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## Sea Serpents sweep the summer games

Submitted by Asha Spitzer



Simon Keenan, celebrates after his race.

A green wave of East Bay Sea Serpents dove into the Summer Games and swam away as champions. East Bay Sea Serpents, the local Special Olympics swim team for swimmers with disabilities, is a 22-year-old program supported by head coach Brian Wentzel and a collection of local volunteers.?

The Summer Games is a three-day event in June, held yearly at Santa Clara University, that provides competition opportunities to Special Olympics athletes from all over Northern California. This year's Summer Games featured over 860 athletes and coaches participating in swimming, track and field, bocce, and tennis. Athletes have the chance to stay in dorms at both Santa Clara University and San Jose State University through the weekend and interact with other participants from Northern California.

The 2023 Summer Games included sixteen East Bay Sea Serpents, who qualified for their spots at the Summer Games at the previous swim meet. These dedicated serpents trained consistently throughout the Fall and Spring session with their teammates, battling freezing rain, broken pool heaters, and change of pool location.

The Summer Games events began on Friday, June 23, with the Opening Ceremony, where athletes, coaches, and fans gathered to celebrate the official start of the Summer Games. The Sea Serpent's entered the ceremony in the Parade of Athletes, a procession introducing the various teams by county.

Following the ceremony, the athletes plunged into the competitions held on Saturday and Sunday in the Sullivan Aquatic Center.

The Sea Serpents started strong with Andrea Halliday's first-place 500-yard freestyle, where she finished 20 laps in only 14 minutes and 45 seconds! The next event, the 50-yard freestyle was the most popular event among the serpents, with age group highlights from Lillian Callahan-Klein (1st), Tyler Caporalleti (1st), John Gomez (2nd), Lily Grennings (1st), Simon Keenen (1st), Elizabeth Rangel (5th), Ramon Silano (2nd), Douglas Tywoniak (6th), and Catherine Vanderliet (4th).

As the day progressed, the serpents continued to demonstrate their phenomenal swimming, concluding with Dillon Roach's first-place win in the 50-yard breaststroke.?

Following the long day of swimming, the Sea Serpents had the chance to interact with other athletes from around Northern California at the dance held at Stevens Stadium Buckshaw Field or at the group movie. First-time participant Jonah Small, EBBS' first Developmental Events athlete, explained he had many favorite parts of the weekend including meeting his roommate and taking part in the dance. Seasoned swimmer Catherine Vanderliet decided her favorite parts were watching the movie Shrek and swimming her bronze medal 50-yard backstroke.?

The Sea Serpents surged into Sunday morning, beginning with the 100-yard freestyle for Lillian Callahan-Klein (1st), Lily Grenning (1st), and Aaron Lo (3rd). Angeleena Layne captured two first-place medals - one for 100-yard breaststroke and the other for 200-yard freestyle. Alexander Lipina participated in all of his events on Sunday, achieving two first places and one second place for his 100-yard butterfly, 100-yard breaststroke, and 200-yard freestyle.

Simon Keenen, age thirteen, a seven year Sea Serpent swimmer and a first time participant in the Summer Games, reflected on his races declaring, "My favorite event was the Freestyle Relay; I was one of four swimmers in the relay. The 50-yard butterfly was the most challenging. I had the most fun with the butterfly, but it was really hard."

The Sea Serpents had a fantastic spring season and their hard work was reflected in their team performance at the games, taking home 23 gold medals, 10 silver medals, and 2 bronze medals.



Catherine Vanderliet, swims her 50-yard backstroke Photos Deanna Wentzel Photography

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