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Winning streaks and championship streaks are exciting to keep a track of in high school sports. No matter what league or what sport, when that championship streak continues through more than a decade, those in that program feel a bit of pressure.

Wheatmore High School swimmer Katie Fritz and the Warriors have answered every challenge once again this year as WHS recently captured its 11th straight conference championship.

Fritz won the 100-meter freestyle, the 50-meter freestyle and was a member of the winning 200-meter and 400-meter relay teams that took home conference titles. The 71 total points earned by Wheatmore was more than enough to outdistance Providence Grove (27), Jordan-Matthews (19) and Trinity (0) for the Piedmont Athletic Conference 2-A championship.

Fritz was named the conference swimmer of the year and took home most valuable honors for the league meet.



*Wheatmore senior Katie Fritz. Photo provided.*

"It's her work ethic and determination," WHS swim coach Brandon Thalasinis said. "She is by far one of the biggest workhorses I have ever met. She's in the pool every morning before school or after school, she makes all our practices and all her club's practices. She's our senior captain and I lean heavily on her as a coach."

Fritz will be competing in regional action this Saturday in Greensboro, hoping to qualify for her fourth straight state swimming championship meet..

Last season, she placed fourth in the state 1-A/2-A meet with a time of 24.20 in the 50-freestyle and fifth in the 100-freestyle in 53.89. That coming after she placed second in the regional in the 50-freestyle and third in the 100-freestyle.

In 2019, she was a state finalist in the 50-freestyle, taking sixth place in 24.26 after earning a regional title in that event in 24.39. She also placed third in the 100-freestyle (54.51) in that regional.

As a freshman, she placed third in the state meet with a clocking of 25.05 in the 50-freestyle.

Fritz, who accepted a scholarship to continue her swimming career at Campbell University. said she

began swimming when her mother signed her up for a summer league at the age of seven. She's been swimming and swimming very well ever since.

"She said to try it to see if I would like it and I loved it," said Fritz, who began attending a year-round swim program at the age of nine. "It's fun to have a team sport, but you have to do it for yourself as well and I like that aspect of it."

"As good as she is in the pool, she is just as good in the classroom," Thalasin said. She is, all-around, the perfect definition of a student-athlete. She checks all the boxes."

All this success almost never happened. But through determination, dedication, hard work and with a lot of courage, Fritz overcame something that would have stopped many swimmers.

Diagnosed with scoliosis, which is a sideways curvature of the spine that occurs during a growth spurt, in the summer prior to her freshman season at WHS, Fritz underwent a spinal fusion. She was out of the water for just three months.

"I was trying to get on the high school team, my older sister (Kyndall) was already on the team and it was definitely challenging," said Fritz, who admitted it was difficult at times to continue her rehabilitation and training. "I wasn't able to get fast times in the beginning and it was really frustrating. My mom told me not to give up. So I didn't focus on the negativity and focused on just getting faster."

It worked.

This year has been challenging as well. Fritz missed two weeks after testing positive for the coronavirus. But once she was cleared to return, Thalasin said it looked as if she never skipped a beat.

"She missed two weeks of practice and one meet, and when she came back, she went to one practice and was ready to go to the meet," the second-year swimming coach said.

Fritz said she's back to her routine of seven workouts per week, sometimes "doubling" her workouts in one day.

This is the time of year when things get a little nerve-racking for Fritz.

"It does and it doesn't," Fritz said of feeling more comfortable after competing in three state meets already. "I get nervous every single meet. I will try the hardest I have ever tried this year because it's my senior year and I want to finish on a good note."

No doubt she certainly will do just that.



*Katie Fritz will be swimming for Campbell University next year. Photo provided.*