

Confusion reigns at Meet of Champions

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MANTUA - When the Morristown boys swim team finally left Gloucester County Institute of Technology on Sunday afternoon, they still weren't sure how to feel: Were they NJSIAA champions or not?

And in what events?

The Colonials got caught up in a controversial series of errors at the Meet of Champions that resulted in reversals and confusion.

At first, everything seemed golden for Morristown. Coming into the medley relay final as the No. 1 seed, the Colonials thought they touched first and defeated Mainland. That's what the scoreboard said, anyway: Morristown was ahead by two-tenths of a second.

Colonials head coach Donna Gelegonya leaped into assistant Bobby Sparano's arms in joy.

But the Colonials never collected gold medals. After an extended delay, the result was reversed, and Mainland was awarded first place due to what was originally described as a touch-pad malfunction.

"I've never been in a meet like this," Morristown sophomore Tommy Cromie said. "No one wants to win this way, with crazy touch-pad issues and official rulings. ... I'd like to consider myself a state champ, but I don't think I will until I get that medal and know what happened. I'm still just in shock."

But the chaos did not abate for the Colonials. Again the No. 1 seed in the 200 free relay, Morristown was able to just edge Hillsborough to take gold.

But this time, the scoreboard said the Raiders were first by 19-hundredths of a second.

And again, the result was reversed by meet officials following an extended delay.

During the awards ceremony for the 200 free relay, the Morristown guys insisted on switching positions with Hillsborough, so that team could also get photos at the top of the podium — something they didn't get a chance to do in the medley relay.

"I feel really bad for all the teams involved," Gelegonya said. "It's a great meet, and everybody put such an effort in, for it to come down to touch-pad problems. I feel really bad. I never want it to end on that note."

To finally resolve a controversy compared to the 1972 Olympic gold medal men's basketball game between the United States and Russia, NJSIAA meet director Paul Welsh "interpolated the numbers," averaging the touch-pad, watch times and backup-button times from each official in every lane of the medley relay final — but no backup was available for Morris-

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SEAN M. FITZGERALD/STAFF PHOTO

Morristown's Matthew Critchley (left) and Mainland's Brian McGroarty swim the breaststroke leg of the medley relay.

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town's lane. The result was a one-tenth of a second discrepancy, which was then added to the average finishing time for both Morristown and Mainland.

More than 45 minutes after the meet ended, Mainland was finally declared the winner — again. The result had been reversed three times.

By comparison, the 200 free relay was much simpler. Since the discrepancy between the pad time and the backup-button times was more than three-tenths of a second, the backups were used to give Morristown the gold.

“I think we’re state champs in both,” Colonials senior Matt Critchley said. “We’re just lucky to have been pushed by them, and hope that we pushed them. After the first relay, I was a little out of sorts. I channeled that anger and swam well the rest of the day. In that sense, I’m glad it happened.”