

**Berkhamsted Swimming Club**  
**Herts County Championships**

2 medals (a silver and a bronze) might seem a small reward for the efforts of the 19 Berkhamsted swimmers who took part in the first weekend of Herts ASA County swimming Championships but the numbers of finals made and top 8 finishes gives a lie to that statement.

From the 45 swims the youngsters made 14 finals and, in the 200 IM heat declared winner events claimed another 5 top 8 places. They managed 30 pb swims and claimed a silver in the 100m backstroke for Ella Nijkamp and a bronze for County first timer, Mia Hickman, in the 200m Individual Medley.

The first session began with the Girls' 100m Fly and decent swims from Chrissie Soulsby in her second champs and Lydia Wisely in her first, alongside experienced hand Ellen Northwood who picked up 12<sup>th</sup> place in the Open age group. Ella Nijkamp started her campaign with a personal best (pb) for 4<sup>th</sup> in her heat (1:17.23) to qualify in 5<sup>th</sup> for the final.

The Boys began with the 100m Back and produced another finalist in Alex Kalverboer as he dropped a second off his pb to make the final in 5<sup>th</sup> with 1:21.07. Tom Holmes-Higgin was 6<sup>th</sup> in his heat before Luke Nijkamp made it a brace of boys in the final as he stormed home 2<sup>nd</sup> in his heat, improving by almost 2 seconds to record 1:07.97, into the final as 8<sup>th</sup> seed. Zac Patel began well but just faded in the final 25m logging 1:08.36 and then 16 year old James Chennells equalled his club record in a Regional Qualifying time (RQT) of 1:02.91 & 12<sup>th</sup> place overall.

The first session finals began with Ella Nijkamp in her 100m Fly. Much more aggressive off the start she was half a second quicker at halfway than in her heat and pressed home to lower her pb from the heat by over a second and a half, finishing with 1:15.69, an RQT, in 6<sup>th</sup> spot.

Alex Kalverboer also improved his pb in the backstroke. Swimming a slightly different race he went out slower to halfway before showing good strength to come home in 1:20.69. Luke Nijkamp was just unable to repeat his 100m back best in his final, posting a 1:08, still faster than his pb from before the start of the day.

The second session saw the reverse events from the morning and a further 5 finalists.

In the Girls' backstroke Mia Hickman finished a strong second in her heat to set a pb and make her second final in 7<sup>th</sup> qualifier with 1:27.16. Abi Hewson showed a welcome return to form, improving almost 2 seconds to 1:14.94, again finishing strongly to take 2<sup>nd</sup> in her heat & 10<sup>th</sup> 14 year old. Ella Nijkamp and Issy Soulsby both made it through to their respective finals. Although both ended 8<sup>th</sup> in their heats Ella Nijkamp qualified 5<sup>th</sup> and Issy Soulsby 4<sup>th</sup> for their respective finals with Soulsby going pb in 1:10.55.

The Boys' fly started with George Thorne blasting off the start and leading for much of his heat before fatigue set in and he ended 2<sup>nd</sup> in 1:14.28. Euan Donald claimed the club's first heat win and made his 15 years final with a gun to pad win in 1:06.99 (pb). Sam Newman was gutsy as ever and again led his heat for the first 75m, touching just under a second outside his best in 4<sup>th</sup> with 1:05.73. Ish Rahim seemed slightly off his normal pace with a 1:02.07, 4<sup>th</sup> in heat, as did Zac Patel with 1:01.52 for 2<sup>nd</sup> in heat but James Chennells stormed home 4<sup>th</sup> in his heat to lower his best to 1:00.89 for an RQT as well. The second set of finals saw Mia Hickman show the first signs of fatigue ending slightly slower than her heat in 1:27.90, consolidating her 7<sup>th</sup> place. Issy Soulsby improved again to gain an improved RQT with 1:10.37, pressuring the medallists all the way before coming home 4<sup>th</sup>.

Then it was Ella Nijkamp back in the pool and in a more assertive frame of mind. Ella led off the start and made the others play catch up as she flew down the pool. In the event, just one other swimmer could go with her and she finished with an excellent silver medal, a pb of 1:12.01 and an RQT to boot. In the Boys' fly finals, Euan Donald, in his first ever final, placed a meritorious 5<sup>th</sup> as he lowered his best with 1:06.76, looking ever more confident and James Chennells was still faster than his entry time with 1:01.08 for 6<sup>th</sup> in the Open category.

