

Irish Short Course Championships.

Irish swimming enthusiasts were firmly focused on Lisburn recently, where the first National Championships of the season, in 25m format, took place at the Lagan Leisureplex from 2nd to 4th December. Olympians Shane Ryan and Nicholas Quinn were not in action due to College commitments and Fiona Doyle also missed out as she was competing in Windsor, Canada at the World Short Course Championships. However, some excellent performances were produced by Irish record holders, setting new records, across a wide range of events.

Dolphin Swimming Club's Athlete of 2015/16, Liam Doyle, set down a marker for the new season when he dominated the breaststroke events to secure a clean sweep of all three National titles. Following the heats of 50m breaststroke on day 1, Doyle qualified in third place to the evening final with Dan Sweeney of SWSC the fastest qualifier. Drawn in adjoining lanes for the final, Doyle improved on his morning swim by 0.77 seconds to touch on 29.50 and hold off the chasing Sweeney 29.85 and Cai Armstrong of Ards 29.91 to claim the first of his three titles. On day 2, Doyle was the fastest qualifier into the 100m breaststroke final. The two Cork boys had spectators on the edge of their seats for a second time as Sweeney turned first at the 50m mark, but Doyle was stronger on the back 50m and touched first on 1:04.21 and again denied Sweeney 1:04.47. Sweeney was hoping to reverse the positions on day 3 as the 200m breaststroke is his preferred distance. However, he picked up a disqualification in the morning heats and was denied a place in the final. Doyle was very consistent in both his heat and final swim and made no mistake touching on 218.32 to claim his third National title and the final individual gold of the championships.

All three of the UCC Mardyke Emerging Talent swimmers were in action. Ally Cunningham and Ellen Cassidy qualified for the 200m backstroke final. Cunningham improved on her heat swim to win bronze 2:17.30 finishing ahead of Cassidy in 4th 2:18.51 Cunningham also secured a final place at 200m freestyle, finishing 5th on 2:06.28 and was 2nd in the 'B' final at 100m freestyle 59.08. Ellen also had a second final, hers at 100m backstroke where she too finished in 5th on 1:04.77. Ellen was the winner of the 'B' final at 50m backstroke 30.39. Sharon Semchiy qualified for the final at 50m freestyle which saw all eight swimmers finish under 27 seconds. Sharon, with a PB was 8th on 26.96. Semchiy also qualified for three 'B' finals. She tied for 3rd place with Roisin Cahill of Ennis, both touching on 59.09 just 0.01 behind clubmate Ally Cunningham. Semchiy had two 4th place finishes in her other 'B' finals 1:07.62 at 100m IM and 1:05.83 at 100m backstroke. All three girls were members of their club relay teams which featured among the medallists.

Conor Doyle of Dolphin SC looked very strong in his 1,500m freestyle final on Day 2, very consistent in his approach, producing average splits of 32.60 seconds per 50m. He completed the race, improving on his previous best by 32 seconds (the equivalent of 50m) to finish in 4th place overall 16:18.30, losing out on a medal to Marley Haugh of Ennis SC. On Day 3 Doyle capitalised on the experience gained the previous day and adopted a similar approach to his race. He swam faster over the course of the 800m, producing an average of 31.66 for each 50m and was rewarded with a 3rd place finish. He had a 15 second PB to touch on 8:26.60 leaving Haugh to settle for 4th 8:26.97

Ross McAuliffe of SWSC won bronze at 50m backstroke 26.97. McAuliffe also qualified for three 'B' finals, placed 2nd at 100m IM 1:01.04, 2nd at 100m backstroke 58.59 and 3rd at 50m butterfly 26.86. He was also the lead off swimmer on the club medley relay team which won silver at both 4x100m and 4x50m relays, finishing behind the team from Ards on both

occasions. He was joined on the team by Dan Sweeney, Nicola Bragagna and Ronan McCarthy.

Emma Cassidy made a welcome return to the podium winning bronze at 100m backstroke 1:03.73 on the final day. She consistently qualified for finals over the course of the three day meet and was 5th at 50m backstroke 30.01, 5th at 100m freestyle 58.29 and was 3rd at the 'B' final of 50m freestyle 27.34.

Emma Moloney of Dolphin SC qualified for all three breaststroke finals and was placed 6th at both 50m 33.89 and 100m 1:14.26 but improved to 5th at 200m on Day 3 touching on 2:38.48. Double Junior European medallist, Mona McSharry of Marlins, Donegal set new Irish Junior records in each of the breaststroke finals.

Cork clubs were very well represented in finals over the three days. Others to feature include, Nicola Bragagna, Luc Galland and Ronan McCarthy of SWSC. Aoife McMahon of Dolphin SC and Cadan McCarthy of Mallow Swans SC.