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While most college students are spending long hours at the library preparing for finals, the ISU swimming and diving team had its own finals to prepare for. The ’Birds competed in their last meet of the semester in Akron, Ohio this past weekend. The hard work and preparation the student-athletes put in all semester paid off with a third-place finish (1188.5) at the Zippy Invitational.

The Redbirds finished their first day of competition at Akron in third place after scoring 419 points. The third-place finish was also accompanied with several season and personal bests for the ISU athletes.

“We are off to a great start at this Invitational … I am very impressed with how the Redbirds performed and I believe stronger days are yet to come,” ISU head swimming coach Steve Paska said Friday.

Right from the get-go Illinois State put points on the board with a fourth-place finish in the 200-yard freestyle relay. The relay team made up of Katherine Nelson, Erica Halley, Kristin Horney and Marissa Yontz recorded a season-best time of 1:35.39.

Senior Danielle Schumacher showed her veteran experience with a first-place finish in the 500-yard freestyle (4:57.52).

“I am very impressed with her race strategy, and she finished the event strong. This win was a great way for her to start her final Zippy Invitational,” Paska said.

Another key contributor to the Redbirds was Cecelia Holmes. She earned a third-place finish and a personal best time in the 500-yard freestyle (4:59.71).

The women’s diving team also competed at the Invitational and Wenting Zhang was a force to be reckoned with. She placed first in the 1-meter boards in both prelims (274.35) and finals (312.50).

“We had a solid performance all around and Wenting had a great event during the finals,” ISU head diving coach Phil Hoffmann said. “I look forward to see what the student-athletes bring to the table tomorrow.”

After the second day of competition, the Redbirds remained in third place with 880.5 points, trailing behind Toledo (1017) and Ohio (898).

A large amount of those points came from Zhang’s performance. Continuing the momentum from Friday night’s victory, Zhang finished first in both the preliminary rounds and finals of the 3-meter dive. On top of the first-place finish, Zhang broke the Illinois State school record and

the Zippy Invitational record with a score of 330.05. She is also the first Redbird diver to take first in a diving event at the Invitational.

“Today all seven of our divers scored points for the team on the 3-meter event and it was fantastic. Wenting had a great weekend, but I think all of our divers put forth a solid effort,” Hoffmann said.

The ISU swimming team continued the fight for the Zippy title and recorded even more season and personal best swims.

Senior Jeanette Nolte swam a personal best time in the 100-yard butterfly prelims, advancing to finals. In the finals, she finished in fourth place with a time of 56.53. Alexis Nash also swam a personal-best in the event and finished seventh (57.65).

In the last event of the night, Schumacher, Nolte, Tori Alland and Holmes took fourth place in the 800-yard freestyle relay with a time of 7:35.17. Schumacher led the relay team and marked a season best split of 1:50.75.

“Today was a very good day for us … The atmosphere is great and everyone is swimming fast, so these have been great races to watch. I am looking forward to the Redbirds closing out the Zippy tomorrow,” Paska said.

In the final day of competition, the ’Birds maintained their third-place spot with 1188.5 points, behind Toledo (1697) and Ohio (1211).

“Overall I am very pleased with the fall semester and how we ended it this weekend in Ohio … I’m very proud of how the swimmers performed this weekend,” Paska said.

Valerie Jones, Holmes, Schumacher and Keely Hunt all qualified for finals and recorded season best swims in the 1650-yard freestyle event.

Nelson, Yontz, Halley and Alland all qualified for finals in the 100-yard freestyle. Nelson finished in fifth place (51.73) and Yontz finished in eighth place (52.60). Both swimmers recorded season bests in this event.

In the 400-yard freestyle relay the Redbirds racked up points with a fourth- and fifth-place finish. The fourth-place team made up of Nelson, Yontz, Nolte and Halley recorded a season best time of 3:30.38.

With their competitions for the fall semester complete, the Redbirds will return to competition Jan. 12 when they host Nebraska-Lincoln.