

Team Colorado Swimmers Set Records Again!

Six swimmers from Colorado won medals and set an astonishing total of 15 meet records for their age group and sports class at the recent 2022 Move United Junior Nationals meet at VMAC.



Team Colorado shows off their medals



Photo courtesy of Lisa Ingram

Over 2 days in July, 160 adaptive athletes from over 30 states participated in the 2022 Move United Junior Nationals swimming competition. This year 6 Colorado athletes competed, setting a total of fifteen meet records for their age group and sports class,

Dillon Mezey and Katee Johnson from the Falfins Swim Team in Colorado Springs, Gracie Oswald from Brighton Bullfrogs, Jackson Ingram from Pikes Peak Aquatics, Luke Carruth from Mission Aurora Swim Club and Beau Gallardo combined to form Team Colorado.

The competition for athletes with disabilities was held over both 25-yard and 50-meter courses. Rules for each stroke are based on the World Paralympic Swimming rulebook that is used for international competitions. Athletes were classified according to their disabilities. In each event, swimmers compete in mixed heats, but then times are ranked against athletes in similar age groups and with similar disabilities to identify the final placings.

Dillon Mezey swimming in the Under 11 S3 competition set meet records in the 50m freestyle, 200m freestyle, and 25yd backstroke competitions and went on to break his own meet records in the 50m backstroke, 100m freestyle and 25 yd freestyle events.

Jackson Ingram swimming in the Under 14 S6 competition set records in the 25yd butterfly, 50yd butterfly, 50m backstroke, 50m butterfly, 50m freestyle and 100m freestyle competitions.

Gracie Oswald swimming in the Under 20 S7/SB8 classification set meet records in the 50yd butterfly, 100yd backstroke and 100yd breaststroke competitions.

Luke Carruth swimming in the Under 11 S8/SB6 competition achieved a first-place finish in the 25yd breaststroke and second place finishes in the 25yr freestyle, 50yd freestyle and 25yd backstroke events.

Katee Johnson swimming in the Under 14 S9 competition achieved first place finishes in the 25yd freestyle and 25yd backstroke and second place finishes in the 50yd freestyle and 50yd backstroke events.



Photo courtesy of Lisa Ingram

After the meet Jackson Ingram said "The experience was awesome, I love swimming it felt awesome to set records. Usually when I swim, I set only my own records, but when I do break others' records it feels good. The first big meet I ever swam in was the Jimmy Flowers Meet in 2020, before COVID, and that was really exciting. Then I went to Arizona for my first-ever meet outside of Colorado and I did well. Then I got the news that I could go to Junior Nationals and I was like, "OK!". It made me feel like I can do anything." Jackson's mother Lisa said "He loved participating in the Move United Junior Nationals the last couple of years".

Luke Carruth's mother Kelsey said, "Luke (7 years old) participated in the MOVE United Jr Nationals for the first time this year. It was his only 3rd meet since his joining MACS. He began on the pre-team within the MACS organization where he learned technique and trained. Once he heard that Jr Nationals was coming to Colorado, he motivated himself to participate and qualify. His experience at Jr Nationals was amazing! He was super nervous at first, but once in the pool he felt comfortable and all his hesitation went away. He was excited to be competing against other kids just like him as he'd never experience that before. Being one of the younger athletes on deck, he became confident in his abilities and had fun. He ultimately won 3 silver and 1 gold in his races which had him grinning from ear to ear. Prior to joining MACS, Luke struggled with finding his niche and seeing his friends run laps around him. Swimming has been an amazing opportunity for him where he is at the same level as his peers who are abled body and he knows he is just as good as them. He's grown a couple more inches and he is proud of who he is with his disability and knows he can accomplish anything if he works hard. He is already counting down the days till the 2023 event"



Photo courtesy of Kelsey Carruth

Brianna Noffsinger, Luke's coach at MACS added "2021-22 was my first year coaching an adaptive athlete. I have learned so much this past year and it has grown my appreciation and knowledge of the sport of swimming as well as my respect and admiration for these athletes. Sometimes I struggled with how to teach a new skill but Luke knows his body so well and can figure out ways to adapt to achieve a goal. It was a great reward for us both to see him work at something and figure out how to make his body work for him. Luke always has a smile on his face when he is in the water and feels at home there. Having an adaptive athlete in practice with other able-bodied kids his age has been a great experience. All the

other kids are so excited to hear about Luke's accomplishments, see his medals, cheer him on and miss him when he's not at practice. Coaching at Junior Nationals was an incredible experience that opened my eyes to all this sport has to offer. That meet allowed Luke to get to know other adaptive athletes. Some with similar abilities to him and some different, but they all shared this love of swimming. By the end of the meet, Luke had made friends from all over the country, met and was cheered on by ParaOlympians, and gained so much confidence. I hope that more kids like Luke are encouraged to start swimming."

Gracie Oswald said after the meet. "I never thought I would be given such amazing opportunities to swim where I truly felt as though I belong, but because of Move United, they made that possible. I've always dreamt of someday getting a bronze or silver medal, but getting gold made my heart skip a beat. It's taken a long time to feel genuinely good about myself and to feel proud about what I've achieved physically, but I've finally gotten there, and it's truly been worth the wait."

Heidi Heim, Gracie's coach at Brighton Bullfrogs added, "Move United is an amazing experience! This year Gracie and I had a great time mingling with swimmers and coaches from Colorado and other states, exchanging stories, making friendships and cheering each other on. It has been a pleasure to watch Gracie grow from the shy and nervous young swimmer to the wise and experienced mentor. Move United has given her the opportunity to get to know and help younger athletes from other Colorado teams, especially this year with the increased number of Colorado swimmers in attendance. We hope that the attendance of Colorado swimmers to Move United (and other meets) continues to grow so these swimmers can create a community of support for each other that they can carry on to other meets inside of Colorado."



Photo courtesy of Coach Wenderquist

When Dillon Mezey was asked about competing, he said "Swimming makes me feel happy. I like to swim because it is a fun sport and I get exercise. I love the competition; it is my favorite thing about swimming" Kelly Wenderquist, Dillon's coach at Falfins added "Dillon is a talented athlete, but more important, he is driven by a positive attitude. Every obstacle becomes a challenge to overcome and he quickly adjusts his mindset to accomplish it. Dillon began competitive swimming 4 years ago to learn something and to have fun. He continues to make every practice fun for himself and his teammates and is a positive influence on everyone he encounters. The meet was an outstanding opportunity for Dillon to compete amongst his peers and we couldn't be prouder of him and his accomplishments."

Coach Wenderquist who also coaches Katee Johnson at Falfins added "Katee is an inquisitive athlete. She seeks to understand the why of her strokes and sets. This has shaped her into a very precise swimmer. She began swimming one year ago and has really taken off. She has a tremendous desire to succeed and works diligently at every practice to achieve her goals."

For more information on how to include athletes with disabilities in swimming and in competitions email disability@swimcolorado.org.

Special thanks to the families Carruth, Ingram, Johnson, Mezey and Oswald and to coaches Heim, Heidinger, Noffsinger and Wenderquist for their contribution to this article and kind permission to use photographs.