

It was a tough start for Stourbridge A team at the first round of this year's Nuneaton and Junior Swimming League, held at a Halesowen on a baking hot April evening. Up against the City of Coventry we knew a win was unlikely, but we needed to fight off competition from fellow Worcestershire clubs Wyre Forest and Ledbury, as well as Stafford Apex and Chase for second place.

It was a rocky start to the gala with only two 3rd places, two 5th places and a 6th place finish in the first five events, putting us in 5th spot overall. A stressful start for all concerned, but it wasn't to last, as the 11s boys team of Matthew McCallum, Ed Maycock, Jake Buswell and Alex Westwood stormed to victory in their medley relay, quickly followed in the very next event by a classy first place in the 12s 2 lengths backstroke by Bethan "BMW" Walters. There wasn't too long to wait before the 9s girls team of Megan Parker, Beth Tetsill, Charlotte Debney and Morgan Allin took second place behind the super strong Ledbury girls in their medley relay. This was quickly followed up by a second place for the 11s boys team again, this time in their freestyle relay alongside the girls 11s team of Rochelle Edwards, Ellie Asprey, Jade Shepherd and Phoebe Sutton who also took second place in theirs.

Not to be outdone, the girls 10 years team of Ellie Maher, Ellie Wood, Phoebe Sutton and Abi Bradley also took second place in their medley relay which they later followed up with another second place in their freestyle relay. Fantastic swims from all four girls here but particularly Abi on those pressured last legs – perhaps a contender for team of the night?

It wasn't just relay events where Stourbridge talent was shining through, Rochelle Edwards increased her points tally for the evening by taking second place in the girls 11s 2 lengths backstroke not long followed by a convincing win from Alex Price in the girls 12s 2 lengths breaststroke, finishing two and a half seconds ahead of the second place swimmer from Stafford Apex. The 12s girls were beginning to show their dominance by this point as Bethan took to the blocks to swim the 2 lengths freestyle; not her usual event but a gutsy swim in a closely fought race to take the 6 points for Stourbridge. Not content with the 12s girls race for the title of team of the night Ellie Maher of the 10s age group took to the water again, taking a convincing second place in the 2 lengths backstroke.

We were three quarters of the way through the gala now and it was clear that Coventry were the strongest team, seemingly much improved on last year, winning 27 of the 51 events. With 145 points we were still in second place but Stafford Apex were closely behind with 134 points, so the last part of the gala was crucial. Luckily our 11s freestyle swimmers didn't let us down with Jade Shepherd taking second place in her individual, just a finger nail behind the Coventry swimmer and Matthew McCallum convincingly taking first place in his event, a full arms length ahead of the rest of the field.

What had started out as a stressful gala resulted in a fantastic second place for the team with some incredible individual performances. Special mention must go to Jake Morris, Flynn Corton, Morgan Allin and Tom Davidson who were competing for the club for the first time. Despite being so young they were very brave and gave each race 100% effort - you certainly did us all proud.

So who was team of the night? Well with three individual first places, and a win in the medley relay it was the 12s girls team of Bethan Walters, Issie Barnsley, Olivia Naylor and Alex Price who take the title in this round earning 31 points for the team. Swimmer of the night is a tricky one, with so many outstanding individual performances, but for overall commitment to their swims and fantastic times the honours this round go to Bethan Walters and Matthew McCallum – not just for winning their respective individual races but for helping to support our younger swimmers in their first competitive outings. Well done to them.

John would like to thank Greg, Sharon, Ian T, Lauren and Becky B for their help on poolside ensuring that the right swimmers were at the right ends doing the right strokes! A big thank you also goes to Ian B, Sandra and Neil for officiating on behalf of the club.

Final points were: City of Coventry 252, Stourbridge A 188, Stafford Apex 167, Ledbury 164, Chase 154, Wyre Forest 136 (subject to ratification by the league).