

Banbridge Swimmers Compete at 2020 McCullagh International

The Swim Ireland '2020 McCullagh International Gala' took place in Bangor Aurora from Thursday 20th to Sunday 23rd February. This year's competition was run in a similar timeline to the Tokyo 2020 Olympic Games with the heats taking place in the evening and the respective finals taking place the following morning. The competition this year promised to be thrilling with Team GB's Adam Peaty, Ross Murdoch and Siobhan O'Connor competing alongside Irish Stars Mona McSharry, Shane Ryan, and Brendan Hyland. Banbridge were as always well represented with a team of sixteen swimmers, who were both equally pleased have earned qualifying times to compete, but to see some world class swimming by these outstanding athletes. Swimming was split into sessions over the weekend with the Age Group (Males aged 12-14 years and females aged 12-13) heats in the afternoon and the Open (Males 15+ and females 14+) heats in the evening.

Thursday - Session 1 the Age Group swimmers and the 400m events, these were all heat declared with no finals. First to hit the water were Darcy Walker (13) and Katie Macfarlane (13) in the 400IM, and the girls both earned the first of the weekends medals, with Katie taking silver in a time of 5.35.21 and Darcy taking bronze in a time of 5.45.23. In the 400M freestyle Olivia Miskelly (13) and Pearse Rice (14) both swam well with Olivia finishing in a Personal Best (PB) time of 5.02.31 and Pearse in a time of 4.53.48.

Thursday - Session 2 and the first of the Open Heats. This evening Banbridge had 7 swimmers competing. Rachel Blemmings (16) and Julia Knox (17) were first in the water in the 400IM. Rachel finishing in a time of 5.46.20, while Julia swam in 4.59.97 and she booked her place in the final tomorrow morning.

Matthew McKee (16) and Adam Wilson (17) then took on the gruelling 200M butterfly. Matthew swam in 2.24.16, while Adam finished in a time of 2.17.59. Alana Burns-Atkin (14) also swam the 200M butterfly in a time of 2.32.79 and she earned her place in the 'B' final tomorrow.

Rachel and Julia then returned to the water this time swimming the 100M breaststroke, Rachel in a time of 1.22.69 and Julia in 1.16.47 were she made another 'B' final tomorrow.

Final event for the local swimmers in this session was the distance event of the Male 800M Freestyle and Jack Lennon (15) and Niall McGeown (16) were both swimming the distance. This was a heat declared swim with no overall final. Both boys swam well Jack finished in 9.25.26 and Niall in 9.22.61.

Friday morning – Session 3 saw Julia Knox and Alana Burns Atkin return to the water to swim their finals from the previous evening. Alana swam the 200m butterfly to a new PB time of 2.31.80 and finishing 6th overall. Julia then swam the 100m breast finishing well coming 2nd overall.

Friday – Session 4 back to the Age group swimmers and Katie Macfarlane competing in the 200IM. She finished in 2.36.96 and claimed her place in the final's tomorrow morning. Pearse Rice swam in the 200M freestyle in a time of 2.18.54.

Girls Lauren Burns-Atkin (12) – the youngest of the Banbridge team competing, along with Darcy Walker and Olivia Miskelly all swam the 200m Breaststroke. Darcy swam in 2.59.01 (PB), Olivia in 3.08.69 and Lauren in 3.14.72. Darcy and Olivia both made times to swim again in the finals tomorrow.

Liam Og Mathers (14) swam the 200m backstroke finishing in 2.31.49 (PB) and booked his place in the age group final. Katie Macfarlane swam in the last swim of the session and the gruelling 200m butterfly, she finished in a time of 2.41.60 and made a second place in the finals.

Friday - Session 5 and after a short break the open heats continued with Jack Lennon and Niall McGeown swimming the 400IM, Niall finished in a super time of 4.56.36 – a super PB, while Jack swam in 5.15.14.

Julia Knox swam the 200m freestyle in 2.06.90 and booked a place in the 'B' final. Followed by Finlay Wright (16) swimming the 200m freestyle in a PB time of 2.03.76. Rachel Blemmings was in the water again this time swimming the 200m breaststroke in 2.57.90. Adam Wilson followed swimming the 200m breaststroke also swimming in 2.36.38.

