

# Aquatic club dives right in at new Pan Am pool

BY MICHAEL HAYAKAWA  
mhayakawa@yrmg.com

When Rob Novak took over as head coach of the Markham Aquatic Club two years ago, his primary objective was to enhance the performance level of each member and raise the organization's profile.

Novak's dream took a big step toward becoming a reality in November when Markham cut the ribbon to officially open the new 10-lane, 50-metre long course pool at the Pan Am Centre in Unionville.

While the facility will be the venue for the water polo competition at the 2015 Pan American Games, it will also be put to good use by other local youth organizations, including the Markham Aquatic Club.

When the club finally made their long-awaited debut in the pool, it was a dream come true.

"It's great ... it's definitely exceeded our expectations," Novak said. "It's been a long time coming."

## 'STEPPING STONE'

Novak predicted having access to the new facility, which can have its depths adjusted or be converted into a short course, will raise the performance levels of each member.

"We should see some noticeable gains among our performers," he said.

Novak said their top four competitive groups ranging between the ages of 11 to 18 are churning the waves throughout the week.

The pool being a long course facility has the potential to serve as a great recruiting tool in enticing new members.

Just as important, the pool's capacity will allow them to serve as a host site in staging other long course competitions at a provincial, national or possibly international levels.

The club will host its meet at the new facility starting this weekend with their annual Winter Invitational.

Slated to run for four days, the meet is expected to field 745 swimmers representing 18 teams from Ontario and Quebec.

"We are truly excited to host this event to

give everyone in the community a chance take part.

"This will be a great stepping stone for the Markham Aquatic Club on building a tradition of hosting high level meets," Novak said.

The club will also host a second meet, the April Invitational, April 23-26 with some 850 to 900 swimmers from Ontario and Quebec expected to be on hand.

"We are working hard to elevate our meet environment to give the swimmers the right tools to achieve best times, quality for championship meets and just enjoy coming and having fun racing," he said.

With a fully equipped dryland training facility also part of the Pan Am Centre, Novak said the facility "will definitely be a showcase".

Meanwhile, the club concluded its 2014 schedule on a positive note when a 90-member contingent went to Pointe Claire, Que., to churn the waves in a AAA/AA event last month.

With 25 clubs in attendance at both events, the Markham Aquatic Club finished second in both meets.

Among individual highlights from the two events, AA meet gold medallists included: Payton Milne, Girls 13-14 200m Breast and 200m IM; Ethan Jong, Boys 11-12 100m Breast and 200m Breast and Adam Blomme, Boys 15 & Over 1500m Free.

In the AAA meet, gold medallists included: Victoria Kwan, Girls 13-14 200m Fly; Jersey Bishop, Girls 15 and Over 400m Free and 800m Free; Connor Walker, Boys 13-14 200m Free, 400m Free, 1500m Free, 200m Fly, 200m IM and 400m IM; Jake Gu, Boys 13-14 100m Breast; Owen Huang, Boys 13-14 200m Breast and Christian Ng, Boys 15 and Over 200m IM and 400m IM.

In addition to her performance at the AAA meet, Bishop was selected to join a junior national tour team that will head to Australia in April to compete at their Age Group National Championships. This marks the second straight year a Markham Aquatic Club member has been chosen, as last year, Ng was chosen for the same tour team.



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Louie Zhao competes in the 100-metre breaststroke during the Markham Aquatic Club's Rising Stars Meet at the Cornell Pool in November.



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