

To the PCA Committee and Members I would like to say a big thank you for the generous assistance and support that I received in order for me to travel to the Trans Tasman Series in Australia and for all the texts and messages I received while I was away. The support I received was amazing and it was fantastic to know that back home everyone was following the competition and sharing in my success with me.

To be selected to represent New Zealand at this competition was definitely an honour and a privilege and a great opportunity to experience my first international competition. It allowed me to swim with top age group swimmers from both New Zealand and Australia. Plus I had the extra bonus of being coached by some of New Zealand's top coaching staff.

When I first arrived in Canberra I definitely felt out of my comfort zone both from a personal and swimming point of view. It was pretty scary being away from my family for the first time and travelling to another country without them. Meeting so many new people and seeing so many new faces was really scary. I did not know many of the other swimmers I was travelling with and also I had no idea how strong the competition would be or whether I was up to the mark.

I was glad to get the first training session over with. I was quite scared as I didn't know what type of session the coaches were going to give us, which lane I should swim in and which swimmers I should train with. Overall the first training session ended up being easy and we practised relays at the end which were a lot of fun.

It did not take long before I started to settle in and found the other swimmers and travelling adults to be really friendly and very supportive.

On day three we trained again both in the morning and at night. The morning training session was quite easy and we trained next to the Australian swimmers in the evening session. That night we had a quick meeting with the coaches. Each swimmer was given a black Swimming NZ badge which apparently all the Olympic swimmers have also received.

On the morning before the competition started we had a light training session. After breakfast we were able to spend the rest of the day just relaxing. I spent this time mentally trying to focus and giving myself positive thoughts to build up my confidence. My experience in swimming has already taught me that the higher I move up the ladder the trainings of other swimmers are very similar, coaching techniques are similar but the point of difference between me and everyone else is what I can mentally bring to the game. I knew it was the only thing I could control and that any fears I had needed to be left behind in my room before I travelled to the pool.

My first race was the 50 Breaststroke skins. I went out well and felt good. I raced in the 200m breaststroke and came 2nd and got a personal best time and also broke a long standing Wellington Record. Overall I had a fantastic day, met some new people and swam great. The next day in session



two I raced in the 100m breaststroke and broke another Wellington Record. I was happy with my swim as the Aussie who bet me was nearly two years older

We then travelled by bus to a place called Wagga Wagga. When I first saw where we were going to stay I felt a little nervous as it did not look that nice. However once we were inside it was very flash. Never judge a book by its cover! I was lucky enough to get a room with an ensuite. Lucky me!

In Session 3 I again raced in the 100m breaststroke and won this race improving my personal best time again and broke the Wellington record which I had set in Canberra. I was pretty pleased with this result. Session 4 followed with me coming 2nd again in the 200m breaststroke.

That afternoon we travelled 5 and half hours by bus to Melbourne. In session 5 I raced the 200m breaststroke again for the final time and improved my time yet again and re broke the Wellington record I had set on day 1. Achieving 2.18.47 in this race for me was the highlight of my trip. My last and final race was the 100m again and although tired I was able to hold onto 2nd place.

With this competition points were given for each swimmers placing. Because we were competing as a team against Australia the competition level was very high. For me it was important that I gave it my best as I didn't want to let my other team members down. I also kept in mind throughout the competition a quote Nevill had given me before I left *"Swimming– the only sport with no half times, no substitutions, no timeouts, and you only get 1 shot for your goal"*. In the end we were beaten by the Aussies but I believe we were one of the strongest teams that New Zealand has had for many years.

Overall I had a fantastic time and I learnt so much about myself both personally and from a swimming point of view. As you all know being a swimmer is a demanding sport with all the training that needs to be done and the sacrifices that need to be made. And with school work it is definitely sometimes a real balancing act. But swimming has already taught me many life skills like commitment, time management and confidence. This trip allowed me to put in place and practise everything that I had learnt so far but most of all to believe in myself.

Thank you all once again.

Ben Walsh