



2011 Country Championships

Kardinia Park, Geelong, 28-30 January

Country Championships are one of the highlights of the swimming year, eagerly anticipated by the swimmers for the chance to compete against the best country swimmers in the state and see how they rank, and by the parents for the intense social experience and enforced relaxation away from home. The team was particularly keen to see how their hard work in preparation would translate against the might of the big clubs, such as Traralgon and Geelong. A steady growth in size of the team, from 8 swimmers 2 years ago to 14 last year, to a team of 31 this year, held promise for improvement up the rankings.

The team travelled down to Geelong over a few days, some taking advantage of the Australia Day holiday to spend a couple of extra days relaxing on the beach at Ocean Grove before the meet. On Thursday the team met at the Kardinia Park pool for a familiarising session. While the swimmers swam through some sets under the anxious eyes of the coach, the support team unpacked the trailer, set up the tents and claimed a section of grandstand for the supporters though the meet. The pool itself presented no real problems for the swimmers, and 10 lanes gave an unusually uncrowded feel to warm-ups. The team then made its way to the Ocean Grove Holiday Park, where they had been allocated an entire corner of cabins, with a BBQ area in the middle and some open space for the swimmers (and parents) to indulge in some alternative sports... the impromptu cricket match held by the younger attendees was quickly overtaken by some of the parents. Anthony Arandt's freakish (fluked?) one handed catch while not spilling his beer provided much mirth among the onlookers. There was sympathy for the occupants of the two caravans at the edge of this area, though, as the enthusiasm of the team was likely to have some impact on their quiet weekend. After dinner, a team meeting was held on the tennis court while the parents socialised, and the team retired for a relatively early night to prepare for the morning challenge.

Friday



The welcoming speech – and yes, that is a uniquely Geelong lectern!

Countries has always thrown up a variety of atmospheric challenges – the windstorm in Sale, the freezing start at Warrnambool – so it was with some surprise that, on the predicted coldest morning of the meet, the sun rose to a beautiful, cool, clear morning. The team quickly organised for the 20 minute trip to Geelong, and quickly got in for the morning warm up. Again, the value of 10 lanes made warm-ups both uncrowded and effective, a significant change from previous years. The athletes' parade proceeded smoothly, with the club represented by Bridie Pearse and Callum King, but the first hiccup of the meet quickly became apparent – the PA system simply could not be heard around the pool. Some speeches were made, but unless one was proficient in lip-reading, the 1500 or so people watching had no idea of what was being said. Ironically, if you were outside at the cool down pool, everything was crystal clear!

Racing started well for the club, with the first event, featuring Shane Webb in his Countries debut, becoming a straight final. Jenna Strauch had the honour of being the first swimmer in the water for the team, in the 200m breaststroke, swimming a strong heat to make the final. As has been said many times, the first swim of the meet sets the tone for the whole team, and this was especially true in Geelong. By the end of the morning heats, 11 swimmers had qualified for 13 finals, as well as 2 relays teams – almost the equivalent of the entire meet at Warrnambool.



The cheer squad in full voice

After returning to Ocean Grove to rest for a couple of hours, the team returned en mass for the finals session. The club's first Multi-Class swimmer, Shane, dived in for the first event and swam a great PB to finish 3rd in the pool. The vagaries of the calculations for SWD swimming, however, meant he eventually finished 7th, but this was a great result none the less. The first medal of the meet arrived in the next event – Jenna Strauch continuing to astound everyone with her ever improving breaststroke, winning silver in the open 200m event. Callum King then swam a brilliant PB to claim silver in the boys 13/U 200m IM. Isabella Symons then took bronze in the girls 11/U 50m backstroke and the look of relief on her face at the medal presentation was priceless. All the finalists swam beautifully, and the relays teams performed

flawlessly. The only sad note was Jayde Robinson becoming unwell in marshalling for her 200m fly final. She had been plagued by illness and injury over most of the last 2 seasons, and had swum her way into this final on her merits, so to be unable to compete was particularly unfortunate.



Fun and games on Saturday evening



The chefs hard at it with necessary essential hydration

At the end of the first day, the club ranked 7th on the team points list. The team then travelled to the Ocean Grove Hotel for a very pleasant and relaxed (if a little late) dinner and team bonding exercise, before reluctantly returning to the Holiday Park for bed, and recovery for the day ahead.

Saturday

Another perfect morning greeted the team. Shane Webb's events had again gone to straight finals, although the access for disabled spectators had been sorted out and his family were much more comfortable. A lesson learned for Countries in Bendigo next year! Racing continued in the same vein as the previous day – solid heat swimming and some outstanding PB times. The highlights of the morning included 3 swimmers - Lily Burke, Kate Jordan and Jenna - all qualifying for the final of the girls 13 years 100m breaststroke, and the efforts of the two open women 4x100m medley relay teams. Given illness and injury had decimated the original team, Makayla Hamilton jumped in to swim her least favourite backstroke and 12 year old Alex Liacos put her hand up to swim the butterfly leg in the B relay, allowing Olivia Arandt a swim at her 5th Countries, on her birthday. The willingness just to compete spoke volumes about the team spirit. The team had qualified 10 swimmers for 15 individual finals, and 4 relays had also made it through to finals.



