



**WATER WARRIOR:**  
Archie Vernon blew away the Open Ironman field during the swim leg to win in Anglesea.  
Picture: STEPHEN HARMAN



## ARCHIE LEAVES RIVALS IN HIS WAKE

ALEX OATES

HE'S a teenager in a man's domain.

But that hasn't stopped Bells Beach young gun Archie Vernon from upstaging his more credentialed competitors in the surf.

At just 17 years of age, Vernon is already making waves in the ultra-competitive ironman.

On Sunday, in just his fourth race in the open division, Vernon blitzed the field to claim victory in Anglesea.

It was his second-straight win at the carnival, having won on debut last year.

Vernon is building an impressive resume after graduating from the juniors, winning open ironman events at Ocean Grove and Point Leo.

"The last few months I've travelled around the country competing in the Nutri-Grain tryouts," Vernon said.

"I did one in Sydney and I had the lifesaving world championships in Adelaide at the end of November, so I've been doing a lot of ironman racing.

"I've been getting a feel for it because I'm only in the under-17s, and at the national level, we don't compete in the

three-leg ironman, we only do a swim and board so it's a new thing for me.

"I've done four in my lifetime (at open level), so I've been a bit lucky, really. I've had a few good races lately, but I'm still getting used to them."

Part of the Ocean 6 Series, which is the pathway to the Nutri-Grain Ironman, Vernon has his sights firmly set on making the progression to the professional ranks.

"That's definitely my goal," Vernon said.

"That's the pinnacle and where everyone wants to be. I'm having a crack at it and that's the aim in the coming years. Hopefully I can make it somehow, but right now it's just the experience of racing against open guys to get used to racing the best.

"It's a good test."

With only a handful of senior ironman races under his belt, Vernon understands it won't be easy to make the step up to the Nutri-Grain Series.

"It's tough to say (how close I am)," Vernon said.

"I'm a bit young, but in the next few years I'm hoping to get in there. But it's very hard, it's extremely competitive."

Vernon had no such difficulties in Anglesea on Sun-



Archie Vernon won the Open Ironman at the Lifesaving Victoria carnival at Anglesea.  
Picture: STEPHEN HARMAN

day, overcoming a slow start on the ski to blow his rivals away in the swim.

"I was fifth in the first leg and I had a really good swim leg and came out of the water

first," Vernon said.

"In the last leg I started to cramp and I was fatiguing a bit. Luckily I got away by myself, so I didn't have to run up the beach."

## Teen's fencing success

ANGELA BENSTED

GEELONG teenager Alex English relied on phone advice from his coach to snatch a bronze medal at a Junior World Cup fencing tournament in Tokyo on Saturday.

Australia's top-ranked junior men's epeeist paid his way and travelled alone to compete in Tokyo.

"It was challenging being without my teammates and not having their support for this competition, but I was able to stay confident and make it happen," the 18-year-old Highton resident said after accepting his medal.

Posting four victories and two losses in the qualifying pools, English was ranked 13th going into the direct elimination bouts.

He defeated Seiya Yuzuriha (Japan) 15-8 in the round of 32 then backed up with a 15-8 victory over 4th-ranked Hao-Wen Cheng (Chinese Taipei) in the round of 16.

Alex maintained his composure to defeat 5th-ranked Ryu Matsumoto (Japan) 15-12 in the quarter-finals, before bowing out 11-15 to Jun Wedisinhe (Japan), the ultimate winner, in his semi-final.

The Tokyo Junior World Cup is one of eight events on the international junior circuit, leading up to the 2019 Junior World Championships, to be held in Poland.

Australian fencing receives no dedicated high performance funding and athletes are required to fully fund their own competition and training expenses.

"Competing at a World Cup without a coach or manager means you have to be a lot more independent," English said.

"It adds a bit of unwanted stress having to find your own way around, especially in a city like Tokyo.

"I'm surprised I didn't get lost while catching trains."

"Luckily, I was able to call my coach in between bouts for advice."



Highton's Alex English

English's medal in Tokyo is the best result achieved by an Australian junior fencer in more than a decade.

It follows his seventh-place at the Junior World Cup in Greece in December and catapults him to 16th in the junior world rankings.

Australian Fencing Federation president and dual Olympian Evelyn Halls says English's recent results prove he can compete against the best junior fencers in the world.

"Australian fencing has been delivering strong results in men's foil and we're now starting to see that success flow through to the other weapons," Halls said.

"It's an exciting time as we head into the qualifying period for the 2020 Olympics."

English now flies to Germany to join the Australian senior men's epee team competing at the Heidenheim World Cup from Thursday.