

Aurora swimmer sets her sights on Olympic glory



By Jeff Doner

At just 13 years old, Lauren Heinburrow is already making a splash in the pool and it's not going unnoticed.

She has only been swimming for four years, but her progress has been astounding.

At a meet in Kamloops in December, she swam to a national qualifying time in the 50m butterfly and on Feb. 1 at the BC AAA Provincial Championships, Lauren beat her previous best time to keep her on the upward trajectory.

She earned a time of 30.28, which she identified as her biggest accomplishment in the pool thus far. That time qualified her for the Western Canadian Championships coming up in Vancouver.

Lauren and her family hail from Aurora, but six months ago she moved out to BC with her swim coach in order to keep her training on track.

"I came out here because my coach was moving to BC for a new swim club. She was a really good coach, so I wanted to keep her as a coach and I moved out here with her," she said.

"I'm really enjoying it. It's a really good experience and I really like the lifestyle and how I'm able to still get lots of swimming in. I'm definitely improving in that and also in school."

When she was 10 years old she started swimming with The Selkies in Aurora. At first with the recreational program, Lauren was soon urged by coaches to make the step up to the competitive team.

She admitted that at first she wasn't all that taken by swimming.

Now she can't get enough, constantly improving her time and technique.

"I had never done a sport that I was so focused on and I started moving up into higher levels of swimming," she said. "I was getting up there into higher levels, so I stuck with it."

In her third year as a swimmer, it became evident that she had strength in sprint. Now, her specialties are the 50m fly and free and the 100m fly and free.

"I liked the backstroke when I started, but I moved to ducks and I loved butterfly, freestyle and sprinting for a whole year," she said. "Everybody was a sprinter in my group, so I started to just go along with them and I just started sprinting."

So far, both Lauren and her parents back here in Aurora are thrilled with how things are progressing for her out in BC.

Through her first five months there, Lauren has competed in six meets and has earned fantastic results.

At 13, she will be one of the younger swimmers to compete in the upcoming national meet, but it's a challenge that she can't wait to face.

"It's kind of hard for my age, making all the times, because at Western's it's 15 and under, so it's hard because I'm competing against all of them and getting the times to qualify for competitions, but it's all really fun competing against higher level swimmers because it pushes me," she said.

"The most important thing is really to push myself hard each practice and not slack off. I always have to push myself to get past other swimmers."

But none of this has come easy. Like any athlete looking to be at the top of their class, Lauren doesn't have the typical life of a 13-year-old girl.

Each week she has 16 ? 18 hours of training that includes one hour of yoga and two hours of dry land training (running and weights) on top of school, which leaves little spare time.

"It's pretty hard sometimes, but I just keep pushing to get to the level that I want to get to," she said.

"But in my spare time I just really like to sleep, but if I'm not sleeping, I either do homework or just hang out with my friends or go jogging with the dog."

Her goals are set high and she uses the success of her teammates and competitors as motivation to keep forging ahead.

"There are always people that are ahead of me in my group and there's always people that I just look up to when I see them race and I'll think, 'I need to get to that level and I want to get to that level way before they did.'"

Although she admitted it is sometimes hard being away from home, she said it's worth it to try and reach her goal and that she knows her family and friends are always just a call, text or email away.

"The hardest part about being away from home is missing my family and not being with my friends that I grew up with. I do really miss my family, but my ultimate goal is to make the Olympic team and win a gold medal for Canada."