

PLYMOUTH DIVING REPORT

BRITISH CHAMPIONSHIPS

4-6 January 2008, Manchester

Plymouth Diving have just returned from their most successful British Championships ever!

Brooke Graddon marked a spectacular comeback to form after 2 years dogged by illness and injury, taking her first ever Senior British Women's Platform title, in a sensational contest, the highest quality domestic Women's platform event ever seen in the UK.

Despite being out of the competitive arena for over 12 months, since November, Brooke has bettered her own personal best by a massive 50 points and after Stacie Powell (Southampton) snatched Tonia Couch's British Record in the semi-final, Brooke very nearly took it back in the final, missing it by less than one point. This is the stuff that fairy stories are made of and is testament to Brooke's strength of character. She has battled long and hard to get back to full fitness and when many would have thrown in the towel, she just pushed that little bit harder. This result means that Brooke will also attend the World Cup in Beijing next month as part of the British Team. Her first major event since the World Championships in the summer of 2005.

Unfortunately, Tonia Couch won't be joining her. There were only 2 slots available on the World Cup Team and with Brooke, Stacie Powell (Southampton) and Tonia locked in heavy battle, changing order throughout the 3 rounds and 15 dive competition, one of the UK's World Class Women's Platform divers was going to miss out and on this occasion, unfortunately, it was our own Tonia. Nevertheless though, Tonia still finished 3rd and can be proud to have been such an integral part of this spectacular display of diving. She will now take time to re-group and hopefully come back even stronger for the Olympic Trials in June.

Sarah Barrow with partner Monique McCarroll from Southampton was already pre-selected for the World Cup in the Synchronised Platform event and would therefore, on instruction from the National Performance Director, would not have been eligible for a berth in the individual event anyway, even if she had achieved a top 2 placing. She still competed in the individual event at the British Championships though and performed extremely well to finish just behind Tonia Couch in 4th place. She did however rubber stamp her selection in the synchronised event, with victory, their third in a row, over Britain's previous top pairing of Couch and Powell, who finished in second place.

A stalwart of Plymouth's Age Group Team, Jenny McDonald (17) was given the opportunity to compete at the British Championships for the first time at the weekend and she did not disappoint. Following in the footsteps of Tonia Couch and Brooke Graddon, who had both been on the rostrum in previous years, Jenny picked up a very well-deserved silver medal in the Junior Girls Platform category (18 & under). It was a truly remarkable performance – without a doubt the best of her long diving career. As she prepares to go to Bournemouth University, this may be the penultimate time she competes under Plymouth Diving, which makes her success even more special.

Another of Plymouth's Age Group Team was competing at this event for the first time, but illness and a subsequent lack of preparation put paid to Jessica Taylor's hopes of matching Jenny's medal winning performance. Jess was more than capable of picking up a Junior medal in the springboard events, but she finished 7th in the Ladies 1m event and 4th Junior and still not feeling 100%, she pulled out of the 3m event. It was nevertheless, a great learning experience for her.

Former international, Kyle Prior (16) is slowly coming back to his best and hinted at just what he could be capable of when he finished 2nd in the Junior Boys 3m event. Despite not being quite at his best, Kyle still comfortably beat the boys who are tipped for junior international selections this year. The team are looking forward to Kyle fighting his way back to top form and the results that could follow.

Last but not least, it was a little bit like the Tom Daley road-show in Manchester. On Saturday, there were 5 camera crews watching his every move, there were interviews with National and local radio, TV and the press, he appeared in National newspapers in the days leading up to the event and in the days which followed – and it didn't faze him one little bit.

He took victory in the Synchronised Men's Platform event with new partner, former Junior World Champion, Blake Aldridge (25) from Southampton. Unfortunately, the Olympic silver medallists, Peter Waterfield and Leon Taylor, who Thomas and Blake beat in Canada, pulled out of the British Championships due to an injury to Taylor. This was a pity as Thomas and Blake were looking forward to beating them again, and it would have provided a great contest. As it was, the new combination proved their worth and despite this only being their second outing together, they achieved another world class score on their way to gold.

The following day, both divers were competing in the individual event, against one half of the Olympic silver medal pairing, Peter Waterfield (Southampton). Thomas has already beaten a below par Peter in Sheffield in November, but was looking forward to an outing against him on top form.

In the prelim, it was first blood to Thomas, with a personal best score. In the semi-final, despite bettering his prelim score, Thomas finished 8 points behind a resurgent Waterfield. Going into the final, after a long weekend, Peter was suffering from cramp in his calf and Thomas was beginning to feel the effects of a back injury he picked up earlier in the week, but like 2 heavyweight boxers, they visited the physio, patched themselves up and went toe-to-toe!

Showing uncharacteristic nerves with this being his first opportunity to qualify for a major championships, Thomas was hesitant on his first two dives, dropping both 7½'s when they had scored 9's and 10's in previous rounds. At this point Waterfield was flying and stretched to a 32 point lead. However, showing great character, Thomas dug deep and summoned all his immense talent to claw his way back and going into the last dive, he had narrowed the gap to just 16 points. With a huge last dive, Thomas piled the pressure on Waterfield who was last to dive and he buckled, dropping his last dive to 6's and gifting Thomas the victory by 8½ points.

This was a truly remarkable achievement and sees Thomas now rise to be the undisputed UK's number 1 ranked male platform diver a pretty remarkable feat for a 13 year old!

So, Plymouth finished the weekend with 4 British Titles (out of 8 events), an additional 4 medals and 3 divers and Coach Andy Banks, on the World Cup Team – a pretty good weekend's work!