

World champion beats all the boys in State NZ Ocean Swim

History was made in the Bay of Islands this morning as one woman taught the men a lesson in round two of the State New Zealand Ocean Swim Series.

The 2009 world champion Melissa Gorman of Australia dominated both the women's and men's fields in the State Paihia Classic, in her first venture on this side of the Tasman.

Gorman finished 22 seconds ahead of 18-year-old men's race winner Stefan Talbot of Pakuranga and one minute 23 seconds ahead of Australian based Kiwi Cara Baker in the 3.3km swim from Russell to Paihia.

"It's pretty exciting. I don't think I've ever really been in a race where the boys have been happy to sit on my feet. I was like come on take the lead for a while," Gorman said.

It was also the first time Gorman had ever worn a full wetsuit, let alone raced in one.

"It's definitely very different from what I'm used to, but as the race went on I kind of got used to it and got the feel – I thought the water was going to be colder so that was a good surprise."

Gorman, who has already qualified for the London Olympics, is using the State NZ Open Swim Series as valuable race preparation.

Baker, who won the opening round of the series in Auckland, has retained her overall lead with her second placing today as she works towards next month's State national open water championships in Taupo, the selection event towards the final London Olympic qualifying race in Portugal.

Talbot was the men's favourite heading into the race, despite having never won a State Ocean Swim Series event before. Although he proved his worth today in winning the men's race by 40 seconds over nearest rival, triathlete Graham O'Grady of Hamilton.

"I stuck with Melissa most of the way. She's a very good swimmer so I decided to try stick with her but she just got me at the end there," said Talbot.

The conditions deceived the swimmers by flaunting a calm, flat surface at the start line in Russell. But once out of the protection of the bay, the strong north-easterly made it testing on competitors.

"When you came round those hills the chop got really messy. It just sort of kept pushing you around everywhere. Visibility was quite hard and it was very physical," he said.

Around 800 swimmers between the ages of six and 81 took the plunge in a range of recreational swims. Included in those who took on the full 3.3km race between Russell and Paihia was Lord of the Rings star Bruce Hopkins who swam his late brother's ashes across in a pouch in his shorts. Hopkins



had tried in vain to tempt his Northland-based brother into competing last year, but he since passed away suddenly.

The third round of the six-race series is the State Capital Classic in Wellington on 29 January.

Results:

Women: Melissa Gorman (Australia) 37:25, 1; Cara Baker (Pakuranga) 38:48, 2; Brenda Russell (Auckland) 42:18, 3; Elizabeth May (Epsom) 43:43, 4; Candra Hansen (Hamilton) 51:49, 5.

Men: Stefan Talbot (Pakuranga) 37:47, 1; Graham O'Grady (Hamilton) 38:28, 2; Brent Foster (Ellerslie) 38:45, 3; Ben Campbell-Macdonald (Wellington) 39:55, 4; Andrew Pullon (Hamilton) 40:01, 5.

Full details: www.oceanswim.co.nz

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