**Stretford ASC AGM – Report from the Head Coach**

Similar to 2020, 2021 was significantly affected by the covid-19 worldwide pandemic. Early 2021 saw us return to lockdown in early January after a short period of pool training at the end of 2020. We spent Jan to mid-April with swimmers completing land training and small social events on Zoom on a regular basis. The timetable was based on the swim sessions we had been running immediately before. Swimmers and coaches gained a lot from these sessions and they enabled some structure to be maintained despite the world in general being at standstill. We fortunately returned to the pool in mid-April and swimmers returned to training in good shape, with many showing gains from the aforementioned land training. The coaching team devised a plan to enthuse the swimmers by arranging 3 socially distanced ‘Level X’ competitions, in May, June and July, culminating in our ‘Level X Championships’ in which medals were awarded across a variety of swim groups and age groups. There were some excellent performances which would prove to be significant in terms of County Qualifying at the end of the year. A number of swimmers qualified to swim at the North West Festival of Swimming, the first competitions ran for the general swimming population since the start of the pandemic.

Our Swim Camp organising team worked very hard to put together a replacement swim camp which took place in early August, after the traditional Easter camp was cancelled due to the pandemic. Swimmers were organised into covid-safe bubbles and this proved to be an effective measure to protect the swimmers & staff, and a great camp was had by all involved.

After a summer break we returned to full training in early September. With the country opening up again, there was a return to open competitions, Pointscore and an eagerly awaited Club Champs for the first time in 2 years. There were also a number qualified for Winter Regionals. The year of racing finished with the Trafford Christmas Cracker open meet, which was a great success. At the close of the year and at the final count, there were 32 Club qualifiers for Lancs Counties, including 26 of whom were training with us full time. This is a fantastic achievement for the club and coaches at the end of a year which was disrupted significantly by the pandemic. It was especially positive to see the range of events and distances the swimmers qualified for.

In October we said goodbye to our much-loved assistant coach, Jared. As his swimmers will agree, Jared was an integral part of our team, making a real difference to those he coached, as well as the coaches and parents who worked with him. We miss him and will always be happy to welcome him back at the club in the years to come, and I want to thank Jared for being ‘just Jared’ as we tended to call him! As one door closed, another opened and we were delighted to appoint Alisdair Stout as our new Assistant coach in November. Our established coaching team of Phil, Shelley, Jared, Mike and myself were also joined at various intervals by older swimmers such as Bethan, Nina, Ellie, Abbie, Harriet, Izzy, Lily, Erin, Chloe, Tia, Ehi and Cameron. It has been fantastic to see these young people develop their confidence and coaching skills over the year.

At the start of the school year we also said goodbye to a number of senior swimmers who departed for university, including Erin Hoyland who is continuing to swim competitively in the American collegiate system, and Club Captain Alfie Jones, now hitting the water up in Glasgow. It was sad to see these fantastic role models move on, but it of course offers opportunities for others to fill their shoes (or fins!)

The array of challenges we faced in 2021 meant that we were hugely reliant on the help of our committee members and volunteers to comply with Swim England training guidance and continue functioning as a club. We are indebted to those who gave, and continue to give, their time to help out and I want to say a huge thank you to everyone who has been involved in the last year. We look forward to welcoming new faces to our volunteer community and if anyone new is interested please do get in touch.

Looking forward to 2022 and beyond, I hope that the club can continue the competitive progress we have made over the last few years, as well as considering how we can further impact young people’s lives in positive ways.

Tom Popes

Head Coach