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Small swim meet, big results

By Scott Cameron
Booster Staff Writer
Wednesday, 27 June 2001

They strutted into Edmonton's Royal Glenora Club with just six swimmers last Saturday, but when the Lloydminster Aquanauts left, the water was still rippling.

The Aquanauts who opted for last weekend's meet - Alexis Edwards, Amy Edwards, Cory Totman, Robyn Hnatuk, Amy Zicker and Dave Cavanagh - returned to the Border City with four aggregate medals, and no finishes lower than fifth.

"The kids seem to want to win more. They want to finish first, get those aggregates and prepare themselves for regionals," said Aquanauts head coach Colleen Parker, who admitted that the first few meets are always a bit of a reconditioning process.

It looks like that stage is officially over - if it even took place. Of the four medals, three were gold.

Alexis Edwards - who medalled the previous weekend in Lloydminster - swam to first place finishes in three of her four races to win the eight and under girls aggregate gold.

The weekend was highlighted for the youngster with a first place swim in the 100 metre individual medley. It was the first time she ever swam it competitively.

"She was the top out of that, which is pretty amazing for a little eight-year-old girl to go in and swim it," said Parker.

The Aquanauts two other gold medalists earned similar praise from the coach.

"The same with Amy and Robyn," said Parker. "They just went in and took charge of all their races." Amy Edwards' performance was almost identical to the younger Edwards, winning three of four races to get the gold in the nine and 10-year-old girls category.

Robyn Hnatuk was the other Lloyd swimmer to strike gold, racing to three first place finishes and a second to easily win the 15 and over girls aggregate.

Cory Totman nabbed the last medal for the Aquanauts from the 120-swimmer field, racing to three second place finishes and a third place to take the bronze aggregate in the 11 and 12-year-old boys.

The times didn't rival any personal bests, but the conditions sort of predetermined that. The pool was outdoors and while the weather was warm, a lack of starting blocks slowed the swimmers' times.

The Wainwright pool on July 7 promises to be faster. That's the Aquanauts' next action and Parker hopes to take a contingent of about 30 swimmers. The meet will be well attended and times that compare to their personal bests will likely be needed in order to compete for aggregate medals.

Not a problem, suggests Parker, assuring that the Aquanauts have yet to peak. "It always seems with the summer clubs that every meet, they are improving their times," she said.

Break no problem for Aquanauts

By Scott Cameron
Booster Staff Writer
Wednesday, July 11, 2001

For a handful of Lloydminster Aquanauts, this past weekend's meet in Wainwright was their first race action in 14 days.

A pretty lengthy lay-off, considering the stage of the swimming season in which the Aquanauts are in.

However, for the majority of the club - those that didn't attend Edmonton's Royal Glenora meet at the end of June - the last swim meet was way back on June 16th, when they hosted their invitational meet at the Leisure Centre.

The time away from competitive waters certainly didn't scare Aquanauts head coach Colleen Parker.

If anything, she was more prepared for Wainwright thanks to the break.

"I wasn't (concerned)," she said. "I just thought it would be some more time to concentrate on the things we needed to work on, like our finishes, our starts and getting our endurance back up."

While the nine-team meet featured a handful of clubs the Aquanauts had yet to see, the results were similar to previous weekends.

The Aquanauts finished in fourth place overall, capturing eight aggregate medals with their 22 swimmer contingent.

Youngster Renee Neufeld won the six-and-under girls bronze medal while Brock Chisholm captured his first aggregate, a silver in the eight-and-under boys division.

Jessica Kelly and Amy Edwards continued to dominate the nine and ten-year-old girls podium, swimming to gold and bronze medals respectively.

Cory Chisholm won the nine and ten-year-old boys gold aggregate, while Mitch Kelly medalled for his third straight meet, winning the 11 and 12-year-old boys bronze.

The two teenage medals came from Jonathan Smyth and Robin Hnatuk who picked up a silver in the 13 and 14-year-old boys and 15 and 16-year-old girls respectively.

It wasn't the largest medal haul for the Aquanauts, but then again, medals aren't the driving factor - times are.

That was why Parker left Wainwright with a smile on her face.

"Every (Lloydminster) swimmer had at least two best times out of the meet," she said. "So, it was a good result."

The Aquanauts next action is this coming weekend as seven swimmers travel to Camrose.

Triple gold for local swimmer

Sunday, July 22, 2001
Lloydminster Booster

As a star member of the Lloydminster Aquanauts swim club, 10-year-old Jessica Kelly is no stranger to gold medals.

Winning them at a winter club meet and in a long course pool however, is something new to her.

After posting some of the provinces best 10-year-old times with the Aquanauts earlier this summer, Kelly was asked to be part of the Alberta Summer Swim Association All-Stars, a team of summer club standouts with "A" times that competes against the winter clubs at long course A provincials.

She attended the provincial meet at the Kinsmen Sports Centre in Edmonton last weekend simply looking for some experience. She came home with a handful of hardware.

Competing in four different 50 metre strokes, Kelly swam to three gold medals and a fifth place finish. She won freestyle gold with a time of 32.14 seconds, beating Fort McMurray's Danielle Newton. In the backstroke, Kelly's gold medal time of 37.27 seconds was more than a full second faster than Red Deer's Julie Kells, the second place finisher. The butterfly was almost a carbon copy of the backstroke race.

Kelly posted a time of 35.82 seconds - more than a full second better than Kells again to take the gold medal.

Aquanauts dominate regionals

Dan Spark
Booster Sports Writer
Wednesday, 15 August 2001

All Colleen Parker could do was watch.

Nervously standing alongside the Leisure Centre's swimming pool, the head coach of the Lloydminster Aquanauts could do nothing more than watch what the culmination of four months of training would bring her youthful swimmers. And in the end, the deep pool of talent that streams through the organization created a wave of success, unparalleled by any other club at the Region C Regionals this past weekend.

Maybe the measurement of success came from the 64 medals claimed by the Aquanauts, or even the fact that 29 out of 33 swimmers qualified for next weekend's provincial meet in Edmonton. But the likely source came from all the support that flooded the Leisure Centre from parents, volunteers and teammates.

It was all for the kids, and by the final heat, the kids delivered. "We just had a great weekend. It went really well," said Parker. "All the coaches were very happy with the results. "There is a larger number going to provincials than last year."

Out of the 64 medals awarded to Lloydminster swimmers, 17 were gold, 24 silver and 23 bronze. Lloydminster was just too strong when they were put up against other clubs such as the Royal Glenora Gators, Camrose Sea Serpents, Derrick Devil-Rays, Vermilion Snipers, Fort Saskatchewan Piranhas and the Edmonton Huma Huma.

All around it was quite an impressive accomplishment put forth by the Aquanauts, but the event's individual honour had to go to Jessica Kelly. She earned four gold medals and one bronze to go along with the two provincial records she tied on the weekend. From only training four months out of the year, Kelly's accomplishments were enough evidence to show the amount of dedication tied into the club.

And with that foundation supporting most Aquanaut swimmers, Parker is confident provincials will prove to be just as successful as regionals. "I think they'll be competitive," she said. "Every meet we gradually improve." No doubt that seasonal improvement will be tested in Edmonton when the Aquanauts compete against the entire province. But with their accomplishments to date, just being there will be its own reward.

Kelly golden in the pool

Matt Ross
Booster Sports Editor
Sunday August 26, 2001

Going backwards in sports isn't a good sign but for Jessica Kelly she swimmingly continues to progress in reverse.

Eleven year-old Jessica shattered the Alberta record in her age group this past weekend at the provincial summer meet in Edmonton. Her time of 36.03 in the 50 metre back crawl was a phenomenal half-second better than the old standard.

Oh, and while she was at it, she also claimed gold in three other events, including staking her name to the record books again. In the 50 metre freestyle, at 31.68 she sliced 18/100ths from the previous best performance.

If success breeds success, Jessica's competitive fire is fueled by her quest for continued individual glory.

"You want to put your name in the record book, plus there are people who you want to beat," the third year swimmer said, beaming with a smile.

Representing the Aquanauts from the Leisure Centre, Jessica qualified for the provincials two weeks ago during the regionals. Her times in all four disciplines, including the 100 metre freestyle and the 25 metre butterfly, were the fastest throughout the province and placed her in the middle lane for all of her one-race finals in Edmonton.

With a muscular build in her shoulders and upper torso, the back crawl is a natural event for Jessica. She agrees the race is made for her but prefers the backwards movement as it allows for an improved oxygen intake.

"When you're pulling in the water, it takes a lot of strength. It's also the best stroke because you can breathe when you swim," she said.

With the summer swim season concluded, Jessica is putting away her swimsuit and sharpening her skates in preparation for ice hockey. However, with future goals of making the Alberta and Canadian swim teams, she acknowledges if she's to get serious about improving in the pool, sometime soon she'll have to commit to year-round training.

She's proven she has the talent to in competing with elite swimmers. At a meet for full-year swimmers in July, also in Edmonton, Jessica emerged with three gold medals and was the first "summer" swimmer to record such a strong showing at a winter provincials.

What's stopping her at this point, though, is her drive. She admits she would get bored and might be turned off the sport altogether if she was training year-round.

Her mom, Lorraine, respects her daughter's wishes. While maybe Jessica's abilities could be maximized with additional training, Lorraine said there comes a point when parents have to refrain from pushing their children.

"When I spoke with James Hood (executive director at Swim Alberta) he said the kids have to ready themselves. Physically, it isn't until the age of 12 before they should be streamlined into one sport."

Still, if there is any motivation that could stoke her desire, on the back of Jessica's medals are the notations of her times and provincial records.

"I'd have to get driven and pushed to do this really hard but setting more records would probably do it."

Aquanauts Speeding up for the Border Battle

By Sean Rooney
Booster Sports Editor
Wednesday, June 19, 2002

It's amazing what a bit of extra practice can do.

For the Lloydminster Aquanauts summer swim club, which started training some six weeks ago, that time in the pool translated into massive jumps at their meet this past weekend at the Leisure Centre.

"We had a lot of best times out of the events," said Aquanauts coach Colleen Parker. "We took times at trials in their second week so the kids can get used to racing again, and the times we've taken off since then are incredible. Sixteen seconds, 21 seconds, five seconds, that's massive amounts of time you're talking about."

And they don't plan on slowing down their pace of getting faster. Seventeen-year-old Robyn Hnatuk, who's preparing for both the Canada Summer Games and provincials competitions this August, competed in only her second meet of the year this past weekend, but her twice-a-day workouts are already paying dividends.

"I took seven seconds off at Vermilion from my time trials time, and I took seven seconds off here from my Vermilion time," she said. "My Vermilion time wasn't that good. I can go a whole lot faster than that."

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How much faster?

"With my starts and my turns I can definitely take three or four seconds off," she said."

The focus right now, however, is the first ever Battle of the Border, to be held June 29 and 30 at Bud Miller Park. With as many as 800 swimmers on hand, the local club took a solid step to asserting itself at the home meet by capturing 12 spots on the Alberta region roster that includes clubs from Camrose, Fort Saskatchewan, Vermilion, Edmonton, Provost, Sherwood Park and Wainwright.

"We're gradually building to regionals and provincials which are in August, so every week I like to see improvements in times," said Parker.

Another prime example would be 11-year-old Cory Chisholm. Though the weekend meet was his first of the year, and therefore wouldn't qualify him for the Battle on the Border, he won bronze medals in the 50 metre backstroke and 50 metre freestyle events.

"I thought I did pretty good," he said. "I've taken quite a bit of time off. Probably eight seconds on each stroke, but I think I can go four or five seconds faster."

This past weekend's meet saw 191 swimmers in the water, 35 of whom were Aquanauts.

MEDAL WINNERS

Girls: Reneee Neufeld (6-under, gold), Brianna Wells (7-8, silver), Jessica Kelly (11-12, silver), Haley Howland (13-14, bronze), Robyn Hnatuk (17-over, silver), Kierstin Smyth (17-over, bronze).

