

WSSC's double Regional Champion Matthew Baker (17) showed great form in the Swim England National Winter Championships (held at Ponds Forge International Sports Centre in Sheffield from 14-17 December 2023). Sixth-former Matthew, a student at Abbeygate Sixth Form College, competed in four events over the course of the four-day meet and posted a number of new lifetime best times in some phenomenal racing.

On the first day of racing, Matthew was entered in the 200m individual medley. Taking more than two seconds off his entry time in the heat, he qualified as the second fastest Junior (17 years and under) for the youth final. Here the seventeen-year-old posted another blisteringly fast time, dropping nearly a second and a half from his heat time and being pipped into fourth place in a very tight finish.

For day 2, Matthew was focused on the 100m freestyle event. Having just slipped out of the medals and into fourth place at November's Regionals, he was keen to post a fast time. In the heat, he equaled his entry time, qualifying in fifth place for the youth final, a position he retained in the final but recording a new personal best of 50.08 seconds.

Days three and four saw Matthew's favoured events; the 200m and 400m freestyle. The East Region Champion was the fastest junior qualifier for the 200m event, taking more than a second off his qualifying time and making the cut for the main final as the sixth fastest male swimmer across all age groups. Again, he found the strength and resilience to slice more than half a second from his heat time, with a new pb and finishing as the seventh fastest male freestyle-swimmer over 200m in England on the day.



Matthew Baker in Lane 7 awaiting the start of the 200m open final

The 400m freestyle was the first event of the final day of racing and Matthew qualified for the youth final with a fourth-place finish in the 17 years and under category. Believing he could improve his time, the WSSC swimmer decided to withdraw from the 100m IM to focus on the 400m freestyle final. This decision was repaid with Regional titleholder Matthew taking an amazing first place more than seven and a half seconds faster than he swam to take the East Region title last month.

Jake Thomas-Mansfield and Myles Turner also qualified to swim at the English Winter Nationals but were unfortunately unable to do so due to work commitments.

Double British Nationals medal-winner and WSSC alumnus Angharad Evans from Abington has been selected for the Swim England National Performance Squad, the final step before the British Swimming World Class programme. She is now participating in the performance swimming programme at the University of Stirling and enjoying their world-class training facilities. At this month's Scottish Winter Nationals, she enjoyed a clean sweep of gold medals in the breaststroke events (50m, 100m and 200m) and rattled the British record in the 100m final, finishing just 0.13 seconds off Molly Renshaw's record set at the World Championships in December 2021.



Matthew Baker at the National Short Course Winter Championships 2023