The boys 14/u free relay team – so close!!



Bella Symons sets off after a medal...

Finals produced what Chris Geyer claimed was the greatest day's results in the history of the club. The cheer squad were kept busy supporting success after success. Shane Webb started the medal rush with a superb swim in the multiclass backstroke, finishing the final second to the wall. On this occasion, the MC calculations resulted in his winning the silver medal, a moment the whole club applauded. For someone who has embraced squad swimming, and worked so hard to improve in spite of his other challenges, this was a historic achievement and a true highlight for the whole weekend. Jenna then took gold in the 13 years 100m breaststroke in a new Country Championships event record time, with the rapidly improving Kate winning bronze.

Callum then claimed gold in his breaststroke in the following final. Bella Symons grabbed silver in her butterfly, before Jenna confirmed her dominance in the breaststroke by taking bronze in the open 100m event. The improvement and consistency of the club's breaststrokers remains spectacular. The relays provided spectacular racing, with the girls 16/u medley relay finishing an agonisingly close 4th.

The team then returned to Ocean Grove on a high. 5th on the points list after 2 days racing, the whole team swimming well and supporting each other, there was still plenty of energy left over for the club BBQ. With numerous cooks preparing the meat, the only problem was an insufficiency of beverage, perhaps an underestimation of the celebrations! The problem was quickly solved by Jen Rodda's quick trip to the local bottle shop. After eating, the team circulated around various cabins, with the girls introducing some of the boys to the joys of leg wax. Some very interesting outcomes were achieved – with some willing participants! Again, festivities had to be curtailed due to the demands of racing, but some of the support team kicked on in remarkably restrained fashion until past midnight, surprisingly not chewed to pieces by mosquitoes. Perhaps the blood alcohol content put the blood suckers off?



Alex "Bug" Laicos giving 100% for the team

Sunday

A subdued and bleary eyed team assembled for the trip back to Geelong early. The last day of Countries is always an endurance event, where the hard work preparing for the meet comes to the fore. PBs are hard to gain and everyone, from all the clubs, are tired. The morning was very warm, with the promise of a very hot day ahead. Unfortunately, Jacob Waller had woken very unwell, and did not feel well enough to swim. As a key member of the boys relay, this presented a great challenge. Michael Valentine, despite not having an individual swim, came to the pool to take his place if needed. Warmups brightened the mood, and the good results quickly resumed. Many solid heat swims followed and again the team had done well, qualifying 6 swimmers for 8 individual finals. Jacob recovered sufficiently to take his place in the boys 14/u free relay, with Michael supporting from the stands, and swam remarkably well to help the team qualify for the final, along with the girls 14/u free relay team. Michael's commitment to the team helped illustrate the team spirit for the whole meet.



Michael Valentine sacrificed a free day to back up and support the team

By the start of finals, the temperature was in excess of 40°C. The starting blocks had to be cooled with water, and there was nowhere to hide. Keeping in the shade and keeping cool were the priorities for the swimmers. The heat caused the first delay in the events when the timing system boiled half way through the session, and the spectators slowly wilted. Despite these challenges, the results continued to be spectacular. Callum continued his incredible form by taking bronze in the 100m backstroke, and Bella



12/u girls medley relay team – hot but happy!



Jayde Robinson swims the heats of the 200 fly – which always demands respect!

claimed her third medal of the meet with bronze in her breaststroke final. Callum then provided the exclamation mark to his performance with a wonderful swim in the 100m fly final, winning his 4th medal of the meet in taking silver. The relay teams then provided the final excitement. Rebecca Holmes jumped straight out from finishing 5th in the final of the open 200m freestyle to anchor the girls free relay, producing a terrific final leg finish just behind the medallists, with the cheer squad screaming. The boys then provided the final highlight, with Jacob recovering so well he managed a sub 27 second split in the final leg, to finish an agonising 0.04 seconds away from the medals in 4th. How the roof stayed on the grandstand remains a mystery.

