

Aqua Duck swim team led by Bonnell key in medley relay 3-person Wrecking Crew

BY DOUG HARRISON
The Acton Tanner

They have destroyed opponents time after time while growing up together as Acton Aqua Duck swimmers.

They are continually re-structuring the local club's record book.

And that's why they — Kara MacDonald, Julie Pliotas and Gareth Lichty — have been aptly dubbed The Wrecking Crew by coach Gerry Ockenden.

MacDonald, 15, began swimming at age 5, did well with it and found it came naturally.

"It was different and not a normal interest at that age," says Kara, naming ballet and dance classes as the more popular interests.

The Erin resident's specialties are the 100-metre freestyle and backcrawl. Her goal is one minute, three seconds in the freestyle. Her best to date is 1:06 or 1:07.

A holder of 16 team records, Kara says the swim challenge is for better times, but adds enjoying the sport keeps her going.

"It's almost as if I enjoy working hard, but it's what comes from working hard that is nice," she explains.

"I'd like to get to an international competition. You can't keep swimming for just one goal — a gold medal. You have to enjoy it daily to get to the top because it takes too much of your life."

Another goal of Kara, an Erin High student, is to shave time off her breaststroke and work on the butterfly.

Fourteen-year-old Julie has been in the water since she was a year old. Hence her ambition to become a marine biologist.

She joined the Aqua Ducks four years ago in an effort to strengthen her tetrathlon (swimming, air pistol shooting, running and horse racing) performance.

Julie has significantly improved on her fortés, the breaststroke and freestyle. She's quicker in the former and has set a goal of 1:09 in the 100m free.

"I enjoy beating my times at

meets and perfecting my strokes," says Julie, who has smashed 11 records.

She feels growing up with Kara and Gareth has improved her both in and out of the pool.

"They make it challenging for me in practice," admits Julie, who attends St. James High in Guelph.

On coach Gerry Ockenden: "He taught me the breaststroke and improved my mechanics. He makes us work hard, but it's worth it in the end."

Gareth is the consummate member of a "wrecking" team. He eats up the competition.

"It's fun. I like to race against myself and compete," says Gareth, a six-year Aqua Duck. "I also like getting better times and establishing records."

The 13-year-old McKenzie-Smith student is a walking record book, having set 31 records in the butterfly, back and breaststroke, freestyle and Individual Medley. His favourite two?

"The backstroke is my fastest and closest to the provincial record," Gareth says of his 1:11 personal mark. "I like the Individual Medley because it has all different strokes and it's fun to swim them."

Simply put, he wants to be an Olympic swimmer.

"I want to be the best, but I have a long way to go. I have to work harder and put in the time."

Gareth looks up to Canadian Olympic swimmers Alex Bauman and Mark Tewksbury and adds "it took them a long time to get there and that makes me work harder."

For now, Gareth will be content with a spot on the provincial team.

"I believe the way they approach swimming is the way they do school and other activities. They decide to do something and they put all they can into it," says coach Ockenden.

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Acton High runner Amanda Bonnell was a key ingredient in the Guelph Track and Field Club's success on the weekend.

The squad travelled to York University on Sunday to participate in the Ontario Track and Field Association (OTFA) indoor relay championships.

The Grade 10 Bonnell headed the four-women Juvenile Girls' 1,600-metre medley relay team to a first-place finish over a team of Grade 12 runners in the meet which featured over 1,200 athletes from 50 clubs and universities.

"She's a key player on the team," said Guelph coach Albert Tschirhart of Bonnell on Monday. "She's stretching her distance to 800m, but is probably a half-year away with that."

"She's very dedicated and a 'Top 4' 400m runner in Ontario."

Bonnell, 14, also ran on the 4x800m Guelph Junior Girls' relay team that finished second.

"Amanda (who ran first) was neck and neck with the top Junior woman in the race and went ahead

of her at the hand-off which was a confidence boost for her," Tschirhart mentioned.

"She's showing some strength in the end and her finishing kick has been stronger over the last five months."

Bonnell will race as a Juvenile on the weekend at York in the individual championships and as a Midget in the Bantam-Midget-Junior (BMJ) Ontario championships at York on Feb. 19 and 20.

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WRECKING CREW: From left, Kara MacDonald, Gareth Lichty and Julie Pliotas are the Acton Aqua Ducks swim team's Wrecking Crew. (Doug Harrison photo)

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Ticket sales close Feb. 22. Cancellations not accepted after Feb. 22.



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