

Megan's Magical Summer

First British cap for Edinburgh teenager

For talented youngsters, it's the speedy development and exciting new challenges that whet the appetite. This summer, City of Edinburgh's Megan Gilchrist has experienced all the thrills of a swimmer on the fast track to success – and she's hungry for more.

The 16-year-old began her summer holidays from Whitburn Academy as a member of an Edinburgh squad that enjoyed a successful trip to Canet and Barcelona. Then she came home to capture the 100m and 1500m freestyle titles at the Scottish National Championships in Glasgow.

With no rest for the gifted, she was off to the British National Championships in Sheffield before embarking on her greatest test to date – a debut for GB at the Paris Open Meet.

"It's really great to win my first British senior cap," admitted Megan before heading to France. "The goal is to swim fast in Paris and also learn as much as I can from the experience."

According to head coach, Fred Vergnoux, Megan has all the qualities to go far in her swimming career. "She is improving all the time and is very focused and very professional in the way she approaches her swimming," he said.

"She did a really good job in Canet and Barcelona and I was particularly pleased that she set a PB in the 200m freestyle at the Scottish Championships. Paris will be a wonderful experience. The first cap is always special and, hopefully, she will produce some fast times."

Mirroring her coach's vision, Megan confirms that she has a single-minded approach towards competitive sport. Awaiting the results of three Highers, the Whitburn youngster will be returning for a sixth year at school - but swimming is very much the priority.

"I would quite like to go to university," she says. "But I want to take time out to concentrate fully on my swimming. I'm aiming high. I'll be trying to make the Olympic Games in Beijing next year, but the London Olympics in 2012 is the really big goal."

Megan Gilchrist



"There is also the Commonwealth Games in New Delhi in 2010. There's just so much to look forward to."

But Whitburn Academy also plays an important role in her swimming career. "The school has been great and I can really come and go as I please," she reveals. She is also delighted that they will be more than happy to provide a few days extra leave for Megan's appearance in the forthcoming UK Schools' Games in Coventry.

Megan learned to swim at Armadale when she was just six years old and then spent time at Livingston Aquanauts and Fauldhouse, with her Dad, Brian, as coach, before earning her place in the CES squad.

"City of Edinburgh is brilliant," she enthused. "Getting to train with so many world-class swimmers is just great."

Undoubtedly, her greatest role model is Alena Popchanka – Fred's wife and the winner of the 200m freestyle at the 2003 World Championships.

The 200m freestyle is also Megan's best event – London 2012 could be her chance to stand out among the very best in the world.

Fred agrees. "Beijing will be a tough call for Megan, but youngsters improve so quickly.. At her age, anything can happen."

"But London is a very exciting prospect. 2012 could certainly be her time."

COACH'S CORNER

FRED'S FOCUS ON THE FUTURE

August is going to be a hectic month for our swimmers. Megan, Robyn and Alena compete in the Paris Open Meet, John and Rob are off to Indianapolis for the US National Championships and then Kirsty, Kris and Gregor take part in the last competition of the summer in the Japan Open.

I'm one of the coaches in Chiba – and I'm looking forward to my first trip to Japan. But, for the swimmers, it is important that they finish the season on a high. They are not going to be fully prepared, but it will be an indication of their fitness.

All the meets are further important steps along the road to the Olympic Games in Beijing next year – and it will be good to get an indication of everyone's progress.

The Olympic trials are at the end of March – and they'll come around all too soon. For every one of our squad, everything is geared towards the vital date.

Kirsty, thanks to her silver medal at the world championships, is already pre-selected for the 200m breaststroke in Beijing. But she has to prove her fitness at the trials – and she also wants to qualify for the 100m.

CHRIS'S CHAT ON SCOTTISH CHAMPS

We came home from a French training camp on Tuesday and the Scottish National Championships started on Thursday in Glasgow, which made it extremely difficult for the swimmers to adapt. But Megan (Gilchrist), Kris (Gilchrist) and John (Owen) swam particularly well – unfortunately Kirsty (Balfour) just took part in one individual event to protect a niggling injury and Gregor (Tait) only swam in the relays because of illness. Alena Popchanka came back from the French nationals to swim the relays which was much appreciated.

We actually only had seven swimmers in individual events but we set National records in the relays and, amazingly, managed to finish second overall in the points behind Loughborough. They had 37 competitors.

The camp in Canet – interspersed by meets in Canet and Barcelona – was excellent. We put together some good, tough training it was a very professional job by all the swimmers.

The camp has the building blocks in place for competitions ahead and we are all looking forward to some fast swimming.

TREENA'S TIP



Stretching the calf is essential if swimmers are to enjoy flexibility of the calf muscles and mobility of the ankle joints.

Pic 1: Keep the foot flat on the ground – knee straight. Feel the stretch.

Pic 2: Kneecap aligned over the second toe. Lean forward into the stretch.

SPONSORSHIP FOR CITY OF EDINBURGH SWIMMERS

Over the next 12 months, the City of Edinburgh squad will all be targeting the Olympic Games in Beijing. It will be 100% commitment – and they will all be relying on the support of family and friends.

Relentless hard work, demanding schedules and massive sacrifices are the pro-forma for a successful Olympic swimmer – unfortunately, large financial rewards don't figure in the package.

But, through sponsorship, businesses have the opportunity to link their names to successful Edinburgh sports stars. Kirsty Balfour could be collecting an Olympic medal next summer – wouldn't it be perfect for a local company to have helped get her there?

Backing can come in a variety of forms – logos on t-shirts, a sponsored car for a swimmer, an advertisement in the newsletter. It will not only benefit the swimmers – an association with a successful group of athletes can also be a huge benefit to your business.

If you are interested in any type of sponsorship or advertising, please get in touch with City of Edinburgh Swimming's Media Consultant Elspeth Burnside - eburnside@btinternet.com

Just think – wouldn't it be perfect to have played a part in a British, Scottish and Edinburgh success story at the Olympic Games?

MEET THE SWIMMER

Kris Gilchrist



- Name: Kris Gilchrist (before you ask– I'm not related to Megan)
- When did you start swimming: 1988 (age 4)
- I love the sport because: I don't get fat and it's a great thing to do for a job - nothing beats the feeling of swimming ACE
- I hate training because: It's hard, long and sometimes repetitive
- Most memorable moment: Beating the 50m free record (with a boom at 15m) at Portobello Pool
- Best night out: Something active (pool etc) that's over early...so I can go to bed
- Favourite band: Arkane Kore, of course
- Favourite sports star: Timmy! or maybe Jimmy
- Favourite meal: Spring roll – chicken fried rice / sweet & sour sauce
- Favourite drink: Irn-Bru- only on special occasions
- Favourite film: The Lion King
- Signature aftershave: Armani Mania
- Edinburgh is great because: of the combination of modern attractions with historic beauty (in places)
- Three perfect dinner guests: Peter Griffin, Leopold Scotch, Jessica Alba
- If I wasn't a swimmer: I'd be doing a different sport
- Something others don't know: Other people are forbidden to touch my belly button (some people do know that actually)