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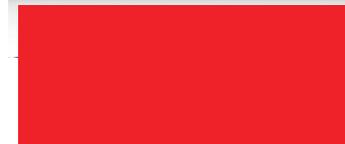
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Megan Bowen has had much to smile about this year

THE mother of Ivybridge swimming sensation Megan Bowen has praised the town's community college for aiding her inexorable rise in the pool.

Sandy Bowen has offered a glowing endorsement of the college's swimming academy after her 14-year-old daughter reached the Olympic trials earlier this month.

The community college's swimming academy allows talented swimmers such as Bowen as much pool time as possible at Dinnaton Swimming Club, while giving them the chance to undertake academic studies at the same time. Mrs Bowen said: 'The swimming academy helps Megan to gain that all-important pool time. There are only so many hours in the week she can get access to the pool, and so to be able to organise her studies around swimming sessions like this is excellent and will definitely make the difference in terms of her performance.'

And the arrangement has reaped impressive dividends for the youngster, who swam at the British Swimming Championships – doubling up as the Olympic trials – at the London Aquatics Centre.

In the 800m freestyle heats, Bowen was 28th out of 30 competitors in a time of 9:22.31. In the 400m freestyle heats, Bowen came 41st out of a field of 52 in a time of 4:28.33. Then, in the 100m freestyle heats, the talented teenager finished 70th out of 73 competitors in a time of 59.20, a season's best performance.

And to prove she has the stamina required to cope with the constant treadmill of competitions, Bowen has

tasted county success on returning to Devon after the Olympic trials. Competing at the Devon Swimming Championships at Central Park, Plymouth, the teenager swam a great heat to get to the 100m freestyle junior championship final, which is open to all ages. Then, in the final, she posted a personal best of 57.82 to gain a silver medal in the Open Championship and a gold medal and trophy for being the top U16 junior.

And it got even better for Bowen when she competed in the final event of the county championships at the Pyramids Leisure Centre in Exeter last weekend. She was champion in the junior 200m freestyle event and then scooped her first senior title in the same competition.

The youngster then added the junior 50m freestyle crown to her burgeoning trophy haul and came second in the seniors' section of the same event. Not content with this, Bowen won both the junior and senior 200m IMs and then came second in the skins knockout contest.

She will be off to Spain with the England junior performance squad for another week-long training camp at Easter. This will help her prepare for this summer's National Age Group Championships. The Dinnaton Swimming Club swimmer was chosen for the performance development squad following her three age-group gold medals at the National Age Group Championships held at Ponds Forge in Sheffield in July last year. The teenager recorded victories in the 200m, 400m and 800m freestyle, and also secured an unexpected silver in the 100m. In 2010, she won bronze medals in the 1,500m and 800m freestyle in her first-ever national competition at Sheffield. She also qualified for eight different disciplines, reaching the finals of the 200m freestyle.

Now she's eyeing England selection on the way to hopefully fulfilling her ultimate ambition: a place at the Olympics. Mrs Bowen was also keen to stress that coach Alan Rooker, who organised Olympic swimming star Rebecca Adlington's land-based training when he was a coach in Nottingham, has been a pivotal part of the teenage prodigy's pool progress.

'Obviously marry up the college's help with a coach of Alan's pedigree, and it's hopefully a winning formula,' Mrs Bowen added. 'For the college to be behind these swimmers at Dinnaton is marvellous. Swimming is a tough sport and requires an awful amount of training time to get to county standard, let alone regional standard. 'Along with the facilitating of extra pool time, the swimmers have land-based training with an excellent strength and conditioning coach, Andy Taylor. He has really helped build Megan's core strength and the results really showed at national competitions.'

Rooker, meanwhile, said it remains to be seen what his pupil can achieve. He said her participation at the Olympic trials was not about 'chasing times', but more a case of 'gaining vital experience' for this summer's National Age Group Championships in Sheffield. 'Her performances were pretty much as I expected, especially as she had a gastric virus and throat infection in the weeks before the trials,' he said.



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