

Chairman's Report 2016/17 Season

August 2017 brought a close to the first year of the Olympic cycle and a very successful season.

At the risk of repeating the head coaches report I have selected a few performances that demonstrate that our environment is still developing athletes from grass roots to the podium and encouraging them to strive 'to be the best they can be' and in some cases go on to compete on the World stage.

Holly Hibbott, Age 17, came 8th in 800 Free at the World Championships in Budapest this summer. Holly is currently ranked number 9 in the World.

Holly has broken every age record Olympic Champion Rebecca Adlington has ever set so far and at the trials in April beat Jazmin Carlin (Two time Olympic silver medallist in Rio) to secure her place in Budapest and her first senior GB team representation. After a disappointing 400 Freestyle Holly broke her personal best in the 800 Freestyle to make the final. A remarkable achievement for such a young lady. Holly and her family have made incredible sacrifices to get Holly to train in Stockport initially travelling from Southport (50 mins each way - 10 times a week!!). Holly now happily lives with team mate Katie Matts during the week and attends college in Stockport to enable her to train at the home of the Wolfpack. This is testament to the programme but also to the strong bonds and team support fostered by our Wolfpack families.

Harrison Coulter, Age 18, is a local lad, coming all the way through the programme from our lesson programme, through every SM squad and every coach. Harrison has suffered with illness for a long period of his life, being seriously ill on several occasions and seemed to spend more time in hospital than at home or at training. However, his perseverance determination and desire to succeed has seen him swim lifetime best performances all season in every event he has swum, overcoming his illnesses and producing World class performances gaining selection to the GB World Junior Championship team to compete in Indianapolis. He is currently ranked 10th in the World Junior rankings.

Harrison is a testament to himself, his unconditionally supportive parents and his coaches Sean Kelly and Richard Blackshaw who successfully guided him through some very tough times.

Harrison came through our junior squads, competing at Mini Meets and the Junior League from the age of 9 and Cheshire Championships as an age group swimmer.

Our next generation of junior swimmers are keeping the tradition of Stockport's fantastic ability to develop skilful swimmers alive by qualifying for the National final for the 7th consecutive year placing 4th. We now have Richard Blackshaw (Head Coach) and Lucas Connolly (Assistant Head Coach) coaching on the Academy and Junior Development squads which demonstrates our commitment to keep the grass roots to Olympic podium development going.

I think that it is important to note that it isn't a coincidence that all the swimmers that have ever stood on the World stage for us have had unconditionally supportive parents. A balanced support for their child during the good times and a balanced support during the bad times. Also, importantly unconditional support for the coaches and the team too.

Passion originates from the Latin word 'pati', which means to suffer or to endure. If we want to take our wins, and we have had many, we have punched way above our weight, we have to take our losses too. We learn from them and come back stronger.

Synchro has had another successful year, in particular with individual success of the girls at grade days meaning a competitive team at every age group will compete at National Age Groups in November. A notable achievement was 5th place at the new combo cup competition in September 2017, with the 15 & under age group gaining a bronze medal and the club placing 5th out of 27 clubs entered, the highest with only 3 team routines entered. A special mention to Evie Walker (12 & Under) qualifying again for the North Beacon Squad and Sophie Freeman for the Advanced Apprenticeship in Sporting Excellence.

Synchro continues to grow its workforce with 3 of the older swimmers now Level 1 synchro qualified and 2 more coaches judge qualified.

Sport as you all know is not all about winning. I continue to be extremely proud of the environment we have built over the years to not only offer a pathway to podium success but a culture that nurtures good people who go on to be successful in whatever they choose to do in life, armed with life skills and core values that often set them apart from their peers.

Five years ago after London our ITC status was taken away along with its funding. At that time we had 160 swimmers, today we have 300. All this with the same number staff we had in 1997. We had 4500 on our lesson programme, we now have 6000. We had no Academy, Triathlon or Baby splash groups. Our Synchro team was tiny. This is not the case anymore. We are in a far strong position than we have ever been in our 43 year history. Our Academy, Synchro and Junior programmes are flourishing and our development programme rivals anywhere in the world. Our Senior, age and youth programmes are as strong as ever.

As this 4 year cycle develops, Stockport Metro's youngsters will become seniors so the opposition best watch out.

We are grateful for the over arching support of Life Leisure and the wider team who continue to support our ambitions for a world class environment.

I would personally like to thank everyone who volunteers their time for the benefit of the programme. You know who you are! That includes the parents, all the committee members and the pod organisers. A special mention for those of you who have continued to volunteer your time and expertise after your children have retired from swimming.

Lastly, but not certainly not least the coaches for their success and continued passion and commitment. Coaching can be very rewarding however it's also relentless by nature and I really admire and respect your continued dedication to the programme and working together for the benefit and progression of the athletes. A truly athlete centred development programme is hard to find and we have cracked it.

In recognition of our success we are in discussions with British Swimming regarding some additional support for the programme. If we keep doing the right thing, we keep working hard, we keep taking care of our members and our staff, we shall once again not only have swimmers qualify for the Olympics but stand on the podium once more. The next few years should see the emergence of some real superstars from our ranks. I'm very proud of how we have responded to the setbacks in the past four years and I'm looking forward to the challenge ahead.

We are now focusing on our next generation.

“If you build it they will come”

Julie Bennett
Chairman