Boys: Luke Muyres (7-8, silver), Brayden Wells (9-10, gold), Mitchel Kelly (11-12, gold), Jonathon Smyth (13-14, silver), Cory Totman (13-14, bronze), Tyler Totman (17-over, gold), Dave Cavanagh (17-over, gold)

Alberta wins border battle

Sean Rooney
Booster Sports Editor
Wednesday, July 03, 2002

In the battle between provinces, Alberta reigned supreme this past weekend at the Leisure Centre pool.

The Battle of the Border swim meet brought swimmers from both Alberta and Saskatchewan to Lloydminster, but when the waters had calmed again, the Wild Rose province had the sweet smell of success.

On average, Alberta swimmers won 6.5 points per competitor, compared to 2.0 points per athlete for Saskatchewan. That was good enough to claim victory, but there were smaller victories throughout the weekend as more than 400 swimmers tried for personal bests.

"I didn't know how I was going to do," said Jessica Kelly, a local Aquanauts swimmer who won three gold medals and added a silver to her collection. "I swim better in my home pool, we practice here every day so I'm used to it."

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While Kelly's biggest competition in the 11 and 12-year-old girls events came from a familiar face, Fort Saskatchewan's Megan Donner, other swimmers had a chance to see what they were up against from across their respective provinces.

"In our zone there's only four or five people, so we get here and there's 16 or 17 people to race against," said 17-year-old Aquanauts athlete Tyler Totman. "It's what I expected. A lot of competition, people who are healthy."

Totman's best result was a second-place finish in the 100 metre backstroke, but he knows he'll be in much better shape when provincials take place in August.

"I wanted to practise more, but this is grad week," he said. "I had a half an hour in the past three weeks to practise."

From a coaching standpoint, the meet was a blessing. Falling right in the middle of the year, soon after most students are done with school, the Battle of the Border was a solid yardstick for their clubs.

"The only other time we meet people from Alberta is at provincials, so it's kind of nice to see where everybody's at in the middle of the year," said Aquanauts and Alberta Region C coach Colleen Parker.

"I didn't realize we were one of the stronger regions in Alberta, we're doing really well at beating Saskatchewan, and the meet was run smoothly as well, so those were all positives."

When it came right down to the crunch, however, the battle wasn't just about seeing how you were doing in your respective province. Though the Saskatchewan contingent didn't hold a candle to Alberta when the final results were tallied, the provincial rivalry was still evident.

"This is the first time we've competed against Alberta," said 17-year-old Watrous, Sask. swimmer Daniel Veld. "It's more of a competition, you come in not knowing how everybody's going to do."

Local results:

Girls: 11-12 - Jessica Kelly, 2nd in 100 free, 1st in 50 fly, 1st in 50 back, 1st in 50 free; 13-14 - Haley Howland, 13th in 50 fly, 12th in 100 back, 8th in 100 breast, 10th in 200 IM; 17-over - Amanda Bowen, 10th in 100 free, 7th in 100 breast, 13th in 50 free; Kierstin Smyth, 11th in 100 free, 11th in 50 fly, 6th in 100 breast, 11th in 50 free; Robyn Hnatuk, 4th in 50 fly, 6th in 100 back, 2nd in 200 IM, 3rd in 50 free.

Boys: 11-12 - Joseph Cavanagh, 4th in 100 free, 7th in 50 fly, 10th in 50 breast, 7th in 100 IM; 13-14 - Cory Totman, 19th in 100 free, 9th in 100 back, 12th in 100 breast, 12th in 200 IM; Jonathon Smyth, 17th in 200 free, 6th in 100 free, 4th in 100 back, 7th in 200 IM; 17-over - Tyler Totman, 14th in 200 free, 5th in 100 free, 2nd in 100 back, 5th in 50 free.

Busy Aquanauts earn spots at provincials

Sean Rooney
Booster Sports Editor
Sunday, August 18, 2002

These are busy times if you're a swimmer with the Lloydminster Aquanauts. After competing in their regionals this past weekend in Edmonton, 14 of the water warriors started the Alberta Summer Games competition this past Thursday. If that weren't enough, provincials are coming up this weekend in Calgary.

"Provincials is bigger," said 18-year-old Kierstin Smyth when asked where she has focused her attention. "Summer Games is tougher because there's more competition with the winter clubs. I don't expect to do as well there.

"But Smyth shouldn't sell herself short, either. At the Grant MacEwan Community College pool in Edmonton this past weekend, she won two silver and two gold medals, and finished a close fourth in two other events in her best-ever weekend at a regional competition.

Smyth wasn't the only one to have a good weekend. Of the 221 swimmers at the meet, 26 were Aquanauts. Out of those, all but five qualified for provincials with either silver or gold medals.

"I think it's pretty good, considering the injury," said Smyth of her success.

The injury?"It happened two years ago when I was training for long distance," she said. "It's my shoulder, (but) they still don't know what it is. I can't practice very much because I'm in pain a lot.

"But the pain hasn't stopped her from continuing to make waves. Smyth now focuses on shorter events like the 50 metre freestyle and 100 metre breaststroke, the two individual events that garnered her silver medals in Edmonton. The golds were team medals.

Along with Karen Bjorge, Robyn Hnatuk, Jessica Kelly and Amanda Bowen, the two teams Smyth was on during each of their respective relays.

Though he doesn't have any injuries to contend with, 11-year-old Brayden Wells does have similar challenges, as provincials are his last meet of the year after regionals. He might go to the Alberta Summer Games in 2004, but for now he's just hoping to keep pace with some new competition.

"In a way having been there (provincials) takes the pressure off, but then there's new kids," he said. "There's another kid I went against in an earlier meet, and his times are better than mine by four or five seconds. And he's not in my region, so I don't swim against him much.

"Considering that Wells' 50 metre freestyle time has dropped by four seconds already this summer, it is possible he's closer to the top than he thinks. At regionals, Wells won three golds, in the 50 and 100 metre freestyle and 50 metre breaststroke. He added a bronze in the 25 metre butterfly for good measure.

"The only time I've ever made it in provincials was two years ago and I made it in all my events. I made the top 13 in all of those events," he said. "I'm shooting for the top 12 this year. Every year I want to get lower."

Regional results:

Boys 8-under -

Luke Muires: 25 m and 50 m freestyle, 25 m butterfly, 100 m IM silver.

Boys 9-10 -

Brock Chisholm: 100 m freestyle and 50 m breaststroke bronze, 25 m butterfly fifth, 50 m freestyle fourth;

Brayden Wells: 50 m and 100 m freestyle, 50 m backstroke gold, 25 m butterfly bronze.

Boys 11-12 -

Kory Chisholm: 50 m butterfly gold, 50 m backstroke sixth, 50 m freestyle fourth, 100 m IM fifth;
Mitchell Kelly: 100 m and 200 m freestyle gold, 50 m backstroke and freestyle silver;
A.J. Mokelky: 100 m freestyle fifth, 200 m freestyle silver, 50 m breaststroke bronze.

Boys 13-14 -

Jonathan Smyth: 100 m freestyle, 200 m IM bronze, 100 m backstroke, 400 m freestyle silver;
Cory Totman, 1,500 m freestyle silver.

Boys 17-over -

David Cavanagh: 100 m butterfly and 100 m breaststroke gold, 50 m butterfly bronze, 50 m freestyle silver;
Dave Saunders: 100 m freestyle fifth, 50 m butterfly sixth, 100 m breaststroke bronze;
Tyler Totman: 100 m freestyle bronze, 50 m butterfly fifth, 100 m backstroke gold, 50 m freestyle fourth.

Girls 8-under -

Brianna Wells: 25 m butterfly fourth, 25 m and 50 m freestyle gold, 100 m IM silver.

Girls 9-10 -

Amanda Lux: 100 m freestyle, 25 m butterfly, 25 m backstroke, 100 m IM gold;
Mary Cavanagh: 50 m breaststroke bronze.

Girls 11-12 -

Jessica Kelly: 100 m and 50 m freestyle, 50 m butterfly and backstroke gold;
Kelly Chisholm: 400 m freestyle bronze;
Keeley Mokelky: 200 m freestyle fifth.

Sibling swimmers surprise

Sean Rooney

Booster Sports Editor

Wednesday, August 28, 2002

Sibling rivalry is something the Lloydminster Aquanauts are all-too-familiar with.

This past weekend, the club concluded their season with eight swimmers winning 11 medals at the provincial finals in Calgary. For a few of the swimmers, the real competition happened on the ride home. "In practice we push each other," said 12-year-old Mitchell Kelly of his sister, 11-year-old Jessica. "I beat her in two of my events, my 100 and 50 metre freestyle, last weekend at regionals.

"She came back this week and had a really good weekend, she lowered her times really well."

Jessica also won another four medals, two gold and two silver, as she was expected to do.

But nobody expected her older brother to pick up a medal for himself. "Out of the four years that I've swam, I've been to it (provincials) three years and that's the first time I've ever got a medal," said Mitchell, ecstatic over his third-place finish in the 11 and 12-year-old boys 200 metre freestyle race this past Sunday. "I beat my

old time by three seconds. I almost had silver, we were going to the wall at the same time and he just touched before me."

"He's never had faster times than I have, and he had faster times in regionals," said Jessica. "But this weekend I had faster times." The debate as to who's faster in the family will rage on forever, but Jessica has clearly been the most decorated thus far. With her closest competitor moving out of her age group next year, she just may need a new trophy case.

"I'll have higher expectations next year," she said.

The Kellys weren't the only siblings making waves in Calgary, either. Tyler Totman was fourth in his best event - the 100 metre backstroke - but his 200 metre free relay team won silver later in the weekend. "The highlight was the relay silver," said the 17-year-old Totman, whose brother Cory finished seventh in the boys open 1,500 metre freestyle swim. "We wanted to beat (Edmonton club) Huma - they got gold. We came out of the region about a second behind them."

The 17-and-over relay team featured one of the oldest competitors at the meet, as well. Forty-three-year-old Dave Saunders has been competing as an Aquanaut for 35 years, even though he now lives in Hinton.

The other swimmers on the silver medal team were Jonathan Smyth and David Cavanagh. Other medal winners were Robyn Hnatuk, who took bronze in the 15-and-over girls 100 metre butterfly, and Amanda Lux, who won bronze in the 9-10-year-old girls 100 metre freestyle race.

Aquanauts improving

Sean Rooney
Booster Sports Editor
Wednesday, June 18, 2003

Young swimmers got a taste of what regionals will be like this past weekend at the Lloyd Leisure Centre.

The Aquanauts summer swim club held its meet, bringing in competitors from across central Alberta. It will also host regionals Aug. 9 and 10.

"It feels like I swim faster in the pool, I know what it's going to be like, so it kind of feels like an advantage," said 12-year-old Larissa Campbell. "I did a lot better at this meet than at Vermilion (a week earlier)."

Campbell won't be able to use home pool advantage come regionals, however. She's heading to P.E.I. for summer vacation, meaning the Lloyd meet was her last of the year.

At least she made it count. Campbell finished with a silver medal in the girls 11 and 12-year-old group, behind provincial record-holder and fellow Aquanaut Jessica Kelly and Fort Saskatchewan's Miranda Dewit.

"I swam four races, got a first and three seconds," she said. "I get a couple more weeks of practice in, which is good."

Winning races isn't necessarily the goal of the swimmers, however. Just ask nine-year-old Carley Hilsendager, who was thrilled even though she didn't end up with a medal.

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"I think in butterfly I beat my time by two seconds, and in front crawl I think I beat it by one," she said. "The front crawl for 50 metres I think I beat it by two seconds too."

Keeley Mokolky also had a breakthrough at the local meet. The 13-year-old competed in her first 400 metre freestyle race, one of six events she entered, and figures to be trying more endurance events in the future.

"I got first," she said. "I want to try the 800 metre next time. I'm definitely more of an endurance swimmer."

New coach Jenna Lamb said she saw a lot more personal bests than Hilsendager's. Because the club is only two weeks into its competitive season, many swimmers are setting personal bests every time they race.

"A lot of them had best times," said Lamb. "All of them had at least one top five finish again."

In Vermilion last week, every swimmer had a fifth-place finish or better to their credit. Lamb hopes that success will continue this weekend when the athletes head to Derrick, Alta.

"They've exceeded expectations I had for a lot of them, now they're working on improving themselves even more, so by the time of provincials they'll have their goals shot," she said.

