



North Shore Amateur Swimming Club Inc

www.nss.org.nz

THIRD KIWI RELAY TO GO TO BEIJING



1st April 2007

New Zealand have qualified a third relay team for the Beijing Olympics on a controversial final session of heats at the 12th FINA World Championships in Melbourne tonight.

The men's medley relay quartet of Cameron Gibson, Glenn Snyders, Corney Swanepoel and Mark Herring were the 11th fastest in the heats, narrowly missing out on a place in the final. But they were safely through as one of the top 12 for an automatic qualification for Beijing. One team that will still need to qualify are top seeds USA who were disqualified after crack butterfly exponent Ian Crocker was adjudged to have left the blocks too soon at the start of the third leg.

Outstanding North Shore veterans Helen Norfolk and Dean Kent both narrowly missed qualification in the heats of the 400m individual medley on the final heats at the Rod Laver Arena.

That leaves Zoe Baker, a two-time medalist at the world championships, as the sole New Zealander in action tonight after she won through to the final of the 50m breaststroke in the semi-finals last night.

Kent produced a strong performance to finish third in his heat behind the two fastest qualifiers led by the great Michael Phelps, with six gold medals to his credit already at these championships, and Italy's Luca Martin. While his preference is for the 200m, the 28-year-old showed the benefit of the hard work he has done with in freestyle to clock 4:18.32 in the heats, only 12/100ths of a second outside his New Zealand record. He was 10th fastest overall and half a second outside qualifying for his second final.

Norfolk, who has been concentrating on freestyle over the last six months, surprised with a superb effort to be ninth fastest in the 400m medley. She was third in her heat behind Australian Stephanie Rice and China's Rui Yu in a slick 4:44.79. This was only 23/100ths from Liz Van Welie's national record.

The 25-year-old has broken New Zealand records for the 200m and 400m freestyle at the championships narrowly missing out on advancing to the finals in both. And while she has not spent as much time on her off-strokes, the freestyle prowess meant Norfolk powered home third fastest over the freestyle leg.

She again missed out on a final, this time by just half a second, ironically to Yu who grabbed the final qualifying spot with an amazing 2:01.62 in the final freestyle leg overtaking Norfolk on the final 50m in their heat.

The men's medley relay quartet of Cameron Gibson, Glenn Snyders, Corney Swanepoel and Mark Herring again showed significant improvement to grab a New Zealand record and 11th placing overall. They would have qualified for Beijing even without the USA disqualification.

They were set up by a brilliant opening leg by the England-based Gibson. The national record holder in the backstroke has moved to UK to join a specialist sprint programme as he converts to freestyle. But he dug deep to be just outside his backstroke record, going nearly two seconds than he did in the individual event during the championships with a 55.70.

The rest played their part to grab a spot in Beijing and display a promising future for men's relay combination.

New Zealand results, day 8 heats, FINA World Swimming Championships:
(time and overall placing in heats)

400m individual medley, men: Dean Kent 4:18.32, 10th.
400m individual medley, women: Helen Norfolk 4:44.79, 9.
4x100m medley relay, men: New Zealand 3:40.29 (Cameron Gibson 55.70, Glenn Snyders 1:01.50, Corney Swanepoel 52.46, Mark Herring 50.63)