

GYMNAST OF THE YEAR

Bishop Ahr's Schwartz still rock solid

By GREG TUFARO
STAFF WRITER

Nicole Schwartz knew her scholastic gymnastics career was nearing an end.

The senior and her Bishop Ahr High School teammates were gathered in the gymnasium during one of their final practices before the NJSIAA championship when she turned to coach Brant Lutska and said: "This is the last Wednesday that I will ever practice at Bishop Ahr."

"It was really sad," Lutska said. "Her and Lauren (Moroch) were both very teary-eyed because it's been home for so long. On Friday (before states) at the end of practice they both kind of stopped and looked around."

The co-captains soaked in the atmosphere before heading to the Hunterdon Central Field House, where the Trojans went on a quest to capture their unprecedented fifth straight state crown.

Schwartz and Moroch carried the team, finishing fourth and 13th all-around, respectively, but some doubt remained whether the Trojans had won the title.

While the rest of her teammates believed a dominant Hillsborough team or perhaps an upstart Pascack Regional squad may have won, Schwartz remained optimistic.

"I don't think that she ever lost hope," Lutska said. "I truly believe that her and Lauren both knew what was the job and what we had to get done."

When Hillsborough was announced as the third-place finisher and Pascack Regional the runner-up, the Trojans finally realized what they had accomplished.

As Bishop Ahr was announced the team champion, several of Schwartz's teammates were reduced to tears.

"She is an extremely focused competitor and is always there to get the job done. She's one of those kids you can always count on to hit. Nicole is a meet kid, and when she gets to the meet she has a job to do and she gets it done. I can't think of a time when she didn't hit four for four."

Brant Lutska,

Bishop Ahr gymnastics coach, speaking on senior Nicole Schwartz.

She simply stood among the sea of gray, black and red with her jaw dropped open. The rock of the program in 2007 remained the rock of the program to the bitter end. Schwartz's teammates gathered around her in celebration.

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Schwartz, the Home News Tribune's 2007 Gymnast of the Year, placed third on floor (9.650), fifth on bars (9.575) and eighth on beam (9.425) at the NJSIAA finals.

"We weren't expected to win," she said. "We came here and proved that we can do it no matter where we are seeded. We just stayed under the radar. Everybody pulled together and worked hard. At Bishop Ahr, all we do is practice."

Practice made perfect for Schwartz, who also won the Greater Middlesex Conference and North 2 all-around titles.

She will continue her gymnastics career in college.



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■ Bishop Ahr's Nicole Schwartz performs on the uneven bars at the Greater Middlesex Conference gymnastics meet at South Brunswick High School on Oct. 19, 2006.