

2014 Coolangatta Gold

By Ryan Kelly

Earlier in the year, five DSLSC competitors thought it would be a great idea to tackle the longest and most iconic race on the SLSA surf sports calendar; the 2014 Coolangatta Gold. After five months of cold, wet and windy training sessions on the apple isle, the Devonport Coolangatta Gold squad consisting of Coach Luke O’Garey (6th attempt), Simon Murfet (2nd attempt), Daniel Mapley, Hamish Chapman and Ryan Kelly (all 1st attempt), were ready for whatever conditions came their way on the first weekend of November on the Gold Coast. The winter consisted of many hours in the water and on the running track, and at times there were even swimming sessions at Latrobe’s outdoor swimming pool where the temperature reached -3 degrees. There were a fair share of hurdles to overcome, with times of sickness and a lack of motivation occasionally confronting the squad. Unluckily for Hamish, he injured his shoulder four weeks out from the race after racing his mum on their push bikes, which was extremely disappointing for the big fella as he had shown great signs of improvement over the winter. However, the rest of the group got through the last few weeks in good health and were ready to show the determination one gets from training through a Tasmanian winter.

The Saturday morning of the ‘shortcourse’ race was a nervous time for Simon, Daniel and Ryan, as they were all wondering if the hard work was going to pay off. The U/19 race with a field of 28 competitors consisted of a 15km ski paddle, a 2km transition run, a 2.5km swim, a 6km board paddle and a 7km run to finish (a total of 32.5km). The ski paddle started out with Simon establishing himself in the top 2, Ryan in the next group of 10 paddlers and Daniel not too far behind. After getting off the ski and getting the legs warmed up again with a 2km run, the swim presented a whole new challenge. Simon and Daniel both swam extremely well and Ryan held his position as all three competitors were well set to complete the gruelling race. The down-wind board paddle of 6km was yet another obstacle to overcome, but the down-wind training along the north-west coast meant the three boys were well positioned going into the last run leg. The final 7km run along the beach all the way back to Coolangatta seemed like it was never going to end at some stages, but Simon held his position to finish in 6th place overall, which was a massive improvement on last year’s race. Ryan finished off strongly to pass some of his rivals to round out the top 10, and Daniel accomplished his goal of completing the challenging course which was an excellent achievement considering he still has two years left in the U/19 age group. All three athletes were pleased with their efforts, and it was time to have a break and show Coach O’Garey some support for his race the next day.

On the Sunday, it was time for Luke to have a crack at the hotly contested 30-39 age group in the long course. Luke’s 41.5km race consisted of a marathon 23km ski leg, followed by a

2km transition run, a 3.5km swim, a 6km board and a 7km run to finish. The race conditions were completely different to the previous day, as after travelling down-wind on the ski, the competitors had to board paddle and run into a strong head wind. Luke absolutely smoked his rivals on the ski, leading by 3 minutes going into the swim. After his best winter of swimming he has had in recent times under super coach Adrian Triffett, Luke held his lead with a decent time after the 3.5km loop course. Going into the wind on the board, he was extremely unlucky to have to paddle the whole leg by himself, while the competitor in 2nd place found the backwash of a team's board paddler and drew level with Luke going into the last run. Luke and his rival found themselves playing a bit of cat-and-mouse at stages in the run, before Luke was passed with just 200 metres to go. He finished 2nd by 15 seconds in the closest finish of the weekend, which was a gutsy and courageous effort from the coach, and it was also his best finish out of his 6 previous attempts.

On behalf of the squad, I would like to thank coach Luke O'Garey for his tireless work over the winter and on race day to ensure we all got the most out of ourselves. I would also like to thank Adrian Triffett for his swimming coaching over the winter at Latrobe. Special thanks also goes to all the parents and helpers on the day of the race (especially swim-lead board paddlers Jared Wiseman and Andrew Murfet), as at times I'm sure it was more stressful being a handler than a competitor. Well done to everyone involved, and a few of us might be back next year to once again represent the state of Tassie and the mighty DSLSC.