This saw the end of today's heats and a well-earned dinner and early night were on the cards for everyone as Saturday morning – Session 6 saw a number of Banbridge swimmers return to the pool to swim the finals.

Katie Macfarlane swam the 200IM and picked up her second medal of the event coming 2nd in a time of 2.35.03. Following this win Darcy Walker then came 3rd place in the 200M breaststroke which she swam in 2.56.63. Olivia Miskelly who also swam the 200M breaststroke final finished 10th overall in a time of 3.10.50. Liam Og Mathers came 9th in his final of the 200M backstroke finishing in a time of 2.31.19 (PB). Katie Macfarlane then swam again in the 200M butterfly final and this time she won gold in a time of 2.33.03 – superb swimming from these youngest Age Group Swimmers.

In the Open finals Julia Knox swam the 200M free coming 4th overall in the 'B' final in a time of 2.06.72.

Saturday – Session 7 the last of the age group heats and first in the water today was Bailey Breen (14) swimming the 200IM in a time of 2.42.48. Olivia Miskelly and Katie Macfarlane then competed in the 200m freestyle. Olivia finishing in 7th place in a time of 2.21.30 (PB) and earned a place in tomorrow morning finals, Katie swam well also finishing in 2.25.63 and was first reserve for the finals.

Lewis Gray (14) swam the 200m breaststroke making a new PB in 2.59.33, he was second reserve for the finals. Followed by Darcy Walker in the 200m backstroke where she booked her place in the finals in a PB time of 2.40.49.

Final of the heats for the Age groups and Lewis Gray, Liam Og Mathers and Bailey Breen all swam the 200m butterfly, Liam finished in 2.33.29 (PB), Bailey in 2.38.86 and Lewis in 2.39.76, Liam and Bailey made the finals while Lewis was first reserve.

Saturday - Session 8 last of the open heats and Julia Knox was swimming the 50m breaststroke swimming in a time of 34.95 seconds and taking a spot in Sundays 'B' final. Matthew McKee returned to the water in the 100m fly where he finished in a time of 1.02.40. Alana Burns-Atkin continued with her butterfly swimming this time swimming the 100m distance finishing in a PB time of 1.08.47 to make the finals.

Niall McGeown and Adam Wilson then swam the 200IM. Adam made a PB time of 2.17.19, as did Niall finishing in 2.20.96. Julia then also swam the 200IM, and a great swim it was finishing in 2.22.80 and taking a place in the 'A' final on Sunday morning. In the final heat Finlay Wright swam the 400m free and he swam well finishing in a time of 4.27.73.

Last session on Sunday morning – Session 9 and the last group of finals. In the Age Group finals, Olivia finished 7th overall in a PB time of 2.21.01, Darcy came 4th in the 200M backstroke in a time of 2.36.94. Liam

Og Mathers and Bailey Breen then swam the 200M butterfly final, with Liam coming 9th overall in 2.33.77 and Bailey coming 10th in a time of 2.41.07.

Alana Burns Atkin then swam the 100m Fly in the Open 'B' final where she placed 7th overall in a time of 1.08.70. Julia Knox had two finals to swim – the 50M breaststroke 'B' final which she finished in 1st place in a time of 34.35, then in the 200IM 'A' final she finished in an impressive 6th place overall in a time of 2.23.16.

After the competition Head Coach David Wilson said "I believe this competition was a wonderful experience for the Banbridge swimmers. They were able to not only see some of the best swimmers in the world perform, but also witness how they look after their own warm up, cool down etc. The majority of our swimmers performed well some making finals in what was an open gala (age does not matter). There is little doubt the time spend traveling to Bangor on a Sunday evening after already swimming on Sunday morning has paid dividends. We as a coaching group hope that we can access further long course training when the new pool in Craigavon opens. For swimmers at this level who wish to try to make national squads Long course training is a must".

As always, a great weekend of swimming by everyone who competed and special congratulations to the Banbridge Team who continue to work so hard. The busy swimming season continues with the Easter Qualifying Gala in Bangor taking place in a few weeks followed by the Irish Long Course Open Championships in Dublin at the start of April.