Aquanauts results

Winners were determined based on aggregate placings at the June 14 meet.

Britt Wells " bronze, girls 6-under; Luke Muyres " silver, boys 8-under; Brock Chisholm " bronze, boys 9-10; Jessica Kelly " gold, girls 11-12; Larissa Campbell " silver, girls 11-12; A;J; Mokolky " silver, boys 11-12; Haley Howland " gold, girls 13-14; Cory Totman " silver, boys 13-14; Jonathan Smyth " silver, boys 15-16; Karen Bjorge " gold, girls 17-over; Tyler Totman " gold, boys 17-over.

Kelly cruises to four more records

Sean Rooney
Booster Sports Editor
Sunday, August 24, 2003

Aquanauts swimmer Jessica Kelly dominated provincials in Calgary this past weekend.

Tyler Totman won a bronze medal in the 17-and-over boys 100 m backstroke event at provincials in Calgary this past weekend, but he knows his limitations.

He's fast, but "I'll never be Jessica Kelly fast." he said.

Already regarded as the top 12-year-old in the province, Kelly won multiple gold medals at provincials.

To everyone's surprise - even hers - she not only won all four individual events she competed in, she broke provincial records in them as well.

"It went better than I expected it to," she said. "Some of them, it was amazing I even beat them."

Kelly now holds five provincial records. Two weeks before provincials she broke the 50 metre freestyle and 100 metre individual medley. In Calgary she re-broke her own 50 m free time by a full second (it now stands at 28.42 seconds), plus set records for the 50 m butterfly (31.24), 50 m back (32.78) and 100 m free (1:04.45). Her new marks were an average of a half-second faster than their predecessors.

"You get time to warm up, but it makes you think that 'hey, this is the last shot you have at it, you may as well give your all,'" said Kelly. "I think I trained more than other years, I tried a little bit harder. I had a really good coach, Jenna Lamb was great, and I had more drive."

Lamb thinks that with her physical and mental abilities, Kelly can go as far as she wants in the sport - including the Olympics.

"If she wants to, she will be going to the Olympics," said Lamb, coach of the Aquanauts. "If that's her goal, she will go. She is one of those few swimmers you ever come across that the ability is there.

"She's very modest, even in practice she'll never have the superior attitude to one of the other swimmers, she's just one of them."

Kelly would have five gold medals from provincials, but she was only allowed to compete in four individual events. She was ranked first in the 100 m IM because of her provincial record time. She also struck bronze in Calgary twice in two relays with fellow Aquanaut swimmers Haley Howland, Keeley Mokolky and Natasha Pidkowa.

"Amazing meet, an unbelievable meet, I've never seen that before," said Lamb. "It's one of those meets, she was able to harness all of her talent. There weren't people quite at her calibre, but they were closer than there has been in our region, so she was able to push herself past her limit even a bit more."

Where does Kelly's talent come from? Her mother was a top-level swimmer, and her father, Paul, played seven years in the NHL. Athleticism and swimming are in the genes.

"She was pretty good, so she's the one who got me motivated to do it," Kelly said of her mother.

The question now is what the 12-year-old phenom will do with all of her talent. She is, after all, only 12, but the lure of a full-year swimming season - she only swims with the summer club Aquanauts right now - would presumably push her to the next echelon of elite young athletes.

"I might do it (winter club)," she said. "I'm not sure yet, it's up to me. I probably won't play hockey, just take the winter off."

NOTES: Totman, like most of the 12 Aquanauts who went to provincials, set a personal best in his heat, 1:11.92.

"In regionals they have preliminaries and finals, but at provincials it's straight to finals," he said. "You run your heat, hope to beat people in the slow heat if you're in the fast heat. "Like me, I was up against the two fastest guys."

Aquanauts medal at home meet

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Josh Aldrich
Booster Sports Editor
Wednesday June 23, 2004

Lloydminster Meridian Booster — Sometimes the important part of a season is how quick the start is and how quickly a team or individual is able to get out of the blocks and build momentum.

The Lloydminster Aquanauts swim club has got off to the kind of start that is conducive to a productive season, as was showcased last Saturday at the Lloydminster Leisure Centre at their annual swim meet.

“It went really well,” said co-coach Kierstin Smyth. “In a couple of them we totally knew we were going to do well, but there were some really good swims. Everyone did really well and lots of times were beaten overall.”

Five Aquanauts went home from the meet sporting aggregate medals. Jonathan Smyth in the boys 15 and 16 group, Jessica Kelly in girls 13 and 14, and Britt Wells in girls six and under all won gold medals. Meanwhile, Haley Howland in girls 15 and 16, and Brianna Wells in girls nine and 10 won bronze medals.

Success from these five is not necessarily a surprise, but is hopefully a sign for things to come from not only them, but the rest of the swimmers.

“This is the first time Jonathan Smyth got first in all of his swims in the Lloyd meet, so it was good of him to get gold,” said Smyth. “But just overall everyone had really good swims, no one really stuck out a lot, but definitely Jonathan and Jessica.”

The meet drew 168 swimmers from 11 clubs to Lloydminster, including 32 Aquanauts.

“They were all in our region,” said Smyth, noting they are in Region C. “Probably the farthest came from Edmonton, Fort Saskatchewan, Camrose, Wainwright.”

Kierstin Smyth is also experiencing a new part of the sport this year. She is on the other side of the goggles for the first time as coach.

“It’s different,” said Smyth, a long time Aquanaut. “I miss being in there, but it’s a lot of fun to pass on everything I’ve learned and my love and knowledge of swimming.”

This is all in preparation for regionals and provincials in Edmonton the first and second week of August, respectively.

“I think it was really good,” said Smyth. “Everyone is practicing really hard and it can only get better from here. It’s pretty exciting to see what will happen at the rest of our meets and then in regionals and provincials.

“We’re just hoping for a lot of personal bests. I know there will be some making it to provincials and we can probably expect some medals there for sure.”

Before then, however, the Aquanauts will be hosting Alberta Games qualifying this Sunday at the leisure centre from 8 a.m. to 12 p.m. On July 10 the Aquanauts are in Fort Saskatchewan for their next official meet.

Swimmers navigate to Summer Games

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Josh Aldrich
Booster Sports Editor
Sunday July 25, 2004

Lloydminster Meridian Booster — Aquanauts, Riptides and Rebels.

In any other instance the combination those three really don't coincide with each other. But when the three local swimming clubs come together the way they have this weekend to send a contingent from Lloydminster to the Alberta Summer Games in Okotoks/High River, it makes perfect sense.

The three clubs are in fact sending nine swimmers and two coaches to the games in Southern Alberta.

"We are very strong with our younger kids, our 13, 14, 15-year-old swimmers are very proficient," said co-coach Tyler Totman. "The team as a whole, it's probably one of the better ones we've sent so far."

Joining the Lloydminster swimmers will be members of clubs from other communities like St. Paul, Bonnyville and Fort McMurray.

The meet will feature many of the same swimmers that they would see at a provincial meet, thus this is one of the highest calibre meets of the year.

"It's like a mini-provincials," said Totman. "You see a lot of the swimmers you normally won't see until August at these meets. Then there's some in the winter clubs you won't see at all. It gives you a chance to see how you rate against the other swimmers in Alberta."

One of Lloyd's biggest opportunities to medal is Jonathan Smyth, one of the best swimmers in the provinces for his level.

"I hope to get a medal," said Smyth, who will be competing in the 200-metre freestyle, the 100-metre freestyle, the 50-metre freestyle and the 100-metre backstroke. "I went to the last summer games and won a bronze medal in the 200-metre freestyle."

"I think right now (Jonathan) is ranked in the top five in the province in all his swims," said co-coach Kierstin Smyth. "He compares to the rest of the swimmers, so he definitely has a shot."

Several Zone 7 members have past games experience to draw on, but for others like Natasha Pidkowa, Okotoks will be a completely new encounter.

"I'm not nervous," said Pidkowa, 15. "After (nine) years of swimming you get used to the pressure and you just go out there like it's a normal swim practice."

Both coaches also have games experience on the other side of the sport. Kierstin and Totman competed in the past two games, in Grand ePrairie in 2000 and Camrose in 2002 as swimmers. While they are able to impart what they learned from those games on their pupils, this is still a completely new experience for them.

"It's going to be a different experience, I'm really quite excited," said co-coach Kierstin Smyth. "It's really nice to share what I've learned and what I know about swimming in general and about the summer games."

Two of the Aquanauts are riding into the games on top of their respective games, having medaled in their last meet last weekend in Edmonton.

Jonathan picked up an overall silver while Braydon Wells secured a bronze. Two other Aquanauts also had solid performances as Brianna Wells won gold and Brit Wells silvered in their respective levels.

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“For a couple events there will be some of the same competition there,” said Kierstin. “But I think it will be really different when they get there, because a lot of different competitors will be there that they don’t normally see at a meet. But it definitely helps to build up their confidence, like every meet does.”

Smyth silver in Okotoks

Josh Aldrich
Booster Sports Editor
Wednesday, August 4, 2004

Lloydminster Meridian Booster — If there is ever a time for a young athlete to succeed and do well, they might as well do it at the biggest stage available to them.

For the swimmers of Zone 7 that time was the Alberta Summer Games in Okotoks and High River where they came away with one of their largest medal hauls ever from the pool.

“This was the best we had ever done as far as placements for medals in swimming,” said coach Kierstin Smyth. “I think we are getting better swimmers (in Zone 7), and the more we compete the better were going to get.”

Lloydminster Aquanaut product Jonathan Smyth contributed to the eight medal onslaught with a silver of his own in the boys 15 and over 200-metre freestyle, improving from a bronze medal in the previous games in Camrose in 2002.

“I was kind of expecting a couple of medals, I think we did better than I expected, but we did pretty close to what we thought we were going to do heading in,” said the rookie coach, who had her own games experience to go off of. “It was a little different. I think it was more fun as an athlete, but it definitely gave me a lot more experience and I learned a lot. It will definitely help me out as a coach. But it was a lot of fun and we all had a blast.”

The three local clubs – Aquanauts, Riptides and Rebels – sent a younger team of nine to the event. Aside from Jonathan Smyth, two other local boys, Brayden Wells and Cory Totman, qualified for the finals in a few of the relays.

This performance is something the coaches, which also included Tyler Totman from the Rebels, are going to be building off of for the 2006 Alberta Games.

“This is a good experience, and a lot of them I think we probably will see in a few years at the next one, since there are quite a few younger ones,” said Smyth. “For the older ones it just gave them a taste of what they will see at regionals and provincials coming up. For some of them it was good to see how they even stood up against some of the winter club swimmers.”

There are three major competitions left in the season for the Aquanauts, all three of them involve trips back to Edmonton. This weekend they make the trip for a club meet, but the following two weekends is when it really gets interesting with regionals and then provincials.

Aquanauts prepare for regionals, provincials

Josh Aldrich
Booster Sports Editor
Wednesday, August 11, 2004

Lloydminster Meridian Booster — The time for any team to be peaking is heading into playoffs. Or in the case of swimmers, that would be regionals and provincials, and the Lloydminster Aquanauts are doing just that.

After a strong showing two weekends ago at the Alberta Summer Games, they followed that up with another one in Edmonton this past weekend. Their efforts were highlighted by their two aggregate medals: a silver from Brianna Wells in the girls nine and 10-year-old category and a bronze from her sister Britt in the six and under category.

“Everyone did really well at the meet,” said coach Keegan Rutherford, 17. “There was some really good swims by all of our kids. It just depends on a lot of the different age groups, where if the kid is at the bottom of their age group, they’re not always going to get the gold medal, but they always improve their times and that’s really good to me.”

This sets them up well heading into regionals this weekend back in Edmonton, where they are expecting a few more medals, this time from the likes of Jonathan Smyth and Jessica Kelly, in addition to the two Wells sisters, among others.

“The ones who go on to provincials are going to be the ones who have been training a lot,” said Rutherford. “It also depends on age group, because if you are at the top of your age group, you definitely have the advantage over somebody who just came into your group. I think all of our swimmers have a really good chance at making it on into provincials, they’ve all be training really well.”

Those who make standard at regionals will qualify for provincials the following weekend, also in Edmonton.

