

SWIMMING

Merger pays off as Seagulls storm to victory

CHRISTCHURCH and New Milton Seagulls reaped the first reward of their recent merger as they stormed to a 56-point victory in their opening Speedo League fixture at Littledown.

After suffering relegation from Division Two last season, they now sit second to title favourites Swim Swansea in the 24-team Division Three.

Their strength in depth was evident as they won the first seven relays to establish a 25-point lead by the halfway point.

Their final tally from the 16 relays was 11 wins, three second places and two thirds.

There were also nine individual wins including two each from Sam Webber in the 11/u 50m backstroke (39.59) and freestyle (34.18) and Chris Chamberlain in the 13/u 50m butterfly (33.93) and freestyle (30.25).

Coach Barry Alldrick won the men's 100m breaststroke (1:17.08).

Other individual winners were breaststrokers Taylor Priest (13/u 50m 35.10) and Jamie Druce (15/u 100m 1:20.58) and, for the girls, Susanna Shires (11/u 50m freestyle 35.93) and Melissa Bennison (13/u 50m butterfly 35.93).

Alldrick said: "It was a brilliant team effort. The challenge now is to sustain and build on this form to put us in a position where we can gain promotion."

Four relay disqualifications and one 'no swim' cost Bournemouth Dolphins' B team second place at Littledown.

But chief coach Graham Bassi promised it would be a different story next time.

"We selected a team to give as many swimmers as possible a chance to race. For the next round we will field our best team.

"We had far too many disqualifications to be competitive and

we need to cut that out of our racing."

Dolphins' 12 wins included four in relays and two from Mark Forrester in the men's 100m medley (1:06.12) and freestyle (58.46).

Other winners were 15/u swimmers Stephanie Moorland (100m back 1:18.84), Emma Baird (100m fly 1:16.16) and Lauren Holman (100m free 1:05.98), 13/u swimmers Rebecca Fish (50m back 37.74) and Symmi Rolt (50m free 32.50), and Kate Allen (open 100m free 1:06.26).

Result: Seagulls 238, Paignton 182, Bournemouth Dolphins B 180, Devonport Royals 177, West Wilts Force 5 C 150, Torquay 117.

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Seagulls off to a flyer

Recently formed Christchurch and New Milton Seagulls got their Speedo League season off to a flying start with a 56 point winning margin at Bournemouth's Littledown pool on Saturday.

Up against Bournemouth Dolphins, Devenport, Paignton, Torquay and West Wilts in round one of the Western Division Speedo League, Seagulls and Torpedoes teams fielded a merged squad for the first time with instant success.

Opening the event slowly with sixth and fourth places in the first two events, the team then went on a streak of seven straight wins establishing a 25 point lead by the halfway point in the evening. Overall, the team delivered 20 first and nine second place finishes in the evening's 50 events.

Similar to the results at the James Morino open meet the previous weekend, the swimmers also demonstrated their continued individual progress, with 59 personal bests (pb) being recorded. Top performers on the female front were Emma Duffell and Sussanna Shires with four pbs each, with the males, Aleksey Lopez, Andrew Woolls-King and head coach Alldrick himself recording three each.

Coach Alldrick said: "This was a brilliant start, a great team effort with everybody pulling together and I'm especially pleased that despite there being 16 relays there were no disqualifications for any Seagulls swimmers tonight. If we can maintain and build on this sort of form then we will be well positioned to gain promotion to Division Two this year."

Final results: 1, Seagulls, 238 pts; 2, Paignton, 182; 3, Bournemouth Dolphins, 180; 4, Devenport, 177; 5, West Wilts, 150; 6, Torquay, 117.