

**National Championships (Age Group) 2014**  
**30<sup>th</sup> July – 4<sup>th</sup> August, Ponds Forge, Sheffield**  
*Report by Coach Rob Howe*



*Left to right: Beng Ren Siew, Megan Molloy, Joe Haimes, Maya Kirlew, Sam Pereira and Josh Kirlew*

*Day one* - After being one of three teams to break the London Regions 100m freestyle relay record back in June, our boys stepped up and swam even quicker at the National Championships. Well done, Josh, Beng Ren, Joe and Sam.

*Day two* - Sam's first individual appearance at the National Championships turned out to be a baptism of fire. Placed in lane 9 of the final heat in the 100m Freestyle with the fastest boys in the age group above, Sam struggled to perform his best time. Obviously disappointed, he could easily have wilted, but not Sam: by the time he had finished swimming down, he had to join the line for his 200m IM. When he got on the block, his confidence had returned and he went in and performed an outstanding IM swim. We make them tough at ESS!

*Day three* - Beng Ren had stepped in as the fourth member of the 4x200m Free team and had been working with Barry on getting his 200m swim right in time for Nationals. With only a few weeks to prepare, I was a little apprehensive about how the team would perform. Having been one of three teams to break the county record at Regions and missing one of the key team members (Kon), it was difficult to think they might go better at Nationals. Sam's fast time in the first leg gave the team a brilliant start. Josh had used his 400m IM



swim in the morning to warm up for a great second leg in the relay, where he undercut his PB by over 2 seconds, keeping us right in the race. It was then that Beng Ren had the chance to put the hard work into practice and he delivered with a new 200m PB. Finally, Joe had to face the challenge of the last leg and he brought the team home with an excellent PB swim and a final finishing place of 15th, faster than the team swam at Regionals.

*Day four* - Big day for ESS: Maya 100m Back, Sam 200m Free & Josh 100m Fly. First up was Sam. The lane draw had once again been unkind and he found himself in lane 9 with all the 14-year boys. Knowing that a good swim would make the final, he put that out of his mind and swam just outside of his PB to secure a place in the evening final. Maya looked very determined, as she walked round to the block and it was already clear that this was going to be a good swim. However, I couldn't have guessed just how good: winning her heat, lowering her PB by over a second and beating the previous club record was as much as I could expect. Maya just missed the final, finishing twelfth, but she'll be back! The final heat swim was Josh's 100m Fly: he had already lowered his PB at London Regions to qualify for Nationals, but Josh was determined to swim faster. He had a very tough heat, but was not the tiniest bit intimidated and set out very fast to turn first at 50m. His speed down the second 50 took him to a new PB, lowering his own club record. He finished just outside the top 10. I think Josh will be training even harder next season to make sure he's in the final.

The evening session saw Sam's final. This was a line up of high quality and only his very best would keep him competitive with the other boys. An outstanding swim saw Sam finish 6th in a new personal best time. I think Sam will use the experience he gained swimming this final to achieve greater things next season.

*Day five* – On the final day at Ponds Forge it was Sam's 400m Free. The week in Sheffield is physically and mentally tiring and Sam had raced every day. What could we expect from his 400m free? Finally, luck was with him and he got an ok lane draw in lane 7. It's the event he's least experienced at, but swimming much more even splits than he did when achieving his qualifying time, Sam showed he is maturing with experience and swam a new PB to finish 13th overall. The end of a great campaign for Sam!

*Day six* - 1500m open water - brrrrr!!! Now this is all a bit different, no lane ropes, tumble turns or tropical temperatures. Megan Molloy was ESS' only brave soul to qualify for the Open Water event. We took an early morning taxi to the beautiful Rother Valley Country Park and luckily, the weather was kind. Almost all the



swimmers taking part were new to the concept of racing outdoors and it was clear to see on the nervous looking faces, as the competitors were called to the starting station. These were athletes out of their comfort zone. Megan had no trouble with the outdoors, the water temperature or the distance and did a very good sub-23 minutes swim. She did learn however, that the girls open water race can be quite a rough and tumble and you need to be ready to fight for your space in the water. This is an event you need to get experience at to perform well and Megan will get better and better, as she does more of it.

I challenge all ESS swimmers to get some Open Water experience and I'll even throw in the incentive that I'll do a race too next season. Well - if someone will teach me to swim!!