This has been a lot of highly competitive swimming in consecutive weeks for the Aquanauts, but they don’t expect fatigue to be a problem. In actuality, instead of taking it easy heading into the two final meets of the season, Rutherford is taking the opposite approach.

“I don’t think there’s any concern about tiring. Once we get back, I plan on doing some harder (training) at the beginning of the week to keep them building on their endurance. In the few days leading up to regionals and provincials, I plan to let them take it easy and to give them that little time before the meet to rest up and to allow their bodies to recuperate.”

Aquanauts swim to provincials

Josh Aldrich
Wednesday August 18, 2004
Lloydminster Meridian Booster

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It has been a big year for the Lloydminster Aquanauts – but they have possibly saved their best for the last two meets of the season.

This past weekend they cleaned up at regionals in Edmonton, collecting 34 medals between 12 swimmers, all of which have now qualified for provincials this weekend in Edmonton.

“I knew we were going to do well, and I knew just about everybody would make it to provincials,” said co-coach Kierstin Smyth. “But there were a lot of surprises and some really close races that some of them pulled off and some of them didn’t. Just about everybody had personal bests and that’s the main thing, the medals are really awesome to come away with that many.

“As far as I can remember this is probably one of our largest medal totals. Of our 14 swimmers ... 12 of them are going on to provincials in something at least.”

Leading the way for the Aquanauts was Jessica Kelly who collected four gold in the girls 13 and 14 100-metre freestyle, backstroke, butterfly and the 50-metre freestyle. In doing so she also set new provincial records in the 100-metre butterfly and 100-metre backstroke.

“It’s pretty big (heading into finals),” said Kelly. “I was happy with the records I got, I didn’t expect all of the medals I did. It’s a big step to be at the bottom of the age group and win some medals.”

It has been a big season for the 14-year-old from Kitscoty. She also swam at the Junior Nationals in Winnipeg earlier this month, qualifying for one final.

“It was great, I enjoyed it a lot,” said Kelly. “I had a lot of good experiences. I got like 19 and 17 in most of them, but in my backstroke I made it to the final and I got eighth place.”

Kelly now has her sights set on setting a new 50-metre freestyle record at provincials. But she has been just part of the story for the Aquanauts this season.

Jonathan Smyth had another big meet, collecting gold in the 15 and 16 boys 400 and 200-metre freestyle and silver in the 100-metre backstroke and freestyle.

Another storyline for the swim club was that of Brayden Wells who has swam well since recovering from a broken leg – suffered in a ‘theatrical accident’ – before the start of the season. Wells went on to win gold in the 11 and 12 boys 100-metre freestyle, silver in 50-metre backstroke and 50-metre freestyle, as well as gold in the 13 and under 200-metre freestyle.

“I’m just trying to train hard (for provincials),” said Wells. “It’s just really phenomenal going to provincials, representing Region ‘C’ – I’m just speechless, it’s just great going there.

“At the beginning of this year I missed a couple of meets because I broke my leg. In my first couple of meets I got more competition than I thought and I’m just really happy I came out with a couple of medals.”

The rest of the medal haul came from Britt Wells with gold in the six-and-under girls 25-metre butterfly, backstroke, freestyle, and the 50-metre freestyle; Renee Neufeld earned silver in the girls eight and under 25-m butterfly, and Bronze in 100-metre IM; Brianna Wells took home silver in the nine and 10 girls 100-metre IM, freestyle, 50-metre freestyle; Luke Muyres won bronze in the nine and 10 boys 25-metre butterfly; Stephanie Lacey won bronze in the 13 and 14 200-metre IM; Keeley Mokolky earned silver in the girls 13 and 14 400-metre freestyle and bronze in 800-metre freestyle; AJ Mokolky brought back silver in the 13 and 14 boys 100-metre breaststroke and bronze in 200-metre IM; Haley Howland earned silver in the 15 and 16 girls 100-metre

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breaststroke and 200-metre IM, and bronze in the 50-metre butterfly; and finally David Saunders won brought home a bronze medal in the 17 and over boys 100-metre breaststroke.

It is a group Smyth is expecting big things out of at provincials this weekend.

“We have a couple of our swimmers that are definitely looking to medal at provincials,” said the coach. “The other ones, if they’re not close they can better their times and that’s a step forward. If they can keep doing that pretty soon they’ll all have provincial medals.”

Aquanauts’ Kelly breaks record ... again

Josh Aldrich

Sunday August 29, 2004

Lloydminster Meridian Booster

So much for the tried-and-tested records of days gone by.

In a seven-day span the Aquanauts’ Jessica Kelly has broken the same record twice, not to mention haul in eight regional and provincial gold medals.

It’s also not so much the fact she broke the same record twice in a week’s time, it’s the manner in which she did it in. She smashed her 13 and 14 girls 100-metre butterfly regional mark (1:11.00) by almost two seconds, swimming 1:09.19 at provincials. Both competitions were at the same pool in Edmonton.

“It was pretty cool,” said Kelly. “I expected to do quite well, I didn’t expect to break my record again, by how much I did.”

“She’s very close to all of the (records) in the events that she swims,” said coach Kierstin Smyth. “All of them are within her reach and the one she did break, she broke by two seconds, so it was a really good swim for her.”

In addition to breaking the record again, she also swam to the same four golds that she did at regionals, winning the 100-metre freestyle and back stroke as well as the 50-metre freestyle events.

It’s that final event the E.S. Laird student has here sights set on for next year.

“Next year I want to get the 50-freestyle record,” she said. “That’s the one I really wanted to get last weekend but I didn’t quite get it. I got my best time this year, but I didn’t quite get the record and that made me kind of mad. I’ll be ready to get it next year.”

It has been a solid season for the 13-year-old Kelly who still has one year left at this level, a really encouraging note considering her performances at regionals, provincials and junior nationals in the past month.

“It’s been great, all of the training has paid off,” said Kelly. “I swam for two hours each day. It’s nice to do that and then go to provincials and do well – you know that you’re training for a reason.”

Kelly wasn’t the only Aquanaut who had a great swim. Of the 11 swimmers representing the club in Edmonton they returned with 17 medals.

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“It’s a really good find for us,” said Smyth. “Overall it’s close to what we normally do. I know there were a couple of unexpected medals and a lots of personal bests ... but overall it was a pretty good year for provincials.”

The remaining individual medal take was this: Brayden Wells won bronze in the 11 and 12 boys 50-metre freestyle; Jonathan Smyth brought back silver medals in the 13 and over boys 400-metre freestyle and the 200-metre freestyle, as well as bronze medals in the 15 and 16 boys 100-metre freestyle and the 100-metre backstroke.

“Brayden went into his race not ranked in the top three and he ended up pulling off a bronze. That was just awesome for him, and he beat his usual competitor, they’re really close all of the time and he took the bronze,” said Smyth.

Jonathan was ranked fourth in the two (events) he went in and he got bronze, so he pulled those up and we weren’t really expecting it.”

When it came to relay teams, the Aquanauts sent one team that collected two golds as Kelly, Haley Howland, Natasha Pidkova and Keeley Mokolky won both the 15 and 16 girls medley relay and free relay.

The Aquanauts were also major contributors to the medal winning Region C relay teams: Jonathan Smyth and Howland both won one gold, while Kelly and Wells both won two bronze medals and Renee Neufeld one.

This marks the end of a very successful season for the swim club, as they head into the winter months with a lot of momentum to carry over into next spring.

“Since we do have a number of personal bests, it really does give us something to build on,” said Smyth. “We know that we’ve improved this season and we can keep going and work even harder and accomplish the goals we didn’t quite get to this season. It looks pretty good heading into next year.”

Totman piloting the Aquanauts

Josh Aldrich

Wednesday June 15, 2005

Lloydminster Meridian Booster

Tyler Totman has now gone full circle with the Lloydminster Aquanauts – the student has now become the teacher.

Totman has traded in his Speedo for a stopwatch and has taken over as the head coach of the Aquanauts, a club he has been part of off and on since 1992.

“I’m a much better coach then I ever was a swimmer,” said Totman. “As a swimmer I was mentally weaker and didn’t challenge myself enough. As coach, I am mean and hard and make them work real hard, so there’s no chance to slack off and have fun.”

He says this with a bit of a laugh, but in reality he’s bringing some discipline and dedication to the swim club and sometimes almost has to break out the drill sergeant inside himself.

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“This year is so much fun because his practices are so long and you think it’s a joke but it’s not, it’s a real practice,” said 11-year-old swimmer Brianna Wells. “So you kind of freak out at first but when you’re done you feel so much better.”

Totman, of course, has their best intentions at heart. With 12 years of swimming under his belt he knows what it takes to get to the next level, and he is pushing them in that direction.

“I have extremely high expectations and I made sure they knew that at the start of the season,” said Totman. “They have to be at every practice, work very hard, are never allowed to dog it, and then they’ll see the payoffs in their times at the end of the season.”

There is a lot of potential there for him to work with already in the Aquanauts fold. From Jessica Kelly to Jonathan Smyth, A. J. Mokolky, Rebecca and Mary Cavanaugh, as well as others, there is a lot of provincials potential.

At a time trial late last month, for example, Mokolky set two new personal bests, and his sights are set high this year as he would like to add a provincial gold medal to the silver and bronze he already has in the 100-metre breast stroke.

“I was definitely expecting one, the other was a complete surprise. I was really surprised at my start, but I think there will definitely be more of that this year,” he said.

This Saturday, the Aquanauts will be hosting their own meet at the Leisure Centre with registration at 8:30 a.m. It is an event the swimmers look forward to as it is one of the few times all year they will have a home pool advantage.

“It’s usually a good opportunity because at most of our meets there’s usually only two people cheering for you,” said Mokolky. “But for this meet everyone comes out and it gets you pumped.”

Kelly breaking records, again

Josh Aldrich
Wednesday June 22, 2005
Lloydminster Meridian Booster

It didn’t take long at all for Jessica Kelly to return to the form she left off on last year.

In just her second meet of the season Kelly was back at breaking records, and the scary thing is this was a record she did not mean to break.

In just her second event of the day – while trying to get ready for the 50-metre freestyle later in the day – she found herself in a dog-fight for first place in the 100-metre back stroke and her competitive side took over and drove to the end. At the time she had no idea she was on a pace for a provincial record, but when she touched the wall she realized she had shaved four tenths of a second off the previous mark.

“I looked up on the board and smiled, and looked for my dad in the crowd to see what he was thinking too,” said Kelly. “He was pretty excited, he gives his little thumbs up.”

She credits new Aquanauts coach Tyler Totman for having her ready to go this early in the season, as he really pushed the conditioning button with all of his swimmers – in fact just about every swimmer set new personal bests. In addition to her new record, Kelly set three other personal bests in the 50-metre fly, the 50-metre freestyle and the 200-metre individual medley.

“Tyler’s a good coach,” said Kelly, 14. “They have really worked on our endurance. I have totally stepped it up and I can tell from last year to this year, my endurance is 10-times better than it was at this time last year.”

It was a great meet by all of the swimmers though, and a number of them left with aggregate medals. Rebekah Cavanagh won silver in the girls seven and eight flight; Kelly won gold in the girls 13 and 14 level; A.J. Mokolky won gold in the boys 13 and 14 division, while Brayden Wells won bronze; Haley Howland earned gold in the girls 15 and 16 level; Cory Totman took home silver in the boys 15 and 16 flight; and Jonathan Smyth was golden in the boys 17-and-over group.

Totman is excited about what this year may bring for the swim club after watching two very successful meets for the Aquanauts – in Vermilion the week before.

“It is very encouraging because you know as the season goes on they’re only going to get faster and faster,” said Totman. “If they keep dropping times like they are now, we will have a very strong team come provincials and regionals.

“This is one of the strongest teams I have seen in my 15 years in Lloyd swimming.”

Their next meet is this weekend in Edmonton at the Camrose and Millennium Marlins swim meet and Totman is expecting more of the same from his team.

“Expectations are high as always,” said Totman. “We’ll be sending a slightly smaller contingent. It will be mostly older swimmers at this one, it will be very interesting to see how they do. It should be a good meet.”

