

Radford, Baker take out State Harbour Crossing

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Kiwi swimmers Kane Radford and Cara Baker took their first steps towards Olympic qualification after winning the State Harbour Crossing in Auckland today.

Radford (Rotorua) beat off the challenge from a stellar field including leading Australian Trent Grimsey to win the 2.9km open water swim from Bayswater on the North Shore to the Viaduct.

The Queensland-based Baker had to fight off defending champion Charlotte Webby (New Plymouth) to claim the women's title among 1300 participants in the first round of the State New Zealand Ocean Swim Series, staged in excellent conditions.

The leading swimmers are using the series towards the State New Zealand Open Water championships in January with the top two men and women will move on to the final Olympic qualifying event in Portugal.

Radford, coached by Mark Regan at Swimming New Zealand's High Performance Centre, had to play catch-up early after veering off-course, as the 2009 world silver medallist Grimsey and talented pool swimmers Matt Stanley and Steven Kent pushed the pace at the front of the pack.

The Rotorua swimmer caught up as he and Grimsey pushed clear of the field before Radford unleashed a finishing burst to win in 35:15, with the Australian seven seconds back.

Kent held off Australian age champion Jared Poort for third place, with fifth fourth ahead of talented junior Stefan Talbot.

"It's a great feeling. It is one of the major swims in the country and so to make up for last year when I had a bad swim is a great feeling," said Radford.

"Considering how hard our training has been, to smash out a race like that is showing we are doing the right work and I can't wait for taper time when we are feeling refreshed.

"We had a normal week leading in to this with 10 sessions including yesterday and full gym. So to be able to swim like this off a week like that is great. I am feeling like nothing can stop me at the moment."

Baker was pushed to the limit in the women's race, after flying in from Queensland where she trains under legendary Australian coach Denis Cotterell.

The 21 year old and Webby locked into the men's pack including Stanley, Talbot, Kurt Bassett and top triathlete Graham O'Grady.

Baker showed her experience to turn on the after-burners to edge out Webby by just five seconds, winning in 38:30.

New Zealand's leading freestyler Lauren Boyle was third ahead of fellow North Shore clubmate Jessie Blundell.

"This win is important to me. The prizemoney is a big help for me to help towards paying my training fees which is a bonus," Baker said. "It's a good build-up towards Taupo which is important to us all as we fight for a spot in the Olympics so this is really important to us.

"I am still building up and not at my peak yet. Even at Taupo I won't be peaking because I need to aim to be at my very best in Portugal if I qualify.

"I am happy where I am at. I had some issues with my shoulder but everything seems to be back to normal and I am really pleased to get the win today. I love coming back to Auckland and to take part in this race is really special."

Among the 1300 participants was Whenuapai cancer survivor Mark Blakey, who finished just before the cut-off time of two hour; West Auckland's Jonathan Smith who has lost 60kg in his quest to complete the Harbour Crossing for the first time; Rotorua grandmother Pam Dickson, who is aiming to swim the English Channel in two years and members of the North Harbour waterpolo team who are raising money for Natalie Murphy, a 35 year old North Shore mother who is desperately fighting breast cancer.

Results:

Men: Kane Radford (Rotorua) 35:16, 1; Trent Grimsey (Australia) 35:23, 2; Steven Kent (North Shore) 36:12, 3; Jarrod Poort (Australia) 36:13, 4; Matthew Stanley (Matamata) 38:21, 5.

Women: Cara Baker (Howick Pakuranga) 38:30, 1; Charlotte Webby (New Plymouth) 38:35, 2; Lauren Boyle (North Shore) 40:25, 3; Jessie Blundell (North Shore) 41:11, 4; Aimee Moss (Auckland) 42:12, 5.

Full results: www.oceanswim.co.nz

Free to use images to follow.

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