



Making a splash

Swimmers Sinead Russell, Tera Van Beilen have their sights set on 2012 Olympics

By Jon Kuiperij
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Two 18-year-old Oakville swimmers are a few strokes closer to realizing their Olympic dreams.

Sinead Russell and Tera Van Beilen, both hopefuls for next year's Summer Games in London, turned heads with their performances at major competitions over the past week. Russell twice broke Canadian records on the way to a eighth-place finish in the women's 100-metre backstroke at the FINA World Aquatic Championships in China, while Van Beilen swam to three gold medals in women's breaststroke at the summer national swimming championships in Pointe-Claire, Que.

Russell, a member of the Dolphins Swim Club, set a new Canadian standard with a time of 59.80 seconds during preliminaries at the FINA meet. She then bettered her own record by posting a time of 59.68 seconds in the semifinals, where she finished fifth.

Russell was unable to maintain that pace in yesterday's (Tuesday's) final, however, clocking a time of 1:00.20 to place eighth. But her performance was still enough to impress Swimming Canada CEO and national coach Pierre Lafontaine.

"Sinead has established herself as one of

the best in the world with that eighth place," he said. "(In the final) she said she didn't feel like she owned the pool like in her previous two swims, but she is still on a learning curve."

Russell, whose older brother Colin competed at the 2008 Summer Games in Beijing, could have locked up a 2012 Olympic spot with a top-five finish at the FINA championships. Instead, she'll have to wait until the national Olympic team trials next March in Montreal.

Van Beilen downplays wins

Van Beilen also has her sights set on those Olympic team trials following her triple-gold showing at nationals.

She downplayed her accomplishments in Montreal, noting that the country's top swimmers were at the FINA meet, but was still quite pleased with her performance.

"I'm pretty happy with how I swam," said the Oakville Aquatic Club (OAK) member, "and I think I'll get faster throughout the summer."

Van Beilen won the 50-metre, 100m and 200m breaststrokes in comfortable fashion. She finished the 50m race in 31.49 seconds, winning by .38 seconds; posted a time of

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OLYMPIC HOPEFULS: Sinead Russell (top photo) and Tera Van Beilen both had strong performances at major swimming competitions over the past week. Russell was eighth in women's 100-metre backstroke at the FINA World Aquatic Championships in China, while Van Beilen won three breaststroke gold medals at the summer nationals in Quebec.