Aquanauts golden at Edmonton meet

Josh Aldrich

Sunday July 03, 2005

Lloydminster Meridian Booste

There has always been just one top dog, one spot at the top – and its a goal that drives many athletes.

After winning silver in the 400 and 200-metre freestyle and bronze in the 100-metre backstroke and 50-metre freestyle, in last year’s provincials, Jonathon Smyth would like nothing better than to upgrade the colour of his medal.

The swimmer is on the right track. He has picked up gold in his last two meets, including this past weekend in Edmonton at the Camrose Sea Serpents & Sherwood Park Millennium Marlins meet.

“I’m expecting a gold medal every time out, sometimes it’s a harder competition, sometimes it’s not,” said Smyth. “I expect to keep beating my times, lowering my times and getting ready for provincials. You have to start early.”

His coach Tyler Totman is excited about the improvement that Smyth has already shown – setting a new personal best in the discipline at the meet – and the potential that still remains.

“He’s working towards a provincial record,” said Totman. “It will be interesting to see if he can do that because he has the ability.”

It was a successful meet for the Aquanauts who sent a smaller group to the competition, but they still came back with five agate medals – Luke Myers silver in the 9/10 boys, Cory Totman silver in the 15/16 boys, and Tyler Totman bronze in the 17-plus boys also came home with medals.

For A.J. Mokolky it was his second gold medals in as many events, the swimmer also set four new personal bests in the process.

“I wasn’t expecting to do well because I hadn’t been training going into it, I had been on vacation for a bit,” said Mokolky. “I just went in hard and it came out good.”

Totman has high hopes for this group, Mokolky and Smyth in particular.

“These guys are performing amazing and they keep getting better. That’s the main thing about these guys,” said the coach. “It’s early in the season and to be getting that many high-point totals and agate gold, and other medals and personal bests. It’s hard to improve, but they keep rising to the challenge every time out.”

Their next competition is July 9 in Fort Saskatchewan and Wainwright, and then on July 10 in Provost. “(Provost) is a meet I really like because it’s an outdoor pool and it’s nice to get the kids out there on nice sunny days,” said Totman. “It’s hardest for the backstrokers because they have nothing to look up at to keep their line, but it’s fun, it’s different and you get to be in the sun all day long.

Kelly dominates provincials

Josh Aldrich
Sunday July 10, 2005
Lloydminster Meridian Booster

The next sport Jessica Kelly may want to try is high jumping, that is if she ever wants to hit the bar she set this past weekend in Calgary.

Kelly may have been the only Aquanaut at the A provincials, but she more than made up for it as she made the trip back to Lloyd with five medals.

“I was so happy when it was all over because it was a stressful week,” said Kelly, 14. “In the finals you just feel sick because you’re so nervous, but when it’s all over and you’ve won, it just feels awesome.”

Not only did she earn gold in both 50-metre butterfly and the 50-metre backstroke, silver in the 50-metre freestyle and 100-metre backstroke, and a bronze in the 100-metre butterfly, she did it in grand fashion, resetting her personal best in each category.

Her coach Tyler Totman knew she was capable of big things in the pool, but this went far beyond what he thought she was going to do.

“This is more than we expected out of Jessica,” he said. “She was stronger and in better shape than she’s been in previously, but you still don’t expect her to swim as well as she did. The older you get, the harder the competition, and she truly shone at this swim meet.”

She even surprised herself. Kelly entered provincials ranked seventh or eighth in just about every event, and has only been training for two months, where most of her competition has been in the pool for 11 months already. But that’s why the race isn’t settled on paper.

“I felt good and I had a lot of energy,” said Kelly. “When I got in the pool I had good endurance. I had a perfect weekend, it just felt good.”

Now she is training five days a week at the Lloyd Leisure Centre as she prepares for Club Nationals on July 22 in Winnipeg.

This won’t be her first trip to nationals – that was last year. Last time, though, she didn’t do as well as she hoped as the jitters got the best of her. This time should be different, as hopes are she will bring home a medal or two, especially in her 50-metre butterfly.

“I really want to make a couple of finals and do well, getting some best times again,” said Kelly. “It’s a huge meet, there are so many kids and everyone is awesome. You really have to be on your game and know what you’re getting into.”

Totman says if she keeps improving like she is, good things will come her way. She may even grab a coveted NCAA scholarship.

“This is the best we’ve ever had one of our older swimmers do in the ASSA as far as total medal haul,” said Totman. “She is definitely a step ahead of any other female swimmer I’ve seen in my 15 years of coaching and swimming. There is no reason Jessica Kelly cannot make a national team in the future. She’ll probably be able to swim for a university.”

This weekend the Aquanauts are off to three different events. On Saturday they will have the choice between Wainwright and Fort Saskatchewan, and on Sunday most of them will be in Provost for one of their few outdoor meets of the year.

Aquanauts continue strong season

Josh Aldrich
Sunday July 17, 2005
Lloydminster Meridian Booster

The Lloydminster Aquanauts experienced a trifecta success last weekend.

On Saturday in Fort Saskatchewan they came away with three medals and 11 personal bests, while in Wainwright they also picked up three medals and 12 personal bests.

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However, they saved their best for Sunday in Provost where they won six medals and came away with 14 personal bests.

“This was a very successful weekend all the way around,” said head coach Tyler Totman. “We won plenty of medals and set a bunch of personal bests which is exactly what we are looking for – especially the personal bests.”

Coming through with a big weekend for the Aquanauts was Keeley Mokelky, who won a bronze in the 15/16 girls agate while setting personal bests in the 100-metre freestyle (1:11.80) and the 200-metre individual medley (3:10.25).

She followed that up with an agate silver medal and a personal best in the 50-metre fly (40.00).

“I actually didn’t know what to expect because I didn’t know who was coming and what clubs were going to be there,” said Mokelky. “When we got there we looked and said, ‘Oh, this is going to be fun.’”

The Provost meet was a special one for a quartet of sisters on the Aquanauts club as Taylor, Shyla, Karlyn and Becky Fischer used to call Provost home. All four of them returned on Sunday and all four came back with at least two personal bests.

Also medaling on the weekend was Luke Muyres, who won a silver in the 9/10 boys, Brayden Wells with a silver in the 13/14 boys and Cory Totman with a silver in the 15/16 boys in Fort Saskatchewan.

In Wainwright, Hayley Howland won gold in the 15/16 girls agate and Rebekah Cavanaugh earned a silver in the 7/8 girls.

In Provost, Haley Howland brought home another gold medal while Jessica Kelly won a silver in the 13/14 girls. Meanwhile, the boys kicked in with golds from A.J. Mokelky in the 13/14 boys and Cory Totman in the 15/16 boys, and Tyler Totman added a bronze medal in the 17+ boys.

It has been a huge year for the Aquanauts, one Totman hopes continues this weekend in Edmonton at Grant MacEwan College at the Huma Huma meet.

“We have very high expectations for this meet,” said Totman. “We’re sending a lot of our older swimmers, so we’re expecting a very good meet all of the way around.”

Kelly breaks 22-year-old record

Josh Aldrich

Sunday July 24, 2005

Lloydminster Meridian Booster

As Jessica Kelly headed off to nationals in Winnipeg earlier this week, she was able to scratch off a major item on her to-do list – breaking the provincial record in the 13-14 girls 50-metre butterfly.

Last weekend at the Edmonton Huma Huma swim meet, Kelly lowered the 22-year-old record by almost a quarter of a second, dropping the standard from 31.10 to 30.86.

The record had stood for eight years longer than she had been on this planet, and was one she had targeted for the past two years.

Her performance blew away her coach Tyler Totman.

“It was an amazing feat, she’s been going after that record all year long,” said Totman. “There’s nothing more that she wanted than that record and the 50-metre freestyle record she’s still chasing. It was an amazing swim on her part.”

However, more time could be falling off of that mark before the year is out.

“Judging by the first half of her race she could go even faster,” said Totman. “It’s a mental thing and getting pressure (from swimmers). It’s hard to swim real fast if you’re not getting pressure from anyone. She’ll find that at regionals and provincials and it will hopefully push her over the edge again.”

It was a strong performance all the way around for the Aquanauts, as the small contingent brought back five medals – one gold, two silver and two bronze – and a long list of personal bests.

This group just keeps getting better and better each time out of the gate. One of the best examples of this is Brianna Wells, who dropped her personal best time in three different events – 50-metre freestyle, 100-metre individual medley and the 200-metre freestyle.

“It’s important because in regionals I will get to be swimming up with some higher ranked swimmers with these better times,” said Wells, 11. “I’ve come pretty far this year because I have been swimming two-hour practices and Tyler’s a really good coach, and I’ve been swimming with people who are in a higher age group than me.” The Neufeld sisters – Claire and Renee – both had a big weekend despite being in the pool for the first time in two weeks. Both of them set multiple personal bests.

Cory Totman has also continually put up strong times, setting new personal standards on a weekly basis, including dropping about five seconds this past weekend off of his 200-metre individual medley time. Meanwhile, Jonathan Smyth continues to put up some of the strongest numbers in the province, as he came away with an agate silver.

“There’s a lot of medals to be had, but we’re taking our fair share,” said Totman. “I’m very confident in what they’ve done and I can’t wait to see them perform in regionals and provincials. I think it’s going to be one of our best years there.”

However, it’s not just the older group that is progressing rapidly. There are two young swimmers that are finding their way together in the pool and have really taken off since being paired together for training. Despite being only seven and eight years old, Britt Wells and Rebekah Cavanagh have some lofty goals. Cavanagh is already chasing down the 10-year-old girls club record in the 25-metre breast stroke, and has two meets left to do it with regionals and provincials.

“I am only a few seconds off of it, so I am hoping to get it,” said Cavanagh. “I like that regionals are going to be here, because this pool is easy for me to swim in because it’s my home pool and it’s a nice pool. I’ve been working really hard and I think I’m going to do well.”

Wells, however, is already within an arms reach of the provincial qualifying time for 10 year olds in the 50-metre freestyle. She is just three seconds off the time and has three years to get it, but there is a good chance she could be there before the year is out.

She credits swimming with Cavanagh for pushing her to this point.

“It’s fun swimming against her,” said Cavanagh. “We do well when swimming together.”

It is a friendly competition between the two that is pushing them both. Despite being good friends, neither likes being beaten by the other.

“It’s fun to practice racing with people,” said Cavanagh. “We’re racing against each other, but not really. We’re just having fun. Our times are pretty close, so we’re comfortable swimming against each other and trying to beat each other.”

Kelly bronzed at nationals

Josh Aldrich

Wednesday July 27, 2005

Lloydminster Meridian Booster

Jessica Kelly may be just 14 years old, but she is one of the country’s brightest rising stars in the pool.

This year alone she has broken some of the most sought-after records, won several medals at provincials, and earned a truckload of medals from other competitions, but this past weekend she did something no Aquanaut has ever done before – she found the podium at the Canadian Long Course Club Nationals swimming competition.

The Lloydminster product climbed her way to the bronze medal position in the 50-metre backstroke and has yet come down.

“It just goes to show you that you don’t have to train 10 months of the year or wear those fast skin suits or anything,” said Kelly. “I come from Lloydminster and you can do alright.”

The race was tight out of the blocks and she had no clue where she finished until she finally touched the wall and found her name on the scoreboard.

“I looked up and I smiled like a dork, I just smiled the whole way,” said Kelly. “They gave us the medals and I kept smiling for an hour afterwards. I couldn’t stop smiling.”

While she was the only Aquanaut at the competition, she brought down her own cheering section as her aunt and uncle, her grandma, a cousin and her father, Paul, made the trek to Winnipeg. If she ever needed to know where she had finished in a race, all she had to do was look up in the crowd for a sign of support.

“After every race I could see him in the stands with a big thumbs up and a huge smile on his face,” said Kelly. “After my 50-metre backstroke he was thrilled – a half-an-hour later he said, ‘I’m still shaking,’ because he was so nervous.

“It was nice of them all to come. It gives you a boost to know that people are actually watching you.”

Paul has followed his daughter all over the province this year to numerous competitions, but this was something else, the scope of which even took him a little getting used.

