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U.S. Paralympics swimmers set world marks on Day 1 of CanAms

MIAMI — Americans Rebecca Meyers, Ian Silverman and Kayla Wheeler set world records on the opening day of the 2014 U.S. Paralympics Swimming Spring National Championships/Spring CanAms at Miami's Ransom Everglades School. The event, which runs through March 29, serves as the U.S. team qualifier for the Pan Pacific Para-Swimming Championships in August.

Wheeler of Lynnwood, Wash., started the record setting day with a 1:45.27 in the women's 50-meter butterfly S2 preliminary race, narrowly breaking the 1:45.84 world record she set in September 2013. She broke the world record once more in the finals, swimming a 1:41.08.

Meyers (Timonium, Md.), who competes in the S13 classification, swam a 17:53.90 in the morning session to smash the world record in the women's 1500m free. The previous world record of 19:41.95 was set by American Elizabeth Scott in September 2000.

"It was incredible," Meyers said. "I'm happy that I finally set a world record in that event. I've been working for that for the last couple years so I'm just really happy I was able to swim a world record time."

With her best events still to come Friday and Saturday, Meyers also won the women's 100m free with a time of 1:02.42 to finish her day on a high note.

"World records might be a long shot in the 400 free, 100 fly and 200 IM but I'm hopeful," Meyers said. "If not at this meet, I think I definitely can set more records by [Pan Pacific Para-Swimming Championships in] Pasadena, California."

Silverman, a University of Southern California commit who trains with Meyers in Baltimore, followed her performance with a record setter of his own in the men's 1500m free S10. He swam a 16:19.70, easily breaking the 16:24.63 mark he set at last year's nationals/Spring CanAms.

Other records set on Day 1 include: Michelle Konkoly's (Eagleville, Pa.) 1:03.94 American record in the women's 100m free S9; Leslie Cichocki's (Palos Hills, Ill.) 1:07.53 American record in the women's 100m free S14; Tharon Drake's (Hobbs, N.M.) 1:16.02 American and Pan American record in the men's 100m breaststroke S11; and Letticia Martinez's (Las Cruces, N.M.) 1:16.49 American record in the women's 100m free.

Although not in record setting form, Jessica Long (Baltimore, Md.) easily won the women's 100m free S8 Thursday by almost four seconds, marking a 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.

"I love to swim," Long said. "It's great to be here in this atmosphere, swimming at such a large meet, but I am definitely feeling Sochi. Going to Russia as a commentator for NBC was such a great experience. I'm so thankful for the opportunity even if it was a little brutal getting in the pool and competing today. I've only been swimming for about four days for this meet so I'm slowly getting into a rhythm. I'm getting back into my routine and I'm building up for Pan Pacs and eventually for Rio [2016 Paralympic Games]."

Three-time Paralympian Long, a 17-time medalist at the Games, has realistic expectations for her meet.

"I know that I'm not at my best," Long said. "My main goal for this meet is to swim well and to make the team. Sochi was great but now I'm putting my focus back on swimming."

The event also marked the return of U.S. Navy veteran Brad Snyder (Baltimore, Md.), who took a brief hiatus from competitive swimming following two gold medals and one silver medal at the London 2012 Paralympic Games. He swam a 1:00.02 in the men's 100m free S11, an event that he won at the Games in September 2012.

"It's really fun to be racing again," Snyder said. "It feels good to just dive off a block and get in the pool and swim against both new and old athletes. This is a great event but everyone has their minds set on Rio and we're just putting ourselves in the mix here."

More than 200 athletes from Cameroon, Canada, Colombia, Costa Rica, El Salvador, Mexico, Russia and the United States are competing in Miami.

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