"

That was the remarkable piece of coaching. Derlein cut through the commotion and helped get his young athlete ready to compete.

And what followed next was a remarkable performance by Jenks, who kept her composure and swam a good race to finish second behind a girl she probably was not going to beat anyway.

That was great work by Derlein and a terrific performance by Jenks under adverse conditions. Jenks later came back to finish second in the 100 freestyle and she helped the Lions place third in the 400 freestyle relay and sixth in the 200 freestyle relay.

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Linn-Mar finished fifth in the team standings, matching the best showing in school history.

It was certainly one of the best coaching jobs in school history as well.