“It was a very pressure-filled race – there were a lot of great swimmers and you just hope that she does well,” said her father. “I was very happy for her. You never are quite sure exactly where they are at in such a big pool. You see them at one point at about the 15-metre mark, but as they move away from you, and they’re so close, you never know who finishes where. You look at the board and you almost have to look a second and a third time to make sure it’s right.”

Kelly’s bronze medal goes well beyond the scope of just the Aquanauts.

According to her coach, Tyler Totman, this is the first medal by a summer club swimmer at the long course nationals – ever. The big difference between the summer club and winter club swimmers is the summer club swimmers can only train for three months of the year while winter club swimmers can go year-round. This was most definitely score one for the little guy.

“Some winter clubs spend their entire days without even sending a swimmer to nationals and we managed to send Jessica there and she won a medal,” said Totman. “We are very impressed with what she has accomplished, it is absolutely phenomenal in terms of what she has achieved.”

Despite being 12 hours away, Totman spent hours following Kelly’s progress online, and when he found out she won a bronze he might as well have been in Winnipeg right alongside her...

“I was extremely happy and excited, probably as excited as she was,” said Totman. “As a coach I’m more nervous of my kids doing well than I ever was of my own swims when I was a swimmer.”

The potential for more out of Kelly is mind-boggling for when she jumps to a winter club – which she says she’ll do in two years. When she starts training year-round the sky will literally be the limit.

“If she trained the full year ‘round, there’s no reason why she wouldn’t become one of the top swimmers in Canada,” said Totman. “She still has a lot of options open to her. She’s only 14, and she will be making that jump into a winter program in the next few years.”

Aquanauts ready for regionals

Josh Aldrich

Wednesday August 03, 2005

Lloydminster Meridian Booster

While the Aquanauts season does not end this weekend it will, however, set up their culmination.

This Saturday and Sunday the Aquanauts will be hosting regionals, which will determine their provincial lineup the following weekend at the Lloyd Leisure Centre.

“We’re really looking forward to it, it’s nice to have it in your own backyard,” said Aquanauts coach Tyler Totman. “Our individual goal is to send as many competitive swimmers to provincials as possible. We want to put forth the best swim team that we have so we can do well and represent our region very well at provincials.”

The Aquanauts will be sending 22 of their competitive swimmers to the pool this weekend to defend their waters from up to as many as eight other swim clubs including Edmonton, Vegreville, Fort Saskatchewan, and Vermilion.

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“This is a high profile meet in our region,” said Totman. “We’re not hosting, they’re just using our pool. It’s a regional event, they just happen to be using our pool. It speaks very highly of the facility we have in Lloyd and the equipment we have available.”

Having regionals in their own pool is a big advantage for the Aquanauts. Not only will they be able to enjoy the comforts of their home and being able to sleep in, it is a pool they know inside and out.

“In this pool you know how it works,” said Totman. “You know the quirks in the ceiling, you know where the ladders are, the walls, the currents even for some people. It’s nice having it in your own pool, it’s good for everyone all around in terms of design.”

Aquanauts soar at regionals

Josh Aldrich

Monday August 08, 2005

Lloydminster Meridian Booster

Any remaining questions about the Lloydminster Aquanauts swim club were answered this weekend.

They took the opportunity of hosting regionals to show the rest of the province they are a threat to the podium at all times. This weekend the club won 55 different medals in individual events and relays, and along the way set 65 personal bests and a few records.

“It has been an amazingly successful meet,” said Aquanauts coach Tyler Totman. “I have not seen results like these in a long time. I am impressed with what the kids have done, they have really put it together this year and I am proud of them.”

Jessica Kelly continued her dominance at the girls 13 and 14 division in an Aquanauts swim cap this summer. This weekend she won four gold medals – 100-metre freestyle, 50-metre freestyle, 50-metre fly and the 200-metre individual medley – set three personal bests, and set two new provincial records.

During prelims she broke her own record in the 50-metre fly (30:57) – she originally broke the 22-year-old record two weeks ago – and then she shattered the 200-metre IM (2:36:21), previously set by Amanda Saltesz in 2002 (2:36:87), in the final.

“I’ve been trying to set the 200-metre IM record since the beginning of the year,” said Kelly. “My dad and I even saw the girl who set it a couple of years ago, and every stroke she did was amazing. She was a great swimmer. I was a second-and-a-half off of it and I learned how to do a suicide turn from backstroke to breaststroke, so I think that helped a lot.”

She has one more record at this level she has been doggedly chasing down all year, the 50-metre freestyle, and she is closing in on it. She is just two-tenths of a second away from the old mark of 28:11, set by Tracy Remple of Fort Saskatchewan in 1986.

“It doesn’t seem to want to fall, but if the pressure is on I can hopefully perform and do good,” said Kelly.

Kelly wasn’t the only Aquanaut to have a big weekend as just about everyone took home a medal and a personal best. Some of the other highlights include Rebekah Cavanagh breaking a 10-year-old club record in the

girls' eight-and-over 25-metre breaststroke (22:72), and the likes of Mary Cavanagh, Brianna Wells and Keeley Mokolky with four personal bests.

Mokolky also picked up three medals in the girls 15 and 16 division – silver in the 100-metre free, bronze in the 13 and over 200-metre free and bronze in the girls open 800-metre free, plus two gold medals in the relays.

Mokolky says the success as a group was hard to avoid as the Aquanauts built a lot of momentum throughout the week.

“We’re all there for each other and we say ‘good luck’ before the races and ‘good job’ after the races,” said Mokolky, 15. “It was a good end to the season at home.”

Hayley Howland set two personal bests in the 50-metre fly and the 100-metre fly and she is just looking forward to provincials in Edmonton this coming weekend.

“The competition is unreal, you never know what to expect,” said Howland, 17, who will be competing in the 100-metre butterfly, the 50-metre butterfly, the 200-metre IM and the 100-metre breaststroke. “If you look at the website you could be first or second in the province, but when you get there, there could be a couple of other people that show up out of no where and you’ve never swam against before.”

Provincials are the final time many of these swimmers will have to reach personal goals for the year and that includes Jonathan Smyth.

Last year Smyth brought back four medals from provincials – two silver and two bronze – a haul he is looking at improving on this year.

“I swam against everyone last year that I’ll be swimming against this year, so I know what they do,” said Smyth, 17, who won four gold medals in the boys 17-and-over 400, 200, 100, and 50-metre freestyle events this weekend. “This event gives everyone confidence and you need confidence to do good.”

Aquanauts hit the pool

Larry Fisher

Friday June 16, 2006

Lloydminster Meridian Booster

Shortly after finding the pool for their first meet of the year in Vermilion, the Lloydminster Aquanauts found themselves back on top of the podium.

The club sent 16 swimmers down the Yellowhead Highway this past weekend and they returned home with 33 personal bests, two gold medals, two silver medals, and two bronze medals.

It was a marked improvement over their showing at last year’s Vermilion meet and the club’s success as a whole was reflected with 429 total team points – up from 348 last year despite sending 13 fewer swimmers.

“We wanted to have a strong start to our season and that was certainly it,” said coach Tyler Totman. “Everyone swam well for the most part and we even had a few surprises like Jeanna Siemens who was swimming in her first-ever meet and ended up placing really well in both of her events.”

As far as individual highlights go, Jessica Kelly picked up where she left off last year breaking four club records in Vermilion despite graduating into a higher age bracket. Now swimming alongside 15 and 16-year-old girls,

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she posted record times in the 50-metre freestyle, 50-metre butterfly, 100-metre butterfly and 100-metre backstroke.

“The records are nice, but there’s definitely room for improvement,” said Kelly, 15, who settled for silver in Vermilion. “I didn’t swim my best times or anything and I still have my eye on a couple more (club) records, so hopefully this weekend will be better.”

Kelly wasn’t the only Aquanaut rewriting their record book in Vermilion. Cory Totman shattered a club record dating back to the 1980s in the boys’ 17-and-over 100-metre backstroke, eclipsing the previous mark by almost five seconds with a time of 1:09.24.

“I crushed a 20-some-year-old record, so it was pretty sweet,” said Totman, whose efforts helped earn him a bronze medal at the meet. “We all did amazing, we got a ton of new medals and lots of kids medalled for their first time ever. It was the start we were looking for and now we have a lot to build on for the rest of the year.”

Jonathan Smyth and Britt Wells accounted for the Aquanauts two gold medals in Vermilion, as the top point getters among 17-and-over boys and eight-and-under girls respectively.

The Aquanauts will try to follow up their Vermilion performance this weekend with 33 club members set to take the pool for their annual Father’s Day Weekend Swim Meet. The event will run Saturday from 9 a.m. to 4 p.m. at the Leisure Centre in Bud Miller Park.

Aquanauts make podium splash

Larry Fisher

Monday June 19, 2006

Lloydminster Meridian Booster

The Lloydminster Aquanauts won one for the dads in the stands at their annual Father’s Day Weekend Swim Meet on Saturday at the Leisure Centre.

The club’s 31 participants combined to reel in three gold medals along with two silvers and 53 personal bests en route to winning their home meet for the first time in many years.

“It’s been awhile,” said coach Tyler Totman. “We had so many amazing swims this weekend and now this sets a great base for the future of our club and our performance in the long run.”

Leading the way yet again was 15-year-old phenom Jessica Kelly, who swam away golden and in the process broke all four of the club records she set last weekend in Vermilion – 100-metre freestyle, 100-metre backstroke, 50-metre freestyle and 50-metre butterfly.

The latter being the most significant as she redeemed herself after settling for silver in Vermilion. While it is little more than a one-horse race for Kelly in the other three events, she has company in the 50-metre butterfly with Edmonton’s Elaine Gross giving her all she can handle and then some.

“She beat me last weekend and I was out to get her back this time, especially swimming in my own pool,” said Kelly. “I was really ready for that race and my preparation paid off.”

It may be billed as a battle between bitter rivals, but rest assured Kelly and Gross are actually good friends outside of the pool and live for the competition they give each other in the water.

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“It was a good race again, but she totally killed me on the turns,” said Gross, 16, who swims out of Edmonton’s Huma Huma club. “Last time it was a total dog fight in the water and this time she kind of pulled away in the end, but it’s just a friendly competition and I love swimming against her because she’s always pushing me to do more than I actually can.”

Totman certainly gets a kick out of watching the two go head-to-head, as they consistently raise the bar while lowering their times.

“There’s a real rivalry brewing there and it’s exciting for all of us,” he said. “It’s always nice to watch anyone swim at that calibre and it really inspires our younger swimmers when they see them going that hard.”

Kelly and Gross will soon find themselves swimming as teammates rather than nemesis, however, as both have been named to an Alberta All-Star team for an upcoming meet in Edmonton.

As for the rest of the field on Saturday, the event attracted about 240 swimmers, ranging in age from four to 18, from eight clubs as far away as Edmonton. With that level of competition in town, it would have been easy for the Aquanauts to be overshadowed at their own meet, but they did their part to stand out.

Jonathan Smyth had a big day, winning gold in the boys’ 17-and-over division and breaking a club record in the 100-metre freestyle along the way. Likewise, Cory Totman shaved close to three seconds off the club record he set in Vermilion last weekend, swimming his 100-metre backstroke heat in 1:06.98 to join Smyth on the podium with a silver medal for his efforts.

Haley Howland was the Aquanauts other golden girl, taking top honours among the 17-and-over girls, while Britt Wells followed up her gold medal performance in Vermilion with a satisfying silver in the eight-and-under age group.

Next on the agenda for a majority of the Aquanauts competitive swimmers are the Alberta Summer Games tryouts which are set for this Sunday.

Kelly poised for podium climb

Larry Fisher

Wednesday July 19, 2006

Lloydminster Meridian Booster

A year older and a year better – or so it would seem for local swimming sensation Jessica Kelly.

Last year, as a 14-year-old, she became the first-ever Lloydminster Aquanaut to find the podium at Club Nationals, and now roughly 12 months later Kelly is preparing to better that bronze-medal performance in the 50-metre backstroke and perhaps push for a medal in the 50-metre butterfly event.

Despite competing at the bottom end of her age bracket, Kelly made a splash at this past weekend’s Alberta ‘A’ provincials in Edmonton, swimming her way on to Team Alberta and qualifying for nationals in five different strokes.

