

2020 PARA WORLD SERIES ~ MELBOURNE VIC ~ 14th to 17th FEBRUARY 2020



The 2020 **World Series** was scheduled to be the first major event to take place in the Paralympic Games year, offering swimmers from all over the **world** the chance to plan next season in advance and to compete in high-level events in preparation for Tokyo 2020, Melbourne hosted the first event together with the running of the Victorian State Open Championships. Both events were well attended by athletes looking for some strong competition leading into nationals and trials. NSW State Open Championships are scheduled to be held a month later, 13th to 15th March at SOPAC and should be equally supported.

Nepean Aquatic Centre Swim Club representatives, Taylor Cameron (S8) and Luke Ahern (S9) travelled separately with their family members and met up with Head Coach, Jackie Barck, at the Melbourne International Sports Aquatic Centre (MISAC) in preparation for the series. The races could be seen on livestream action for Swimming Australia with live and full race replays. It was fun for Luke and Taylor to receive encouraging text messages from friends and team mates at home. Some of the club junior swimmers were competing over the weekend at SOPAC in the Metro South West Championships where Lisa Thompson was assisting and promised to keep in touch to bring updated results.

Both NACSC athletes commenced their programme with 400 freestyle on the first day. This was a solid nerve settler and gave the swimmers a good taste of the pool. Luke possibly hit the water a little flustered as he was characteristically ticked off late to marshalling. He posted a time equivalent to his entry time whilst Taylor, chased down the leaders in her heat and hit the wall clocking a 19 seconds personal best. The weather was hot and humid.

The last event of the morning was the 100 freestyle and this event was set up to be hotly contested with male and female athletes from all classifications keen to put in a good performance. With no limit to the number of athletes in each classification in the final, it now becomes more essential to swim fast in the heats. Luke and Taylor were keen and did not disappoint, both posting significant personal best times of -2 seconds and -3 seconds. Taylor clocking her first time under 40 seconds for the first 50 metres. Neither swimmer qualified in the top 10 to swim in a final so rest was ordered.

Note: All para races were swum as multi-class races, meaning athletes from all classifications competed in the same event, with the para swimmer achieving the highest point score in the final of each event being the winner. The Multi-Class Point Score (MCPS) has been developed to provide a simplified way for swimmers and coaches to measure and compare performances. The MCPS is based on the World Record (WR) times for each classification but also takes into account weightings for non-Paralympic events that are not raced by other countries around the world.

On the second day of competition, the 50 freestyle sprint was scheduled around 10am so there was a chance for a little sleep in before facing a cooler morning walk from the tram to the pool. Following warm up for the 50 freestyle, the weather changed quite significantly to become cooler and rain fell intermittently at the outside venue. Not perturbed, it was business as usual and the pair from NACSC touched the wall strongly. Luke was happy to post a .37 pb and Taylor a pb of 1.41 – just .04 outside of an open national qualifying time.

There was sufficient time before warming up for the 100 backstroke event to wander around the parkland and check out the memorabilia in the facility which had quite an interesting staircase of champions. The grand prix is set to be run in Albert Park a few weeks hence and there was a bright orange formula one Renault racing car parked handsomely in the foyer.

Luke loves the 100 backstroke and was very keen to see how his improved kick and underwater streamlines would fare. Taylor, on the other hand, knew that she had some work ahead of her to promote her stroke rate. Both improved their time – Luke by 2 seconds and Taylor by 4 seconds. Again no final berths but certainly improved rankings.

Day 3 promised to be good and was actually the best weather. 50 backstroke to start –nice! Luke felt that he has more to give in this event which is exciting given that he posted a 1.5 second pb and Taylor swam strongly for her 2.5 second pb.

The challenge was on between the duo from NACSC to see who could swim the greater pb in their final event of the series, which was 200 freestyle. Neither swimmer had contested many freestyle events over this distance. They had been swimming so evenly over the whole meet to-date. At the end of the day, it was Taylor who came out the victor in their little bet with an improved time of 6.32 seconds.

There were certainly loads of exciting races to recall over the weekend and there will be many more to witness leading into selection trials for Tokyo.

Luke and Taylor will not be taking part in any of the remaining World Series events for 2020, however, other athletes may elect to travel to the remaining six countries to contest the series. Unfortunately, the next meet was to be held in Singapore in May but it has been cancelled. The best female and best male swimmers will be selected for the World Series awards at the end of the season on the basis of their rankings. All results at each World Series edition are calculated using a standardised World Para Swimming points system. This ensures that the overall World Series winner will be the best performing athlete over the duration of the series, meaning that every performance counts. How exciting !

This experience was humbling as well as rewarding for me and I am grateful to have been afforded the opportunity to attend and witness Australia finishing on top of the medal tally at the World Para Swimming World Series after amassing a total of 16 gold, 17 silver and 19 bronze medals across the three-day international competition.

The wonderfully staged event had lessons for our NACSC athletes to draw upon in future competitions. It is back to training where they will be honing in on their skills to race well at the multi-class meet on 2 March and then at the NSW Open State Championships at SOPAC. Luke is keen to push his butterfly time down and Taylor really.. really.. really.. wants a national qualifying time as this has eluded her up to this point in time but given her attendance at training , her application and her attitude, should not be too far in the future.



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