



**ASA NATIONAL COUNTY TEAM CHAMPIONSHIPS**  
**PONDS FORGE, SHEFFIELD**  
**SUNDAY 22<sup>ND</sup> OCTOBER 2006**



Having met in the rain at Spur Road, Orpington, on the afternoon of Saturday 21<sup>st</sup> October 2006, the Kent Team boarded a Sullivan's Coach to make the journey up to Chesterfield, in preparation for a good nights sleep before the ASA National County Team Championships the next day at Ponds Forge, Sheffield.

It wasn't long into our journey that there were calls for a toilet break and food stop – and that was just from the Team Managers!

After four and a half hours of, surprisingly, good traffic, we eventually reached our destination at the Ibis Hotel in Chesterfield. With all swimmers still accounted for, each pair was allocated their rooms and then quickly made their way back to the hotel restaurant for a much needed dinner and drink before the bedtime curfew kicked in. With each room silent, I could now make my own way to bed in preparation for the long day ahead on the Sunday.

After all but one or two had struggled with the 7am wake up call, eventually every swimmer made breakfast and collected team kit and competitor I.D. Having all checked out and boarded the coach, we made the short journey down the road to Ponds Forge.

Despite being an hour early, there were already plenty of teams, officials and spectators on site and the swimmers were eager to find their position in the stand and get changed for warm-up. The usual entertainment during warm-up was provided by some over-excited teenagers (boys!!) and the view of themselves on the big screen (I will leave it up to your own imaginations). After which, we were duly entertained by the arrival of the Presidents, of the 40 County Associations who were competing, the officials and the Team Representatives carrying their County banners. In Kent's case, the honour this year fell to Nick Devine and Chloe Hart.

A small delay in proceedings meant that we were all prompted to rise to our feet and join in with a rendition of "The Birdy Song", "YMCA" and "The Macarena" - duly displayed on the big screen – it was a shame that they didn't get a shot of our Vice-President abysmally attempting the "YMCA" (at least she was one of only two Presidents who did join in!!).

Now the atmosphere had been set, the teams were ready to compete. For any parent or coach who has not been to this meet, it really is a sight to behold. The 50m of Ponds Forge divided into two 25m competition pools, with Division I swimming at the scoreboard end and Division II swimming at the same time in the diving pit end. Two races at the same time, forty counties and plenty of air horns and fancy dress in the balcony – it really is a spectacle which must take some organising!

The event started off well for Kent and after two first places in succession (from Ellen Gandy and Karl Botha) in our Division, we soon saw Kent sitting within the top 3 placed teams. Excellent individual swims and the teams saw Kent stay in the top 3 for the majority of the gala. The relays provided some extremely close finishes and, some great internal rivalry. The 16/17 year old boys were mortified by being beaten by the 14/15 year olds on time, but were soon reprieved when the younger team were given a suspect (well I would say that!) disqualification losing a valuable 19 points. With the finale in sight, the 14/15 year old girls put in a spellbinding performance in their medley relay to come second in the penultimate event. With Lancashire runaway winners in Division 1, the final heat of the final event, the mixed 6 x 50m freestyle team, proved to be the one where pride was at stake. Kent led the way for the first half of the race, with our fastest and oldest swimmers going off first. However, with the height and strength of the other team's senior swimmers still to go, the nail biting was getting more intense as our lead ebbed away, despite the support from the rest of the team (and the Vice President on poolside). A storming performance from Jack Little on the final leg meant that we finished in an unpredicted sixth in the race and ninth in the overall standings of Division I. Our closest neighbours, Surrey and Essex, just avoided relegation to Division II finishing in 16<sup>th</sup> and 15<sup>th</sup> respectively.

After boarding the coach and making our way back down a sodden M11 and M25, we eventually arrived back at Spur Road. Although dark, late, raining and tired we all descended the coach slightly more proud to be a part of the County team and of what we had achieved. Well done to all!

**County Team**

**Girls:** Chloe Ross, Louise Gates, Ellen Gandy, Holly Ralfe, Amy-Louise Kennard, Katy Little, Emma Coppen, Holly Miles, Chloe Hart, Victoria McPherson, Sophie Tomlin, Emma Harris,

**Boys:** Charles Crayford, Xander Alari-Williams, Karl Botha, Sam Hunt, Guy Hewett, Ricky Outhwaite, Andrew Smith, Ben Watson, Andrew Blatchford, Nicholas Devine, Jack Little, Michael Gregory

**Team Managers**

Mrs Gill Hughes

Mrs Jennifer Verhorevoort

**Kent Swimming Officials**

Mr Ian Allchin

Mrs Ann Memmott

**Team Coaches**

Mr Mick Geer

Mr Julian Metcalf

**Vice President Kent ASA**

Mrs Jean Scott