The first day ended with the 200 IM and in the 10/11 years age group Mia Hickman picked up the club's second medal of the meet with a massive 10 second lowering of her best time. Ahead of the

clock from the first 50m fly leg, she steadily improved against her pb, to post 3:10.60, just half a second behind silver in bronze medal position.

Tamsin Moren put injury worries behind her to clock her own pb in 2:53.99 moving strongly through from the Breast leg onwards. Ella Nijkamp dropped her season's best to 2:50.56 for 9<sup>th</sup> overall and Soulsby improved from 7<sup>th</sup> seed to 5<sup>th</sup> with a pb of 2:35.49.

Tom Homes-Higgin was back for the Boys and, rejuvenated, he managed to set a pb of 3:01.08 in the same heat as Alex Kalverboer who worked the second half of his race hard to go under 3 minutes for the first time in 2:58.06.

George Thorne attacked hard as always and held on to come home just under 2 seconds ahead of his best in 2:37.70. Euan Donald was on a high and chopped over 2 seconds from his pb with 2:26.90 and another top eight placing in 6<sup>th</sup>. Ish Rahim put his Fly disappointment behind him to clock 2:22.21, another pb for 2<sup>nd</sup> in his heat. Patel posted 2:21.72 and the day ended with James Chennells as 5<sup>th</sup> fastest overall in 2:16.10.

The Sunday sessions showcased the 100m Free & Breast events with the boys first up in the Free. Alex Kalverboer's excellent start continued as he sliced over 3 seconds from his best in an exciting 3<sup>rd</sup> in heat 1:13.47, soon followed by Dan Chennells dropping a second to 1:01.56. Euan Donald was slightly disappointed to post 1:02.11 for 15<sup>th</sup> and then Zac Patel recovered some of his verve with a pb of 56.52 as he clearly won his heat with clear water in 56.52 (pb). Ish Rahim was within half a second of his best with 57.23 and James Chennells just missed a final swim with 9<sup>th</sup> in 54.81.

The Girls' Breast saw Mia Hickman make it a clean sweep of finals for her in all her first weekend races as she clocked 1:38.67 to make the final in 4<sup>th</sup>. Chrissie Soulsby improved to 1:39.70 and then Tamsin Moren placed 3<sup>rd</sup> in her heat and made the final in 7<sup>th</sup>.

Mia Hickman's final provided a repeat 1:38 swim from her to place 4<sup>th</sup>. In an exciting finish she just ran out of water trying to swim down the bronze medallist, finishing just 2/100ths behind. Tamsin Moren was determined in her final and ended just 6/100ths slower than her own pb from the outside lane 1 and improved her seeding to 6<sup>th</sup> in 1:25.98.

For the Boys' breast, Alex Kalverboer continued on his way with a determined heat win, improving 4 seconds to 1:31.70 and make the final in 3<sup>rd</sup> place. Euan Donald, also having a terrific start to the meet, made another final in 5<sup>th</sup> with 1:16.87. Patel managed to close to within half a second of his best with 1:13.26.

The girls began with Abbie Briers winning her heat in fine style and improving 0.01 seconds on her pb, as she led from the off and was never challenged. Ella Nijkamp went into the event on a 1:06 but showed good speed to claim 2<sup>nd</sup> in her heat with 1:04.58 (RQT) to go into the final in 3<sup>rd</sup> and then Hewson finished her race really well for 4<sup>th</sup> in heat with 1:06.36, right on her pb.

In the finals, Alex Kalverboer repeated his 1:31 swim but was pipped for a medal by a swimmer who improved their own best by 2 seconds to achieve the bronze but it was Alex Kalverboer's first final in a seeded lane and he will learn from the experience. Euan Donald made a small improvement in his final, pressurising the leaders all the way to 75m, so much so that his final 1:16.55 was another RQT for the youngster.

The final finals of the weekend were the Girls' 100m Free. Abbie Briers almost tried too hard, losing a bit of her fluency and came home 8<sup>th</sup> but is improving all the time while Ella Nijkamp was pipped to the bronze by 0.30 seconds in a tight finish but repeated her heat time with another 1:04.

The weekend was a great learning curve for the young athletes and all showed great psychological maturity alongside their physical prowess.