

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE
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U.S. swimmer Kayla Wheeler highlights final day in Miami

MIAMI — American swimmer Kayla Wheeler closed out an impressive appearance at the 2014 U.S. Paralympics Swimming Spring National Championships/Spring CanAms today in Miami with a Pan American record in the women's 200-meter freestyle S2. It was one of 12 Pan American records and 15 American records broken on the final day of the international event, which serves as the U.S. team qualifier for the Pan Pacific Para-Swimming Championships in August.

The 2014 U.S. Pan Pacific Para-Swimming Championship Team, which can include up to 45 athletes, will be named by April 12. The competition is August 6-10 in Pasadena, Calif.

Wheeler swam a 6:06.24 in the morning preliminaries, a record, then bested herself with a 5:49.55 in the evening finals.

"Since I started swimming that event, I've been trying to get under six minutes," Wheeler said. "I had that time in mind back in 2007 so to finally get it today, I was really excited. I'm really, really happy that I made it today."

Throughout the three day competition in Miami, 17-year-old Wheeler (Lynnwood, Wash.) broke a world record in the 50m butterfly (S2), the Pan American record in the 200m free (S2) and American records in the 50m breaststroke (SB1) and 50m freestyle (S2) for her classification. Coming into the meet, Wheeler already held the world record for the 100m breast (SB1), the 50m fly (S1 and S2) and the 150m individual medley (SM1) heading into the competition.

"I've been practicing four days a week to prepare for this competition," she said. "Before that, I was doing three days of practice. I bump up to four before a big meet so I have been practicing more. I was really feeling it this meet."

Born with one arm and no legs, Wheeler, who competed this week in the SB1 and S2 classifications, has one of the more limiting physical disabilities in her sport. (A lower number in Paralympic swimming classification indicates a more severe activity limitation than a higher number.)

"I want people in the lower classes to get out there and swim," Wheeler said. "People with more limiting disabilities aren't always keen to get into the water because they see faster swimmers and don't quite understand classifications. I want them to know that no matter what your disability is, you can get in and swim. It is a great way to let loose and be free."

While not in record setting form, Baltimore area swimmers continued to dominate the standings, led by 17-time Paralympic medalist Jessica Long. She was named swimmer of the meet after winning the women's 100m free, 200m IM, 100m back and 400m free in the S8 classification.

"This is not my best swimming," said Long, who prepped for the event for only four days. "I came here to qualify for the Pan Pacific Para-Swimming Championship Team and start preparing for Rio."

The competition marked her return to the pool after a stint as on-camera talent for NBC Olympics' coverage of the Sochi 2014 Paralympic Winter Games, March 7-16.

On Day 1, her training mates Rebecca Meyers (Timonium, Md.) and Ian Silverman (Baltimore, Md.) set world records in the women's 1500m free S13 and men's 1500m S10 respectively. Other world records set in the meet: Canadian Kristie Kasko's 2:45.60 in the women's 200m IM SM14 and 1:16.57 in the 100m back S14; Canadian Adam Rahier's 2:22.47 in the men's 200m IM SM14; and Canadian Maxime Rousselle's 2:21.58 in the men's 200m IM SM14.

More than 200 athletes from Cameroon, Canada, Colombia, Costa Rica, El Salvador, Mexico, Russia and the United States competed in Miami. The season continues for U.S. swimmers most notably at the May 17-18 Cincinnati Disability Meet in Cincinnati and the June 21-22 Jimi Flowers Classic in Colorado Springs, Colo.

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