



FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE
Saturday 22 November

Newcomer Scoops Bay Of Islands Classic

Yasu Hirai made a stunning debut on the State Ocean Swim Series with a win in the Bay of Islands Classic in Paihia today.

Japan's top-ranked open water swimmer beat Bond University clubmate George O'Brien by 15 seconds over the 3.3km course.

Charlotte Webby won the women's race finishing well clear of fellow Kiwi, Olympian Lauren Boyle, with Australian Samantha Watts finishing third.

Hirai sat in second place for most of the 3.3km race from the historic town of Russell, firstly behind Troy Balvert (St Peter's Swimming Academy) who led until the halfway mark, and then on the feet of O'Brien.

The 24-year-old made a burst with 300 metres to swim.

"I'm very happy to win in my first Series in New Zealand," said Hirai. "I tried to conserve energy as I have some speed at the end and that was what I needed today."

Philip Ryan was the best of the Kiwis, 12 seconds behind O'Brien in third, with another Queenslander Michael Shiel and Balvert making up the top five.

Ryan led briefly at the fourth marker when the field closed up but by the fifth buoy the winner was only going to be one of the visitors and as they passed the moored yachts and headed towards the large crowd on the beach it was Hirai who claimed the honours.

Hirai earns 100 points in the six-race Series which continues until April.

Webby, who finished overall second on the 2013-14 Series, made no contest of the women's race.

"Lauren (Boyle) got me at the start but I got beside her and eventually in front and then I didn't want to look back in case she was closing," said the 26-year-old from Stratford.

"I could see the men and wanted to be a little closer to their feet so I will work on my start ahead of next time.

“It was a good start to the year and hopefully leads to a good season, both in the Series and the 10km season.”

Boyle said she enjoyed the Bay of Islands Classic even though she was on her own for most of the race.

“Racing in the ocean is very different from the pool especially when you are swimming alone and it is nice when you get to see the end,” said the Commonwealth 800m champion. “I was going well at the beginning but when Charlotte went past me she kept extending the gap so I just went at my own pace.

“My focus now turns to training as we have a big long-course season ahead of us right up till July, though I will be back for the King of the Bays in April.”

Boyle was a popular drawcard to the thousands who lined Paihia Beach signing autographs for and posing for photographs with many adoring fans.

“Open water swimming is so important in New Zealand because we are surrounded by water and being out in nature in the sun is such a great way to enjoy what we have in this country.”

Almost 700 competitors competed in round one of the Series which continues in Auckland on 7 December.

RESULTS OF THE STATE BAY OF ISLANDS CLASSIC, Paihia

Men's

1st, Yasu Hirai ((JPN), 43'59

2nd, George O'Brien (AUS), 44'14

3rd, Philip Ryan (NZL), 44'26

Women's

1st, Charlotte Webby (NZL), 46'43

2nd, Lauren Boyle (NZL), 49'55

3rd, Samantha Watts (AUS), 51'30

REMAINING EVENTS

Harbour Crossing, Auckland, 7th December 2014

Capital Classic, Wellington, 25th January 2015

La Grande Swim, Akaroa, Christchurch, 15th February 2015

Sand to Surf, Mt Maunganui, 21st March 2015

King of the Bays, Auckland, 18th April 2015

ENDS

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