

SWIMMERS BLAST OFF FOR CARIFTA



The “MudBug BlastOff” Swim Meet run by the NuWave Swim Club at the University of New Orleans from March 28-30 was the event chosen as the final competitive warm up for the Cayman swim team leading up to the CARIFTA games in mid April, with a total of 29 swimmers taken to the “Big Easy” by Stingray Swim Club, including not only the CARIFTA team but also some younger members of the club, for some of whom it was their first time in a 50 metre pool.

Sometimes the phrase “southern hospitality” is in danger of being overused, but not in this case. If anything, the New Orleans swimming community put the rest of the South to shame, such was the warmth and generosity of their welcome to the Cayman team. This started with the traditional “N’Awleams” welcome gift of necklaces of Mardi Gras beads, so many of which were draped on some Cayman swimmers that they were in some danger of neck injury! A highlight of the meet was a “Mudbug” (another word for Crawfish) social, at which the Cayman swimmers sampled crawfish, with some of them developing a voracious appetite for this delicacy.

Despite (in theory) being fatigued from a long period of intense training for CARIFTA, nothing could dampen the competitive fire of these impressive young athletes, and the squad came away with 148 personal bests and 13 age group and Cayman national records.

CARIFTA team members Shaune Fraser and Andrew Mackay each set several age group and Cayman national records, with Shaune setting pool and Louisiana state age group records along the way. Youngsters Chelsea Nelson and Alexander McCallum, no doubt inspired by the shining examples shown them by all of the CARIFTA swimmers, also set age group records in multiple events.

Whilst those involved with the Cayman swim programme by now tend to regard such achievements as routine, our hosts from New Orleans were simply awed by and highly envious of the Cayman team. All of the warm and welcoming hosts just had to comment not only on the competitive quality of the Cayman swimmers, but also on how lucky Cayman was to have such a highly regarded and dedicated coaching staff.

The New Orleans clubs were also amazed not only that the Cayman team had to travel overseas to swim in a 50 metre pool but also that they were able to afford to do so. Head Coach Dave Kelsheimer commented ; “once again our thanks go out to all of our major sponsors, and in particular Cayman Airways, for their continued support. The overseas trips to compete in 50 metre pools are essential for the development of our swimmers. This meet was a very successful one for us with many personal best times. It was also a rare opportunity for our younger swimmers to see the Senior athletes swim in a 50 metre pool. The meet gave us a last chance to gauge the training progress of the 03 Carifta team which hits the pool in Kingston on April 19. We are very excited and are confident they will do Cayman proud.”

