

Downing makes two finals in Delhi

Wednesday October 13, 2010

By Tom Patrick

Dan Galbraith/CGC



Yukon's Mackenzie Downing competes in the 50-metre butterfly on October 4 in Delhi, India.

Early mornings, long commutes and even a touch of illness were not enough to keep swimmer Mackenzie Downing from top-10 results at the Commonwealth Games last week in Delhi, India.

Competing in three butterfly events and reaching two finals, the Whitehorse native finished eighth in the 50-metre, ninth in the 100-metre and sixth in the 200-metre.

"I was pretty happy with it - it was definitely better than the Pan Pacific Championships, so I was happy with the improvement in my times," said the former Whitehorse Glacier Bears swimmer. "They're not exactly where I'd like them to be, but I'm going in the right direction."

"It was just such a hard competition with everything going on. Just travelling from the village to the venue took a long time - we had to start really early. And I ended up getting sick, so it was just really hard.

"No one at the meet was swimming super fast, so it was more about competing and getting through the meet. So I think I did really good job of that."

While her best result came in the "200 fly," Downing is most pleased with her performance in the 50-metre, setting a personal best of 27.1 seconds in the semifinal of the event. She raced in the final on her 24th birthday the following day.

"The 50-metre I was the happiest with because it was my first best time in butterfly since 2007," said Downing. "I didn't even know I was swimming that race until the day before the meet. My coach told me I was in it and I thought, 'Let's just see how it goes.' I didn't expect to make the final - I didn't even expect to make the semi.

"It was a nice surprise and a nice way to start the meet off."

Undoubtedly experiencing the same concerns as the other Canadian athletes before the start of the Games, with news reports of Delhi being grievously unprepared to host, Downing feels the situation may have been overblown by the media.

"I think it was fine," said Downing. "There was so much negative press going into it, I was expecting it to be so much worse than it was. Obviously there were things that could have been better, but with any type of games that size, it's a logistical nightmare for the people hosting it. So it's really hard for everything to go smoothly."

Downing earned her spot on Canada's Commonwealth team with strong results at the Pan Pacific Games in Irvine, California, in August, finishing seventh in the 200-metre butterfly - second out of Canadians - and 14th in the 100-metre butterfly.

Downing, who holds seven national titles, left the territory five years ago to study at, and swim for, the University of Victoria. Despite her absence from the Glacier Bears, she still holds seven club records (three short-course, four long-course) all from the 2003, 2004 seasons.

The Greek and Roman studies major has spent the last five years swimming on the UVic swim team and now trains at the Victoria Academy, the national training centre, and competes out of Pacific Coast Swimming, a club team associated with the University of Victoria. (She is no longer eligible for the university team, having completed five seasons on it.)

Her recent successes this summer come after a disastrous 2009 season that almost convinced Downing to leave competitive swimming.

After years of growing success, making national team in 2006, going to her first world championship in 2007 and winning gold and silver at the World University Games, Downing's rise through the rankings came to a unfortunate end when she failed to make Canada's Olympic team, a lifelong dream of hers.

"That was just so devastating because I worked my whole life towards it," Downing told the News in August. "I kept swimming but it took a long time to get over that mentally and emotionally. Then in 2009, I was injured a lot of the year and I was sick. So it seemed like everything was going wrong at the same time."

Earlier in the summer, Downing produced A final results at American Grand Prix events in Santa Clara and Los Angeles.

Downing then qualified for Canada's Pan Pacific team in July at the Summer National Championships in Victoria, swimming to a second-place finish in the 200-metre butterfly and seventh in the 100-metre butterfly.

Her next big meet will be the Canadian Spring Nationals, which doubles as the trials for the world championships, in April.

Contact Tom Patrick at

tomp@yukon-news.com