Robyn Slot said it best – Countries is a whole different level. The team rose to the challenge in spectacular fashion, and finished 5th in the points for the Allan Monaghan Shield. Traralgon dominated, as they have for all of the last decade, but there were signs other clubs are rising to the challenge. Callum King was a deserving winner of the Coaches asctVic Country Achiever’s award for the most improved swimmer. As the team returned home, the highlights will not readily be forgotten. Many swimmers performed superbly without the glory, yet were still delighted with the team success. Rebecca Holmes had 9 events at Countries and made 9 finals, finishing between 4th and 8th in all of them. Linda Waller turned to the cheer squad after the first heat of the boys 14-15 years breaststroke and declared Jacob would need to swim a National qualifying time just to make the final – he just about did with a 3 second PB, and went on to finish 4th. Nick Moloney had only one individual swim, but was a key reason why all 4 of the relays he was part of made finals. The 10 year olds, including Jack Beale who made 3 finals, competed in the 11/u events, promising great things for Countries next year, along with Callum Moloney (1 final) and Ethan Waller. Young swimmers like Ruby Burke, Harrison Howell, Kim Kennedy, Matthew Slot and Carly Moloney all have great experience on which to build for the future. Jack Smeelie had his first taste of Countries with the club. Max Pearse swam 3 PBs in his 3 events. James Coughlin, Bryce Garland, Harrison Pearse and Sophie Cantwell all swam well individually, but raised their level for their relays and helped their teams make finals.

The team had a fantastic Country Championships in Geelong. The efforts of the support team and cheer squad were memorable, and the dedication of the coaches, Tony and Chris, who were there for every minute of warm-ups, heats, finals (and celebrations) cannot be underestimated. The team can now look forward to the 2012 Country Championships in Bendigo with great anticipation.

The 2011 Country Championships team:

- Olivia Arandt
- Jack Beale
- Lily Burke
- Ruby Burke
- Sophie Cantwell
- James Coughlin
- Bryce Garland
- Stephanie Goode
- Makayla Hamilton
- Rebecca Holmes
- Harrison Howell
- Kate Jordan
- Kimberly Kennedy
- Callum King
- Alexandra Liacos
- Carly Moloney
- Callum Moloney
- Nicholas Moloney
- Bridie Pearse
- Harrison Pearse
- Maxwell Pearse
- Jayde Robinson
- Eleanor Rodda
- Matthew Slot
- Jack Smeelie
- Jenna Strauch
- Isabella Symons
- Michael Valentine
- Ethan Waller
- Jacob Waller
- Shane Webb



Callum at medals presentations



Jenna celebrates her open 200m breaststroke success



Medallists in the 13 years girls 100m breaststroke



Bella Symons with her butterfly medal

Medallists at 2011 Country Championships

Callum King

Gold - boys 13 yr 100m breast
Silver – boys 13/u 200m IM
Silver – boys 13 yr 100m butterfly
Bronze – boys 13 yr 100m back

Jenna Strauch

Gold - girls 13 yr 100m breast (event record)
Silver – women 200m breast
Bronze – women 100m breast

Isabella Symons

Silver – girls 11/u butterfly
Bronze – girls 11/u back
Bronze – girls 11/u breast

Shane Webb

Silver – Mixed MC 50m back

Kate Jordan

Bronze – girls 13yr 100m breast

Finalists at 2011 Country Championships

Jack Beale (11/u 50m fly, free & back)
Lily Burke (13 yr 100m breast)
Stephanie Goode (open 200m breast, 16-17 yr 100m free & breast)
Rebecca Holmes (14-15 yr 100m back, free & fly, 200m IM and open 200m free)
Kate Jordan (13 yr 100m breast)
Callum King (13yr 200m IM, 100m free, back, breast & fly)
Callum Moloney (11/U 50m back)
Jayde Robinson (14-15 yr 100m fly, open 200m fly)
Eleanor Rodda (16-17 yr 100m fly)
Jenna Strauch (13 yr 100m free, breast & back, open 100m and 200m breast)
Isabella Symons (11/U 50m back, free, fly & breast)
Shane Webb (mixed MC 50m breast, fly & back)

Women 16/U 4x50 Freestyle

Jenna Strauch, Eleanor Rodda, Stephanie Goode, Rebecca Holmes

Men 16/U 4x50 Freestyle

James Coughlin, Harrison Pearse, Callum King, Jacob Waller

Women 14/U 4x50 Medley

Jenna Strauch, Kate Jordan, Lily Burke, Rebecca Holmes

Men 14/U 4x50 Medley

Jacob Waller, Callum King, Bryce Garland, Nicholas Moloney

Women 16/U 4x50 Medley

Sophie Cantwell, Jenna Strauch, Jayde Robinson, Rebecca Holmes

Men 16/U 4x50 Medley

Harrison Pearse, Callum King, James Coughlin, Jacob Waller

Women 14/U 4x50 Freestyle

Jenna Strauch, Kimberly Kennedy, Lily Burke, Rebecca Holmes

Men 14/U 4x50 Freestyle

Callum King, Bryce Garland, Nicholas Moloney, Jacob Waller



Coaches Award winner Callum King



Shane Webb looks right at home in medals presentations!



Bella in the medals again!



The girls 14/u free relay team



Harrison starts strongly in his backstroke heat



Max competes in the heats of the 100m breast



Makayla and Lily giving the team great support?