

Aussie grip slackens

Victoria 94

VICTORIA, Aug 22: English and Canadian swimmers loosened the Australian stranglehold on Commonwealth Games swimming on Sunday, with three record-breaking wins against the odds, reports Reuter.

England's backstroke prospect Adam Ruckwood broke his own British mark and the Games record in the 200 metres, grabbing the lead in the final length to win in two minutes 0.79 seconds.

"There's always a bit of needling between England, Canada and the Aussies and it's nine to get one over on the Aussies," said Ruckwood, 20 next month.

Canada's Kevin Draxinger, who retired from swimming after the race to start medical college on Monday, added silver to the bronze he gained at the last Games in Auckland.

He clocked 2:02.1, with Scott Miller of Australia, favourite to add to the gold he won in the 100 butterfly on Saturday, third in 2:02.43.

Stephen Clarke earned Canada's eagerly-awaited first swimming gold and avenged his narrow defeat by Miller on Saturday, when he touched ahead of Australia's Chris Fydlar in the 100 metres freestyle.

"I was up late last night thinking about what might have been," Clarke said, adding he went more steadily in the first 50 metres to avoid burning himself out as he had done in the butterfly.

Clarke said the whole team had breathed a sigh of relief after his win.

"We knew the Aussies had the dominant team," he said. "But now we've got one back we can perhaps just relax a bit," he added.

Clarke's time of 50.21 was a Canadian record. Fydlar, silver medalist in Auckland, clocked 50.15, with defending champion Andrew Ballidon of Australia third in 50.71.

The last gold to elude the Australians went to England in the women's 4x100m freestyle relay, where Karen Pickering, gold medalist on Friday in the individual event, made up nearly a second over the last 50 metres to beat the Australian favourites.

"I stretched out my stroke in the last 50. Over the last few strokes I could not wait to touch the wall," Pickering said.

The team, spearheaded by Susan Rolph and with Alex Bennett and Claire Huddart swimming the middle legs, finished in a Games record 3:46.23, breaking the British record too.

"It's good just to keep showing the Australians they are not unbeatable," a gleeful Pickering added.

English shuttlers reign

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VICTORIA, Aug 22: England maintained their unbeaten record in Commonwealth Games team badminton when they defeated Malaysia 3-2 in the final on Sunday, reports Reuter.

It was their fifth gold medal since the event was introduced in Edmonton in 1978.

As expected, the outcome depended on the mixed doubles after Malaysia won both men's events and England dominated the two women's matches.

The mixed could scarcely have been closer or more exciting.

England had a strong pairing in all-England champions Nick Ponting and Joanne Wright and, when they took the first game 15-4 against Kim Hui Tan and Zamaliah Sidek, it seemed England were already halfway to the top of the rostrum.

But Malaysia fought their way back into the match, taking a tense second game 18-16.

The decider was strewn with errors, with Ponting for a time unable to serve in court and Sidek also showing her nerves with a string of mistakes. But in the end the reliable and at times brilliant Tan also succumbed and was unable to prevent the inevitable.

Ponting summoned up final smash to clinch victory 18-16 and a relieved England team celebrated wildly.

The Malaysians, traditionally weak in the women's events, could feel pleased with their performance in taking the silver after returning home empty-handed from Auckland four years ago.

The final began with Rashid Sidek wasting little time in

But a tearful Brown said she had tensed up before the race and was bitterly disappointed. "I did not think my stroke was right at any time during the race," she said.

Riley and then Brown had already broken the Games record during the morning heats.

Riley said she would like to go even faster at the World Championships in Rome next month. "But I'm not making any world record predictions."

In the men's 100 metres butterfly, Scott Miller edged out Canada's Stephen Clarke, finishing in 54.39 against 54.45 for Clarke.

Miller's fine performance came just three weeks after a bout of chicken pox.

The Women's 200 freestyle proved a slow race by comparison. Favourite Susan O'Neill won in 2:00.86 to make up for a disappointing fifth place in Friday's 100 race.

Teammate Nicole Stevenson pulled out all the stops in the backstroke to win in 4:13.06.

"I lost count of the number of people asking me back home if I was going to get another five," the Olympic silver medalist said.

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