“It’s the next step and I’m looking forward to it,” said Kelly, who will swim the 50 back, 50 fly, 50 free, 100 free and 100 back at nationals in Calgary July 20 to 23. “Last year I made it to a final and placed, so now I kind of know what it’s like and how good it feels and I’m pumped to do it again.

“My 50 fly time is looking really good this year too, so I’m aiming to make that final as well as improve on my 50 back.”

Kelly was successful in defending her 50-metre backstroke title at provincials, taking gold in the 15 and 16-year-old girls’ division, and will once again be Alberta’s best bet for a medal in that event come nationals. It was an all-around good meet for her, however, as she also managed to bring home bronze in the 50-metre butterfly and set a personal best in the 100-metre backstroke.

While she appears to be peaking at the perfect time, Kelly says there is plenty of room for improvement, both prior to nationals and looking long-term.

“I was pretty happy with my times at (provincials). Almost all of them were my best so far this year and I was within a couple of tenths of my PBs from last year in the 50 back and 50 fly, but I know I still have more in me and hopefully I can prove that at nationals,” said Kelly, adding she’s benefited from training alongside fellow Aquanauts Jonathan Smyth and Cory Totman who compete in the 17-and-over boys’ division.

“We work together a lot, especially with sprints, and they are usually a little bit ahead of me just because they are guys and they are older and stronger,” said Kelly. “But by pushing myself to keep up with them it’s only going to help me in the long run.”

If nothing else, Smyth and Totman provide Kelly with much needed competition – albeit friendly. Swimmers of her calibre are few and far between among summer club members. And more often than not, she finds herself racing primarily against the clock, which makes it difficult for her to truly gauge where she’s at.

“The small-town meets are good too, but you don’t get to see the best of the best until you get to provincials and then nationals,” said Kelly, who was one of only two summer club members to make Team Alberta. The rest of their roster is comprised of winter club members who train year-round as opposed to three or four months during the summer.

“We’re pushing her as hard as we can here, but without the competition I don’t know how much more we can do,” said Aquanauts co-coach Keegan Rutherford. “Jessica’s pretty dominant against the other summer club swimmers, but it’s also nice to see her right in the thick of things at the provincial level against girls who spend 12 straight months in the pool.

“She’s really making a name for herself and our club and obviously we wish her nothing but the best at nationals.”

Meanwhile, the rest of her Aquanaut teammates will be in Edmonton July 20 to 23, competing in the Huma Huma Swim Meet in preparation for regionals at the beginning of August.

Pidkowa swims to ASG silver

Larry Fisher

Wednesday August 02, 2006

Lloydminster Meridian Booster

A bit of a slacker but hardly a slouch, Lloydminster Aquanauts swimmer Natasha Pidkowa added a silver lining to her 2006 Alberta Summer Games, finishing second in the 15-to-17-year-old girls’ 100-metre breaststroke event.

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Making her second and final ASG appearance this past weekend in Red Deer, the 17-year-old Holy Rosary graduate swam a personal best 1:24.94 in the final, eclipsing her previous mark set in the preliminary heat by almost three seconds.

“I don’t know where my swimming career is going to take me from here, but it was nice to end off with a medal and that sense of accomplishment,” said Pidkowa, crediting her parents and coaches for her first-ever ASG medal. “I like to slack and have fun, but they force me to show up for practice and constantly push me to improve, so I have to give them most of the credit.”

Another reason for Pidkowa’s sudden success may have been subdued expectations – both from herself and coach Tyler Totman. Attending only her second meet of the year, having placed third overall in her age group at the Aquanauts home meet in mid-June, Pidkowa arrived in Red Deer as a relatively unknown commodity but certainly made a name for herself throughout the weekend.

“I didn’t go in with too many expectations because I had been really busy with work and stuff and didn’t have too much time to compete or even practice,” said Pidkowa, who also finished fourth in the 200-metre breaststroke – missing the podium by the slightest of margins. “I just figured I would go and do my best, and I surprised myself more than ever with what I was able to do.

“I definitely wasn’t as nervous this time around and didn’t put as much pressure on myself (before the individual races).”

Totman couldn’t have been more proud of Pidkowa’s efforts as the only Aquanaut to medal at the meet, and he was absolutely astonished by his third-year student’s ability to shave almost three seconds off her personal best time in just a matter of hours.

“It’s rare to see a PB drop by that much in the same competition, but Natasha just had a phenomenal swim and really gave it her all,” said Totman, adding Pidkowa made some minor adjustments to her stroke after the prelims in preparation for the final. “She had some pretty stiff competition and yet rose to the top of her class, which ultimately reflects well on our club as a whole.”

Pidkowa came within a second-and-a-half of qualifying for ‘A’ provincials with her silver-medal performance, however, she will get another crack at reaching that milestone with regionals set for Aug. 12 to 14 in Edmonton.

“I would love to make it to provincials in hopefully the 100-metre breaststroke,” she said. “I also hold our club record for that event at around 1:25, so I’m hoping to maybe push it a little further and see what I can do.”

Of the 23 total Aquanauts representing Zone 7 in Red Deer, Courtney Lofstrom and Keeley Mokolky also had strong showings. Lofstrom lowered her personal bests in the 11 and 12-year-old girls’ 50-metre freestyle, 100-metre freestyle, 200-metre freestyle and 200-metre breaststroke, while Mokolky set a new PB in the 15-to-17-year-old girls’ 400-metre freestyle. Another shining star for Zone 7 was Fort McMurray’s Jorah Gebert, who led the way with three gold medals in the boys’ 13 and 14-year-old division.

Totman takes terrible tumble

Larry Fisher

Wednesday August 02, 2006

Lloydminster Meridian Booster

Talk about catching a bad break – or sprain as it would turn out to be.

Lloydminster Aquanauts swimmer Cory Totman was considered a lock to earn Zone 7 a medal in the 15-to-17-year-old boys' 100-metre backstroke and most expected him to push for the podium in two of his five other events at this past weekend's Alberta Summer Games in Red Deer.

Totman didn't disappoint early on, splashing his way to a personal best in the 200-metre Individual Medley Friday morning in what was the fifth fastest qualifying time at 2:34.15. However, a freak accident prior to only his second preliminary heat ended all hopes of medalling, and subsequently sent Totman to hospital with what was later diagnosed as a badly sprained ankle with extensive ligament damage.

"As soon as I hopped in I just felt searing pain throughout my body. The split second I was in the water I knew already then I was done for the games," said Totman, who rolled his ankle forward on impact with the pool floor. "I was pretty choked up, it was hard to swallow having worked all year towards medalling there and making a serious run at provincials, and now not being able to do either."

Hurting himself was likely the last thing on Totman's mind as he plunged into the water for the 200-metre backstroke – another event he was eyeing a Top 5 finish in – but in a cruel twist of fate, he was too tall for his own good and the shallow waters did little to cushion the blow. Immediately following the incident, Totman was transported by ambulance to the Red Deer Hospital where he was fitted for a partial cast before returning to the pool to root on his Zone 7 teammates.

Back home in Lloydminster on Monday, which just so happened to be his 18th birthday, Totman had a date with the doctor. While he remained upbeat and optimistic for a return to the water in time for provincials, starting Aug. 18, it wasn't meant to be as his worst nightmare soon became a reality.

"They are saying three weeks until I can put any weight on it and then I'll have to go through probably six weeks of physiotherapy because there is ligament damage too," said Totman, who is literally ending his senior swimming year on a sore note. "Doc said there's no chance of me being able to go to provincials. I'm going to have to agree with him on that one, because I hadn't taken off my (partial cast) to look at it since it happened and when we did she was super swollen and gross looking."

Cory isn't the first Totman to have his provincial dreams shattered by injury, however. His older brother and current coach, Tyler, broke his wrist only four days prior to provincials a few years back and can relate to Cory's emotional agony.

"It's too bad. Cory was set to do very well for us," said Tyler, who was poolside when the incident took place and could sense something was wrong. "Cory tried to tough it out, he was completely quiet and didn't show any real noticeable signs of pain, they didn't even stop the race to be honest, but I could tell something pretty serious must have happened to him.

"It took awhile for it to really sink in because obviously it's not the way he wanted to go out being that was his last kick at the can for Alberta Summer Games."

One thing that wasn't hurt in the whole ordeal, however, was Cory's sense of humour.

"This just goes to show I really am following in Tyler's footsteps, only this time that's not necessarily a good thing," he said. "I went in with the goal of winning a couple of medals, but in the end I still went out in style – I was the only one that got injured."

Aquanauts reel in records, medals at regionals

Larry Fisher

Friday August 18, 2006

Lloydminster Meridian Booster

The Lloydminster Aquanauts reset the standard for excellence at this past weekend's regional swim meet at Grant MacEwan College in Edmonton.

Despite taking only 13 swimmers to the annual event, the Aquanauts returned home with 34 medals, 27 personal bests, nine club records and one provincial record, while finishing fourth overall in team points in what was one of the club's all-time best showings at regionals.

"We had a phenomenal meet, everyone just swam their hearts out," said coach Tyler Totman, who hopped back into the pool himself and became one of 11 Aquanauts to qualify for this weekend's provincials in Calgary with a gold-medal performance in the 100-metre backstroke.

That event is usually dominated by his younger brother Cory, who suffered a severe ankle sprain at the Alberta Summer Games in Red Deer a couple of weeks back and has been out of the pool ever since.

"If Cory was there I wouldn't have been winning that's for sure," said Totman. "But that's the stroke I used to swim a lot of back in the day and hopefully I can finish close to my old personal best at provincials."

While Totman was quick to downplay his own accomplishment, he was ecstatic with the efforts of his students – young and old. From first-timers Jordan and Jeanna Siemens, who both swam personal best times, to phenoms Jessica Kelly and Jonathan Smyth, who combined for 12 medals including 10 golds, there was no shortage of highlights for the Aquanauts.

It was just another day in the pool for Kelly, however, as she was up to her old tricks at regionals – setting a new provincial record in the 200-metre individual medley, shattering the old mark by nearly a full second-and-a-half.

"I knew (the record) was within reach, but I didn't think I would get it at regionals because that was my first time swimming the IM all year," said Kelly, who is riding a wave of confidence after also resetting her own club records in the 15-to-17-year-old girls' 100-metre backstroke and 100-metre butterfly at regionals. "For provincials I want to get that IM record lower and go after the 100-metre backstroke record and maybe even get the 50-metre butterfly record too."

Not to be outdone, Smyth set four club records in the boys' 17-and-over division at regionals – three of which were already his and another in the 50-metre freestyle which had stood since 1985 and was once a provincial record. The former fast-time holder, Dave Saunders, was present to witness his record fall and later swam alongside Smyth as part of the Aquanauts' gold-medal winning relay team.

"That 50-free was my closest race of the day and really the only one I had major competition in, but I pulled it out in the end," said Smyth, who didn't finish second in anything at regionals, taking gold in four individual races two relays. "I'm ranked first in all four of my events heading into provincials, so if I swim the way I can then technically I should end up on top of the podium."

Among the Aquanauts other medal favourites for provincials are Natasha Pidkova and A.J. Mokolky, who boast the province's top breaststroke qualifying times in their respective age groups. Britt, Brianna and Brayden Wells along with Friedrich Naude will also be making the trip to Calgary.

“As a club we are shooting for eight medals at provincials which would be a phenomenal haul for only 11 swimmers,” said Totman. “Our goal for this year is be a Top 10 club and then maybe Top 5 next year.”

Smyth, Kelly fill pool with medals

Larry Fisher

Friday August 25, 2006

Lloydminster Meridian Booster

Coming off one of their all-time best showings at regionals, Lloydminster Aquanauts coach Tyler Totman set the bar high heading into this past weekend’s Alberta Summer Swimming Association Provincial Meet in Calgary. He benchmarked their performance at eight individual medals, saying that would be a phenomenal haul for only sending 11 swimmers. But lo and behold his clubmates nearly doubled that total, bringing home 14 individual medals as well as two relay medals.

“We actually exceeded my expectations by a fair margin and really racked up the medals at provincials,” said Totman, who accounted for one medal of his own – a bronze in the boys’ 17-and-over 100-metre backstroke. “A lot of our kids stepped it up when the pressure was on and swam their way to the podium, which was just awesome to watch.”

