Chairperson’s Report 2019 – 2020

This has been a definite year of ups and downs and probably the strangest one on record.

We resumed training in September 2019, back in Cookstown and Armagh Leisure Centres and despite our hopes for a speedy return to Dungannon, delays with the building work meant that it was early February before we were able to welcome our swimmers back to their home pool. I’d like to thank the coaches for the huge amount of work that they put in, travelling to the different venues and keeping so many of our swimmers motivated and committed to their sport.

It was wonderful to see the delight on everyone’s faces as they took to the refurbished pool in Dungannon. You could really see the increased determination in the training lanes. Unfortunately, this was all far too short lived, as less than six weeks later the global pandemic of Covid-19 saw the pool empty again, as we closed the club in line with Swim Ireland’s and government’s guidelines.

Despite being away from their home pool the swimmers did their best and worked hard, swimming the majority of the PTL league as away fixtures with only one home gala the entire season. We didn’t manage to achieve any overall gala wins, but some impressive individual performances and strong efforts from the whole team, gave us a decent points total, allowing us to retain our position in Division 3. Lockdown happened just before the first Aquasprint gala was due to be held, so most of our youngest swimmers didn’t get to experience any competitive swimming. We’re not sure at this stage whether there will be a competitive league in PTL or Aquasprints this season due to ongoing Covid restrictions, although no doubt we’ll organise something internally at least.

Many of our young swimmers last season took their first steps on the competitive pathway by attending Swim Ulster’s Skills Meets; others attended Development Meets and Qualifying Meets and Open Galas at various clubs. Our most competitive swimmers had started the season well, pre-lockdown, putting in the hard work to secure qualifying times for top level competitions that never happened. We really sympathise with the disappointment that they surely felt, but in sport, keeping going when you face setbacks is part of the process and we wish them all the best in their continuing competitive pathways. We would encourage any of our swimmers who take pleasure in racing to consider looking at the wide range of opportunities in future.

During lockdown, we enjoyed a few club challenges: the banner design competition, won by Grace Campbell, the Baby Shark Challenge and David’s Zoom-based exercise sessions. There was also a Zoom Social. We hope you enjoyed these and thanks to everyone involved in organising them.

Several new coaches gained level 1 qualification last season, with Sarah Wilson and Emma Richardson joining the team. Paul McClean has secured his Level 2 teaching qualification, which is a great asset to the club and Catherine Donohue and Alison Donaghy are currently working towards theirs. As always, we would encourage anyone with an interest in working with our young people to consider taking a teaching or coaching qualification.

Several committee members have stepped down over the course of the season and I’d like to thank Colm McCluskey, Louise Kirkland and Shelly Aiken for their contributions to the club. Colm will continue to run the website and all will continue to support the club in some ways. I’d also like to thank the whole committee for the work they put in to keep the club running, with a particular mention to Suzanne Graham who has taken on an enormous task this season in accepting the role of Membership Secretary from her predecessor Dawn Campbell, as well as the role of Lead Covid-19 Officer. It has to be said that Suzanne’s IT skills have rocketed over the past few weeks as we’ve taken so much of our paperwork onto an online format. We look forward to welcoming some new members onto the committee this season, particularly those who are keen to find out how things work within the club, with a view to taking on a major role maybe next season.