

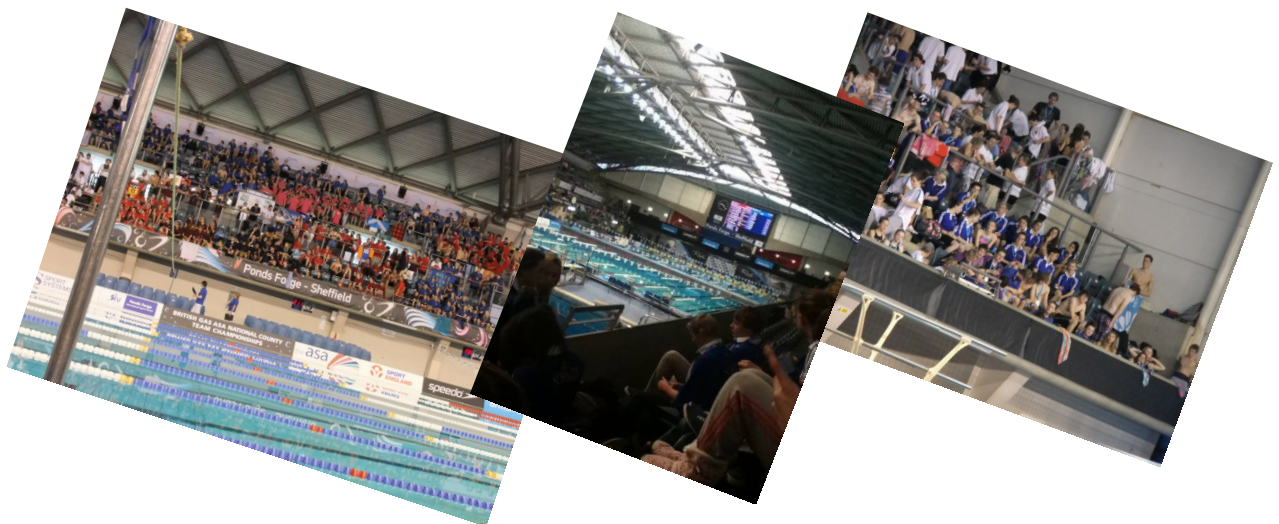


Charlie Hepworth and Nicholas Savill Compete for Sussex in the National County Team Championships 2012

Sussex County ASA selected two Worthing swimmers, Charlie & Nicholas, to feature in this year's National County Team Championships at Ponds Forge, Sheffield, in which Sussex were trying to gain promotion to the top division. The pair were drafted in to the team as a result of their times being among the fastest in the County in their relevant strokes – Freestyle for Charlie and Breaststroke for Nicholas. Charlie was given the Freestyle leg in the Boys 14/15yrs IM Relay and Nicholas the individual 12/13yrs Boys 100m Breast and also the Breast leg in the Boys 12/13yrs IM Relay.

They travelled with the team on the Saturday and stayed overnight in a hotel, team briefings and team building sessions prepared them for the next day. The swimmers managing for themselves the all important food intake and sleep requirements needed to optimise their performance.

On the Sunday, after a very early team breakfast, they travelled apprehensively to the pool at Ponds Forge, the County Head Coach and the County President both giving encouragement along the way - a top 4 finish for the Sussex team was the declared goal. On arrival they knew they had broken into the big time – a National Event – in a huge venue consisting of two back to back 10 lane 25m pools running the gala simultaneously, a complex with the ability to accommodate the 900+ swimmers from over 40 counties in England, Scotland and Wales, the 100's of spectators and numerous officials, camera crews were on the pool deck as the event was screened live on the ASA website.



The event started with an Opening Ceremony, which like the Olympics involved a parade by the participating counties – a very colourful affair as the swimmers adorned various make up, wigs and hats in a final team bonding. This contributed to the colourful array of teams and the enthused atmosphere that filled the arena. The Officials marched on, the author included, and took up their positions and then the ASA President declared the event open - “Let the Swimming begin”.



Nicholas's first event was early on, being in the fourth event and whipping was three events in advance there was no time to relax and get focused – straight in to the thick of it. He got off to a good start turning at 50m level with the leaders and finally finishing 9th overall with a time of 1:15.94s, a 1.66s PB and breaking the Worthing Boys 13yrs 100m Breast record in the process. Sussex was up and running and the magnitude of the task realised – this was going to be tough!

Many events passed, the huge scoreboard showing results of both pools and video footage and eventually the current standings – Sussex were in 6th – the relays were going to decide the final outcome.

Charlie's IM relay team took up their positions knowing they had to perform, this they certainly did with an excellent 3rd place - Charlie's Freestyle leg was officially recorded as a very fast 25.09s – further analysis of the splits suggests that this was even faster at 24.97s. His inclusion in the team well and truly justified, with this Sussex had moved into 3rd but the points differences were very close and places were switching with every race.

Nicholas' relay race was about to start as the scoreboard flashed up Sussex in 4th – the goal was still on with four events to go and even further pressure heaped on – absolutely no DQ's was the order from the County Head Coach. The Boys rose to the challenge, although already behind at the first take over Nicholas pulled them back into contention with a split time on the Breast leg of 34.49s the remaining two swimmers secured the 5th position.

As the racing came to a close had Sussex done enough, all eyes turned to the scoreboard which had, for a reason unknown to us, stopped showing team positions during the last few events. After waiting for 10mins, it seemed like an eternity, it was announced that a protest was being heard and the final result would be delayed until after this. The Sussex team made their way to the coach for the journey back, speculations abundant on where they had finished. The mood on the coach was jubilant and excitable yet with a tinge of reservation as still no result confirmed. Then the coach erupted as the result appeared on the website – Sussex had finished 3rd – promotion back to division 1.

Charlie and Nicholas both raised their game, outperformed faster swimmers on paper and did not only themselves proud but also the whole of Sussex and above all Worthing Swimming Club and its hard working team of coaches. Well done to them both on being part of a successful Sussex team and a just reward for their dedication and effort in training.

Mark Savill

Authors Note: The author travelled with the team as one of the two Sussex Officials appointed for this National Event..