

Leo's on another level

Swimmer announces his arrival in the water after smashing Olympian's long-held Bay records

SWIMMING



David Beck

Ask the best athletes in the world what the keys to success are and most answers will likely be along the lines of dedication, persistence and passion.

At just 10, Te Arawa Swimming's Leo English appears to have the lot by the bucketload.

In June, Leo made waves at the Taupō Xlr8 swim meet, winning all of his races and beating the Bay of Plenty record for 9-year-old boys in the 800m freestyle. His time of 11m 7.46s beat the record previously held by Olympian Kane Radford by 38 seconds – a record that stood for 19 years.

Last month, Leo was at it again.

At the Central North Island Swimming Championships in Rotorua, he beat two more of Radford's records, in the 10-year-old boys' 800m and 1500m freestyle. He finished the 800m in 10m 38.43s, comfortably beating Radford's time of 11m 0.37s.

He finished the 1500m in 20m 10.81s, beating Radford's time of 20m 37.59s.

Leo said he was "really happy" with what he had achieved.

"I think I prepared for it pretty well in the warm-up because [Te Arawa Swimming

head coach Henk Greupink] timed me for my split times, for what I was trying to get times for.

"I felt pretty prepared for the race. [Breaking records] feels really good because usually the announcer calls it out over the loud speaker."

Knowing what his split times needed to be and that he could achieve them, it was a case of staying calm and swimming consistently.

Leo started with beginner's swimming lessons when he was about 3 and has been a regular in the pool ever since.

"I started squad swimming when I was 7.

"Now I do three or four trainings a week, usually three in the afternoons and one in the morning.

"It's good fitness and it's really fun because you get to socialise with all the swimmers, you make heaps of friends doing it."

Leo was full of praise for his coach Greupink.

"Henk is amazing, he's always teaching us new drills and working on our technique every day. He's a really amazing coach.

"There are some days when I'm a bit tired but I swim because I love it.

"It's really fun to have a go and it's really nice on these hot summer days.

"It is hard on some days but it's always fun and it's a really good community around it, there's heaps of nice families that do it."

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Leo English

Greupink said Leo was the type of athlete who never needed to be pushed to work hard.

"I think it's amazing, the beautiful thing about Leo is it's all self-driven. I have never, ever, at that age aimed or targeted records.

"It started in June this year with the amazing 800m freestyle and someone next to me said 'that's the record'.

"He did the same last week and it's all driven by him.

"What I do like about Leo, and I wish a lot more of my swimmers were like that, is he is willing to take the challenge to take on longer distance swimming.

"Leo is a very ambitious boy, he thinks bigger and listens to what I tell him. He takes it all on board, I love it."

Greupink believes any child has the potential to be great in any sport if they apply themselves the way Leo does.

"Every kid has potential, every kid that wants to be a swimmer or a soccer player or a badminton player has potential.

"It's just having a goal, having a dream, having a passion then turning up and working with your coach or your mates – he's just one of those kids.

"Whatever you want to do, whatever your ambition as a kid – I tell them to write it on a piece of paper and put it under their pillow or up on the wall and just look at it from time to time."

Whatever the method, it appears Leo has all the tools to go far.

Te Arawa swimmer Leo English has broken several Bay of Plenty records.

Photo / Stephen Parker

