

# Downing creates buzz at memorial meet

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By Tom Patrick

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*Tom Patrick/Yukon News*



**MacKenzie Downing competes in the 200-metre freestyle during the Ryan Downing Memorial Swim Meet at the Canada Games Centre on Saturday.**

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The presence of Whitehorse's MacKenzie Downing boosted excitement levels among young Glacier Bears at the Ryan Downing Memorial Swim Meet Friday and Saturday at Canada Games Centre.

"It was a good opportunity to swim with her," said Glacier Bear Haley Braga, 14, who set two meet records. "It's inspiring because she started off here too. It's a small town, but we've had some really good swimmers."

"When I heard I was swimming against MacKenzie I was, like, 'Yes! I'm swimming against MacKenzie!' said Adrian Robinson, another Bear to set a meet record. "I was so happy."

In fact, swimming in the meet named after her brother for the first time in six years was a big deal for Downing as well.

"It was amazing; it was better than I hoped for," said Downing. "I was really excited to come back and was really excited to be here. Just the energy - everyone was excited to have me here. I was racing little kids in the small pool and I'm glad there was a lot of excitement."

Downing, a member of the national swim team, set three of the eight meet records broken over the weekend, bringing her total to eight with ones in 2001 and 2003. For the

records, Downing swam the 50-metre butterfly in 29.09 seconds, the 200-metre freestyle in 2:05.03 and the 100-metre butterfly in 1:03.60.

"It's pretty early in the season and I've been training really hard," said the 25-year-old. "I did a lot of events and trained through the meet – I did my regular training schedule yesterday and swam the meet. But for this part of the season, I'm pretty happy with my times."

The meet, which had about 100 participants, saw one club record fall as well. Sam Storey set his first career club and meet record, completing the 100-metre individual medley in 1:15.93 seconds in the boys 13-14 division.

"I could have gone faster, but it was definitely a personal best," said Storey. "I messed up on a turn big time (between) backstroke and breaststroke."

"It was definitely awesome. She's an amazing swimmer," he added of having Downing at the meet. "It was really neat to watch her swim."

Braga's records were in the girls 13-14 category, swimming the 100-metre backstroke in 1:11.92 – for a personal best – and in the 400 free in 4:52.13.

"It wasn't a personal best by any means, but it was a good race and felt good," said Braga. "We've been working on a lot of technique in practice, so it was a good chance to test it out."

Robinson, who moved to Whitehorse from Botswana two years ago, swam the 100-metre backstroke in 38.33 for a meet record in the boys 11-12 category. At last year's Downing meet, Robinson set four meet records.

"I think the fly-kick up to the red line really helped me," said Robinson. "I was really tired, but I just kept pushing it."

Also setting a meet record was Erin McArthur in the girls 13/14 category, completing the 100 IM in 1:13.97.



The meet was also Stephanie Dixon's first as the new head coach of the Glacier Bears.

"I think the meet went really well and I was really proud to be part of a team that cares so much about team dynamics and cheering for each other," said Dixon. "It seemed to be about so much more than just winning and prize money. Those things are always exciting, but these kids care about each other and want to see each do well."

"At the end of the day, I want to see these kids turn into great people, not just great athletes."

*Tom Patrick/Yukon News*

**Rennes Lindsay during the 100-metre breaststroke.**

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"I thought she did a really great job. She's a good coach," said Braga. "She has a lot of energy and has a lot of tips and advice. She has an interesting approach to helping us learn. We do a lot of technique and focus a lot on the foundations of swimming."

There was a little family rivalry going on at the meet, with Downing taking on her father David Downing in a fun 50-metre butterfly race. Even with David getting a head start by half a pool-length, MacKenzie took the win.

"I think he might have jumped the gun a bit there," said Downing. "I was worried over that first 25 (metres) – he was really far ahead of me. I thought he was going to get me.

"But it turned out to be a really close race."

Downing, who conducted a butterfly seminar on Sunday, will be attending a Canada Cup national qualifier at the end of the month in Toronto and will train in Florida in the New Year before some of the US Grand Prix races. However, the apex of her season will be the Olympic trials in April.

"Most of the meets (this season) are in preparation for that," said Downing.

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