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'I feel really lucky'

Bishop Chatard swimmer undaunted by disability

By Paul Shepherd

Star correspondent

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Kendra White hears stories of others who share experiences similar to hers and considers herself fortunate.

The Bishop Chatard senior was born with the upper part of her right leg missing, the lower half in its place. She's endured surgeries and wears a prosthesis, but it hasn't kept White from pursuing her goals.

White, who lives in Fishers, is a member of the Chatard swimming team. She's been swimming competitively since the third grade and is glad she warmed up to a sport she once considered her "last resort" for a shot at athletic competition.

"Just to prove to myself that I can do something and don't have to feel sorry for myself, I'm actually really proud that I did it," White said.

"I know that there are a lot of other people, and they only have their arms to swim with. I heard of a guy who had one arm and no legs. I feel really lucky that I have two arms and a leg to swim with. That always encourages me when I hear other stories like mine."

White had surgery as an infant to have her right foot reshaped to form a knee and was fitted with a prosthetic leg at 2 years old. She is refitted with a new prosthesis about every two years and takes the realistic-looking limb off when she swims.

White possesses a strong upper body, which has helped her compete in the backstroke and butterfly.

White tried a new event, the 500-yard freestyle at Chatard's Jan. 8 dual meet at Indiana Deaf, and recorded her first win of the season. She hopes to continue swimming that event this year.

Chatard returns to the pool Tuesday in the Brebeuf Jesuit Invitational at the Natatorium at IUPUI.

"She's an amazing swimmer," said Chatard coach Terese Schurger. "Everyone else can have a better push off and start, but she still holds her own. She's probably one of the hardest workers on my team. She's definitely one of the (physically) strongest swimmers I have."

White tried cheerleading and gymnastics when she was younger but the weight from her prosthesis -- which is made from wood, metal and plastic -- made those sports difficult. She has found her niche in swimming.

"At first, my mom kind of hesitated," White said. "She didn't want me out there in front of everyone, taking off my leg, but it never really bothered me. I think of myself as a normal person.

"(Swimming is) actually easy for me. I don't really think, 'Oh I have one leg, I can't do it.' I just try my hardest and hope that I'm as good as everyone else."