

Eight records broken at Ryan Downing swim meet

Sam Storey is wasting little time hitting his stride in the pool.

By Jonathan Russell on October 31, 2011



Photo by VINCE FEDOROFF

BACK AGAIN – MacKenzie Downing, Glacier Bear turned national swim team member, returned to compete in the Ryan Downing Memorial Swim Meet at the Canada Games Centre over the weekend. MacKenzie also held a Fly Camp on Sunday for the young swimmers.

Sam Storey is wasting little time hitting his stride in the pool.

The 14-year-old broke a Ryan Downing Memorial Swim Meet record – and a Whitehorse Glacier Bears Swim Club record – in the 13/14 boys 100-metre IM with a time of one minute, 15.93 seconds.

“I felt actually like I could have gone faster, but it felt great,” Storey said on the deck of the Canada Games Centre pool following the final heats on Saturday.

Haley Braga broke two meet records in the 13/14 girls age group, posting a time of 1:11.92 in the 100m backstroke and 4:52.13 in the 400m freestyle.

"It wasn't a PB (personal best) by any means, but it's the first meet of the year, a training meet, just working through it, so it was OK," Braga said of her time in the 400m free.

Other meet records were broken by Erin McArthur in the girls 13/14 100m IM (1:13.97) and Adrian Robinson in the boys 11/12 50m backstroke (38.33).

The undeniable star of the show, however, was MacKenzie Downing, Canadian National Swim Team swimmer and younger sister to Ryan Downing, who passed away in 1996 at age 13.

In her first Ryan Downing meet in more than five years, MacKenzie set three records in the girls 15 and over age group, in the 50m fly (29.09), the 200m free (2:05.03) and the 100m fly (1:03.60).

She called the experience of competing in the meet "amazing."

"It was better than I hoped for," the 25-year-old said. "I was really excited to come back ... the energy, everyone was excited to have me here. I was racing the little kids in the small pool. I'm really glad there was a lot of excitement and people did care that I came, so that was really good."

MacKenzie most recently competed at the FISU World University Games in Shenzhen, China, where she was a finalist in the 200m butterfly.

The Ryan Downing meet is the beginning of another cycle in the swim season.

And personal best times are difficult to achieve on the first shot, MacKenzie said.

"It's pretty early in the season," she said. "I did a lot of events, kind of trained through the meet. I did my normal training schedule yesterday. At this point in the season I was pretty happy with my times and they're a good indicator of where I'm going.

"You're not going to go any best times yet but it's good to get some training under your belt and actually noticing in the 200 or the longer races you're actually feeling more in shape."

She looked in top form when she raced her father, David Downing, in the 50m fly. He may have had a head start.

"I think he might have jumped the gun a bit there," MacKenzie laughed. "But I was worried that first 25; he was really far ahead of me. I thought he was going to get me. It turned out to be a really close race, so that was good, a lot of excitement."

Braga – who competed in the AAA Canadian Age Group Nationals in Montreal and finished with the Western Canada Summer Games last summer – also got the chance to compete against MacKenzie over the weekend.

"In the 100m fly, I saw her for the first 50 and then she went way ahead," Braga said.

"It's really inspiring," Braga added of Downing's success Outside. "Coming from a small town, we've had lots of good swimmers, like Alex (Gabor) and Bronwyn (Pasloski), MacKenzie, there's so many. It's just inspiring."

Storey agreed.

"She's an amazing swimmer," Storey said. "It's incredible to know that such a good athlete can come from such a small town like Whitehorse – it's awesome."

MacKenzie remembers her own role models within the club as she was coming through the ranks as a Glacier Bear.

"I looked up to some of the older Glacier Bears," MacKenzie said. "There was a girl, Gina Ursich, she swam at the national level I think, and she went away to swim at university. So there were a couple of older kids who I looked up to growing up and seeing them in the club. But they didn't really continue (in the sport) as much after they left, so it was more while they were here, looking up to the older kids."

Now, she has her sights set on the Olympic trials for the 2012 London Games.

The meets she will compete in over the next six months will be in preparation for April's trials, including the Canada Cup in Toronto at the end of November and the US Grand Prix.

Competing in Whitehorse was a good start to that process, she said.

"It feels really comfortable, it feels really natural, and it feels like I'm home and I'm with the club," Downing said. "Even though I don't know a lot of the younger kids anymore, because I've been away for so long, they all want to talk to me. It's just really comfortable; it's just a great, relaxed feeling."
