

# Yukon swimmer butterflies to silvers at Canada Cup

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By Tom Patrick

Dan Galbraith/CGC



Mackenzie Downing during the Commonwealth Games in New Delhi, India, in October. Downing won two silver medals at the Canada Cup in Etobicoke, Ontario, on the weekend.

Days after receiving Sport Yukon's International Female Athlete of the Year award on Friday, Whitehorse native Mackenzie Downing was already back in the pool adding to her list of accomplishments.

Competing at the Canada Cup short course competition in Etobicoke, Ontario, on the weekend, Downing and Glacier Bears' Alexandra Gabor were making A finals to start the swim season.

"It was really positive and motivating for the rest of the year to be swimming that well this early in the season," said Downing.

Improving over the two bronze medals she won at the event last year, Downing won silvers in the 100- and 200-metre butterfly events. She also finished ninth in the "50 fly."

"I was a little more happy with my results this year," said Downing. "I was really happy with it because the Commonwealth Games went so late in the year - we took a week off afterwards - so my team was worried going into it because we didn't know if we were in good enough shape."

At the Commonwealth Games in October, Downing, who currently swims for the Victoria Academy, finished in the top-10 in three butterfly events with her best being sixth in the 200-metre. Her performance at the Games in Delhi, India, played a large part in her winning the Sport Yukon award.

"I was really excited about it," said Downing. "I didn't know if I was going to win it this year because there are so many great athletes coming out of the Yukon right now."

Although she did not reach any finals, Downing set personal best short-course times in the 200- and 400-metre freestyle races over the weekend.

"Butterfly is definitely my specialty, but I used to be a pretty decent freestyle swimmer," said Downing. "I'm trying to get back into it now. I don't expect it to be on par with my butterfly."

"It's good to have a bigger repertoire of events; the 200-metre freestyle is a pretty open relay event in Canada right now, so I might be able to make that. Canada has a much better chance at medaling in relay events than the individual events."

Gabor, who won gold in the 200-metre freestyle at the same event a year ago, making her a national champion, is not disappointed with the absence of hardware or personal best times in Etobicoke. She did not taper her training for the competition, setting her focus on the much larger, more important World Aquatic Championships being held in two weeks in Dubai, UAE.

"I wasn't rested, so I wasn't expecting to win or anything, because they were all rested," said Gabor. "I thought I did pretty well considering where I'm at right now, with all the training."

"I obviously wasn't expecting (personal bests) - when I set those I was really rested and was going for best times and records. Right now I'm still training for Dubai."

Despite continuing her regular training regiment up to the Cup, Gabor was not far from the podium in her best event, the 200-metre freestyle, finishing fourth just a half second behind third. She also reached the B final in both the 50- and 100-metre freestyle, coming 13th in the former and 16th in the later.

This month's trip to Dubai will be Gabor's second appearance at the World Aquatic Championships, having competed at last year's event in Rome.

Not only did she become the first Glacier Bear to compete at that level last year, Gabor helped the national team reach eighth in the 4x200-metre freestyle. She also finished 20th in the 200-metre freestyle, leaving BC records in her wake.

"I feel like I'm getting on track," said Gabor. "Last year wasn't the best year I've had - right track, wrong direction, sort of thing. I'm training right now for Dubai, that's the short term. The long term would be for the worlds trials, which are early April. That's the big one."

Gabor, who was named Swim Yukon's Swimmer of the Year at the Sport Yukon Awards Night on Friday, is currently scheduled to swim the 200- and 400-metre freestyle events in Dubai and will likely join a Canadian relay team in a race or two.

"The coaches haven't decided yet," said Gabor. "We'll probably find out when we get down there."

Last week, Gabor announced that she has signed a letter of intent to attend and swim for Stanford University in California on a full scholarship starting next fall.