



Banbridge young swimmers make waves at Irish National Championships

13 young swimmers from Banbridge Amateur Swimming Club competed in the Irish National Championships Division 2 competition which took place in the University Limerick Arena on Thursday 11th– Sunday 14th July. A record number of 864 swimmers across Ireland were competing over the 4 days and the Banbridge squad were participating in over 20 events in what is rated as one of the most prestigious competitions in the swimming calendar.

The squad impressively achieved 7 medals, 3 Gold, 1 Silver and 3 Bronze, with super swimmer Lewis Gray receiving 5 of the medals attained.

Whilst a few of the squad had competed at this level previously most of the swimmers were competing for the first time having qualified through the Swim Ulster Regional Meets earlier this year.

One of the youngest team members Ben Wilson (11) kicked off Banbridge's races on Day 1 in the male 200 freestyle race, Ben swam a good fast first race, the first of many over the 4 days. Katlo Matlhodi (14) was up next performing well in his race and recording his first PB of the competition as he took 2.49 seconds of his entry time.

Lewis Gray (13) put his 100m backstroke skills into action and swam an impressive 1.13.03 which gained him a silver medal. This was the first of the winning streak not only for Lewis but also for the squad, it certainly meant the morning swimmers ended on a high.

In the afternoon session Mia Mulholland (11) was the first of the girls to swim in the 100m Backstroke. Mia swam hard and fast dropping 2.8 seconds to give her a PB time of 1.23.89. This was a great first swim for Mia.

The next race was girls 11/12-year-old 400m IM, Lauren Burns-Atkins (11) was the only swimmer of the squad to qualify for this race. Lauren executed each stroke with strength and speed, dropping over 15seconds on her entry time and was placed 11th in her age category.

The squad returned on Day 2 raring to go with more swimmers competing in a series of different events. Ciara Daly (13) swam a strong and steady 100m freestyle for the girls and Lewis returned to the pool for 100m Breaststroke, joined by Alan Karchenko (11) who was competing in competition for the first time. Lewis swam out of his skin, achieving Gold (1.20.02) and Alan achieved a PB (1.35.95) and was first reserve for the finals.

It was the boys turn for 100m Freestyle with both Matthew Rice and Lewis achieving PB's. The swimmers were certainly in the zone and whilst the sun was shining outside the heat was building in the pool. Parents, supporters, coaches were keeping the momentum going as the competition was heading towards the half way point.





It was the girls turn for the 100m breaststroke, a popular race from the Banbridge squad with Sarah Macauley (13) and Kirstie McCall (14) competing in their first race of the competition and Lauren and Ciara returning to the pool. The girls were on fire with Ciara and Sarah pushing hard and achieving PB's for the 13-year-old category (1.31.59) and (1.30.89) respectively. Lauren and Kirsty swam exceptionally well in their heats against tough competition.

These exceptional girl breaststrokers all featured again in the girls 200m Freestyle relay, fast kicks, white water and strong changeovers meant a strong race. The competition again was tough at this national level and they achieved a 2.14.18 time for this race.

Super Saturday had arrived, with the squad entered into 7 events it was definitely a busy day of racing and sibling cheerleaders and junior Club members Samantha Burns Atkins, Erin Daly, Ethan Gray and Alex Karchenco were supporting from the gallery, keeping spirits high for the Banbridge competitors.

Ben, Lewis and Katlo were all racing in the 100m butterfly, both Lewis and Katlo raced superbly in the heats and both made the finals with Lewis gaining another gold medal of the competition with an impressive time and PB of 1.09.65. Katlo also achieved a PB (1.14.06) and was placed 5th in the 14-year-old category.

It was a quick turnaround for Ben for the 400m freestyle and he was joined by Tom King (15) who was swimming for the first time. Ben, swam a good race within his age category and Tom dropped 4.3 seconds on his entry time and achieved a PB (4.57.10).

It was the boys turn for the 200m medley relay and Ben, Katlo, Matthew were joined by Robbie Gilmore (14). They boys swam hard and fast with good split times and change overs and achieved a final time of 2.33.09.

It was a busy afternoon session with Lauren, Sarah and Alex King (11) all participating in the 100m butterfly. Lauren dropped 5.3 seconds for a good time of 1.29.03, a good swim by Alex (1.35.83) and Sarah made the finals achieving a PB of 1.17.10 ranking 6th overall, this was a great result.

Freestyle was the focus for the next few races as Matthew, Robbie and Lewis all competed in 50m and Mia and Kirstie in 400m. PB's for both Matthew and Robbie with excellent swims and Lewis swam another fabulous race ranking 1st and another gold!

The girls also performed well, Mia dropped a massive 8 seconds in the 400m freestyle and Kirstie also gained a PB (5.23.52), the squad was certainly in the zone and making their mark in the heats.

Sarah, Lauren, Alex and Kirstie all returned to the pool and competed in the 200m Medley Relay, performing great swims and a good time of 2.34.95.





The final day had arrived and the final push for times, places, PB's and medals, the pressure was on and the competition was coming to a close. Katlo was first up in 200 IM, reaching the finals and swimming a fabulous 2.32.41 and gaining his first medal (bronze). This was a great start to the final day. Lauren, Sarah and Kirstie followed in the next race 200m breaststroke. Lauren swam a fantastic race and made it to the finals where she dropped a further 5 seconds and just missed out on a medal by gaining 4th place (3.09.90). Sarah also swam brilliantly and achieved another PB (3.18.68). Kirstie qualified for the finals swimming 3.10.68 and was placed 7th overall. The girls were definitely putting their mark on the final day of racing!

With only a few races left of the competition, Lauren and Kirstie returned to the pool for 200IM. Both girls swam well and Kirstie dropped a further 2.13 seconds for a PB of 2.50.83. Alan had been waiting patiently for 200m breaststroke along with Lewis and Katlo. All swam good, strong races. Alan's wait was not in vain as he dropped a massive 14 seconds of his entry time and made it to the finals where he was placed 8th (3.17.90), Lewis was determined to finish on a high and was 6th in the heats, made it to the finals and swam a fantastic swim to gain 3rd place and a bronze medal (2.58.47). Katlo also made it to the finals and just missed out on a medal by gaining 4th place (2.52.28)

Ben started the races on day one and had the pleasure of completing the final race for the Banbridge squad on day 4. This race was the 800m freestyle race. This distance race is tough especially after 4 busy long days of swimming, however Ben was not phased. He kept a steady pace throughout and achieved a PB of 4.26 seconds, 3rd place and a bronze medal. Well done Ben, you finished the competition on a winning note!

Coach Fiona Clelland said, "I am very proud of each and every one of the Banbridge squad who have trained hard, shown commitment and dedication to swim at this National Level. Some of our swimmers are still in primary school and it is a wonderful achievement to reach this stage so early in sporting years. The squad were fabulous ambassadors for the club and demonstrated professionalism in the pool. I congratulate them all on great times, PBs and everyone who achieved a medal. Special congratulations go to our top medal achiever Lewis Gray, it was wonderful to watch him swim and exceed his own expectations. These swimmers have now gained a well-earned rest. The senior members of the club will be participating in the Irish Championships in Dublin next week and we wish them as much success as we have had."