In what has become a trend all year long, two Aquanauts distanced themselves from the pack.

Jonathan Smyth ended his Aquanauts career on a memorable note; by winning four gold medals, setting three club records, and was awarded the trophy for 2006 ASSA Most Outstanding Male Swimmer – the first Aquanaut to do so since Hobie Horton back in 1985.

“Jonathan has had an outstanding year,” said Totman, adding Smyth now has his sights set on making the University of Alberta’s swim team this fall. “He changed up the way he trained, instead of two one-hour blocks per day he did one two-hour block, and that really worked wonders for his endurance and put a lot more focus on building natural speed in him.”

Jessica Kelly also came up big in Calgary, adding yet another provincial record to her growing collection, and also came away with four medals – two gold and two silver. With her time of 1:09.14 in the 100-metre backstroke event, Kelly officially became the fastest female backstroker in summer swimming history.

“Jessica got out of the blocks super fast and she brought it home just as fast, she didn’t die out at all, and it was just another phenomenal race into the record books for her,” said Totman, noting Kelly’s provincial record in the 200-metre individual medley set two weeks ago at regionals actually fell again at provincials to Elaine Gross, the gold medallist out of the Huma Huma Swim Club in Edmonton.

While most of her Aquanaut teammates have since dried off and put away their caps until next spring, Kelly is still in the pool preparing for winter club tryouts as she will audition for Sherwood Park’s world-renowned Silver Tide Swim Club in the coming weeks.

“It is a very high-performance club. At the last age group championships they won top team under 75 members in the province of Alberta and one of the Silver Tide’s swimmers is also a member of Team Canada,” said Totman. “If Jessica does in fact catch on there, training year-round with that kind of talent pushing her to get better, she will definitely develop into an elite-calibre swimmer.”

Kelly's influence is already rubbing off and is part of the reason for the Aquanauts' substantial improvement over last year's showing at both regionals and provincials – climbing from outside the Top 20 to within striking distance of the Top 10 summer clubs in Alberta over the course of a single season.

Britt Wells also medalled in three events at provincials – taking silver in the girls' eight-and-under 50-metre freestyle, bronze in the 25-metre freestyle, and bronze in the 100-metre individual medley. Meanwhile, Natasha Pidkova rounded out the Aquanauts' individual medallists with a gold and club record in the girls' 17-and-over 100-metre breaststroke as well as a bronze in the 50-metre butterfly. Pidkova also teamed up with Kelly, Keeley Mokelky, and Brianna Wells to win gold and set a new club record in the girls' 17-and-over freestyle relay as well as a bronze and club record in the medley relay.

Aquanauts make podium splash

Larry Fisher

Friday June 15, 2007

Lloydminster Meridian Booster

Father's Day may be Sunday, but the Lloydminster Aquanauts plan on giving their dads a gift of gold during Saturday's annual Father's Day Weekend Swim Meet at the Lloydminster Leisure Centre.

If the Aquanauts first meet of the season in Vermilion was any indication, the club will have plenty to celebrate and the dads at poolside will be in for a treat. They returned home from Vermilion with 54 personal bests and 10 medals – including five gold – in 85 swims this past weekend.

“For our first competition, the kids all did exceptionally well,” said Aquanauts co-coach Amber Miller, who works primarily with the beginner group. “There are a few little things we need to clean up on, but other than that they did great, especially the younger kids who were swimming in their very first meet.”

One such newcomer to the competitive side of things is Kelsey Rish. The 12-year-old, entering her second season with the club, made her debut in Vermilion and enjoyed every minute of it.

“It was kind of tricky because it was my first time racing with lots of other people from other cities,” said Rish, who competed in the 50-metre breaststroke, 50-metre freestyle, and 200-metre freestyle events. “It was lots of fun trying to figure out what other people did and then learning from them to help improve my own times.”

While Rish and others were merely soaking up the experience, the older Aquanauts went into Vermilion with high expectations, and for the most part were able to achieve them.

Jonathon Smyth and Jessica Kelly both swam to 'A' times, qualifying them for the Alberta Summer Swim Association's all-star team, which will compete in Edmonton at the Long Course Provincial Championships in July. Among the other highlights were Keeley Mokelky and Haley Howland tying for gold in the 17-and-over girls category, while Cory Totman stood alone atop the podium in the 17-and-over boys division.

“We always expect to have good results with our more veteran kids,” said Aquanauts coach Tyler Totman. “It was a decent warm-up meet for them, they were all pretty impressive. It's hard to single any one person out this time, but it was nice to see Keeley and Haley – best friends – sharing the gold.”

The Aquanauts are preparing for a much bigger test at their home meet, however. A majority of the senior swimmers from other clubs opted out of last weekend's season opener, and instead concentrated on the Border

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City competition. There were four clubs and about 90 swimmers in Vermilion, and Totman is expecting double that in Lloydminster with eight clubs and more than 220 swimmers registered.

“It is usually a really big starting meet, and the first of the really senior-focused meets,” said Totman, adding it will be the Aquanauts first look at their perennial rivals from the Edmonton Huma Huma Swim Club. “It is always a great competition when Edmonton comes out. They are bringing 40 swimmers to this meet, which is more than we even have in our club, so it will be really interesting going up against them.

“We are still expecting big things from a lot of kids, because this is their home pool and it is their best shot to get good PBs heading into the rest of the year.”

The meet gets underway at 9 a.m. and runs until about 5 p.m.

Aquanauts win home meet

Josh Aldrich

Wednesday June 20, 2007

Lloydminster Meridian Booster

For being a relatively small swim team, the Aquanauts pack quite the punch.

This past weekend with eight different clubs and more than 220 swimmers in town for the Aquanauts annual meet, it was the hometown swimmers that came out on top with seven medallists and several new club records.

“The fact we only sent 26 swimmers was the most impressive part,” said coach Tyler Totman. “Twenty-six swimmers managed to win our meet.”

Two of the club records that fell were long-standing records that date back almost 30 years – 17 and over girls 50-metre butterfly (1972) and the 100-metre backstroke (1980) – and both were taken over by Haley Howland.

“It was awesome,” said Howland, 18. “It felt good inside knowing I could still train hard and be successful. I tried it last weekend in Vermilion but wasn’t successful, but with the home pool advantage I just nailed it.”

Howland’s success was a bit of a surprise. After being a rising star with the club for a number of years, she took last season off almost entirely due to it being her Grade 12 year and other commitments. But she couldn’t deny the draw of the pool.

“I just didn’t have the heart to swim last year,” said Howland. “But I’ve been working at the pool full-time so I’ve been in the water a lot more. The first couple of practices were hard to get into, but I made it, so now I should be good for the rest of the season.”

Cory Totman also set a club record in the 100-metre backstroke. But it wasn’t standing near as long as the ones Howland beat, as he actually set it last year.

“It was pretty easy, but I enjoy doing it. I didn’t really target it, but it happens, getting faster is always a goal, so when I (reset a record) it feels good,” said Cory, who won the 17 and over boys gold and has his sights set on more medals at provincials.

As always with an Aquanauts meet, Jessica Kelly also showed very well. No provincial marks fell this past weekend for her, but Totman has the feeling it will only be a matter of time.

“She had a phenomenal meet. She should be on pace to start beating provincial records in the next three to four weeks as we do more speed training with her,” said Totman, noting the 200-metre IM and the 1,500-metre freestyle will be the likely victims. “I know Jess herself isn’t happy unless she’s beating provincial records. In her case, setting personal bests and continuing development, records seem to follow.”

Other medallists included Kelly winning the girls 15 and 16 gold, AJ Mokelky the boys 15 and 16 silver, Natasha Pidkova the girls 17 and over silver, Tyler Totman the boys 17 and over silver, and Hanna Kern-Ali the girls six and under bronze.

The older swimmers next meet will be in two weeks in Fort Saskatchewan, and Totman is expecting even more of a challenge, especially from Edmonton’s HUMA club.

“HUMA being closer to home, you know they’re going to pick it up a bit. They finished third at our event and they’re a perennial provincial powerhouse,” said Totman. “And Fort Saskatchewan you know will have a lot of pressure on themselves to win it.”

The weekend was also an opportunity for the club’s younger swimmers to get a taste of a big competition as the meet tailored a few events exclusively towards them. They will have another shot at the competition experience this weekend in Leduc at the Derrick meet – a meet built around young swimmers.

“For a lot of them it took a lot to go up behind the blocks in their very first meet, not knowing what to expect,” said coach Keegan Rutherford. “A lot of our swimmers didn’t even know if they would be able to swim a full length and were real nervous, so we did a lot to overcome that – to develop confidence in these swimmers.”

The youth of the club is a strong point as they do their best to eventually fill the swimming cap of those moving on.

“You can see potential and progression in a lot of them. They may not look like much of a swimmer at the beginning of the year, but they’ll be able to swim a couple hundred metres by the end,” said Rutherford.

Totman swimming to the top

Josh Aldrich

Wednesday August 01, 2007

Lloydminster Meridian Booster

In sports there are few things that will motivate an athlete like to trying to avenge an injury shortened season.

Cory Totman’s swimming season came to an abrupt end at the worst possible time last year, but he has come back with a vengeance, shattering age-old club records and working himself to the top of the overall rankings.

“I’m feeling strong, I just need a little more speed and a little more endurance,” said Totman, 19, who is in his 14th competitive swimming season.

The season ending incident occurred almost exactly a year ago today. He was preparing for his second preliminary swim at the Alberta Summer Games in Red Deer dreaming of finding the podium at least twice. He jumped in the pool, and those dreams turned to a nightmare.

He landed awkwardly in the pool, tearing just about every ligament in his right ankle.

Not only were his Summer Games over, it took him out of the provincial equation later that month as well, where once again he was expected to be one of the top swimmers in the 17-and-over division.

“It’s motivation for this year and I’m being way more cautious getting in and out of the pool, I don’t want to hurt myself,” said Totman.

The injury had Totman inactive and out of shape into February, but since has turned things around to the point where he is now the top-ranked swimmer in his category in Alberta. For provincials this year he is eyeing the title his Aquanauts teammate and friend Jonathan Smyth captured last year – Alberta Summer Swimming Association Most Outstanding Male Swimmer.

“Jon won it last year and it would be nice if I won it this year, back-to-back Aquanauts 17 and over boys winning it,” said Totman, who will be swimming in the 200-metre IM, 100-metre back stroke, the 1,500-metre freestyle, and the 400-metre freestyle. “You swim four races and add up the points and whoever has the most points at the end of the day gets the trophy.”

His coach and brother Tyler Totman, says he is well on his way to accomplishing his goal. In the 20 different individual events he has swam in this year, he has finished first in all but two of them, and even then he still found the podium with second and third place finishes. Along the way he has taken out two 25 year-old club records, the latest being the 200-metre IM previously held by Hobie Horton, a former ASSA Most Outstanding Male Swimmer.

“He really has picked up his training this year, even on his days off he’ll come into the pool and swim 2,000 metres, plus put a jog in. This is really an example of hard work, more than natural talent or anything,” said Tyler. “Focusing is his number one feature, he focuses on his goal and does what it takes to get there. He’s almost trying to make up for what he missed out on last season with this year.”

Totman isn’t the only one who has seen success the last few weeks. In Provost two weeks ago the club had four personal bests and collected five overall medals from nine swimmers – Cory Totman won 17-and-over male gold, Haley Howland took the 17-and-over female gold with Keeley Mokolky finishing second, A.J. Mokolky took gold in the 15-to-16 male division, and Rebekah Cavanagh earned gold in the nine-to-10 female division.

The next day in Fort Saskatchewan there were 11 personal bests set and they collected three more overall medals – Cory Totman won gold in the 17-and-over male division with Tyler taking silver, and Howland took silver in the 17 and over female division.

This past weekend at the Sylvan Lake Open Water event, the club sent five swimmers with Howland winning her age group in the 2.5-kilometre swim, Keeley, Tyler, and Jessica Kelly finished second in their age groups in the 2.5-kilometre swim, and Cory finished fourth in his group in the five-kilometre swim.

“We’ve had some really successful meets so far this year,” said Tyler. “It’s our hard work that is really paying off.”