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NSW's top senior and junior ironmen and ironwomen - (L-R) Jackson Borg, Sam Braun, Lizzie Welborn and Lily Finati. Pic: Damian Shaw

Rock pool swimming, private training sessions and long, lonely paddles on deserted waterways - this is how our top ironmen and ironwomen stayed fit over a winter lockdown by coronavirus.

While surf life savers north of the border trained without restrictions, it was a different story in Sydney.

And that's made our top contenders for the podium in the upcoming Nutri-Grain ironman series not just a little peeved, but also more determined than ever to show up their northern rivals.



Jackson Borg and Lizzie Welborn are NSW's biggest hopes of success in the series.

And now they have the stage to do it on with the opening three legs of the famous surf series to be held on home waters at North Bondi from January 14-16.

"It was mentally quite tough. It was long and a bit lonely and you had to find motivation at times," said Newport surf life saver Jackson Borg of training in the cold and alone for much of the winter.

"But it was character building and I'll use that."

While lockdown is over, another potential setback looms for NSW athletes with the first round of the rich Summer of Surf series starting on the Sunshine Coast in Queensland a week before border restrictions with NSW are due to be lifted.



Before the Queensland and ironwoman raced a Next Gen series will be held. North Bondi's Lily Finati and Sam Braun, right, will both be competing.

Unless this changes, NSW athletes will miss a vital lead-up to the Nutri-Grain while the Queenslanders will have the event in their own backyard.

"We are checking the news constantly and just hopping the date changes," said Welborn, also with the Newport surf life saving club but who started her ironman career with North Bondi club.

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Alongside the six rounds of ironman and ironwoman racing, Surf Life Saving Australia will run a super surf teams event with a Next Gen series to be raced in Queensland.

DATES, VENUES FOR 2021/22 NUTRI-GRAIN IRON SERIES

- Qualification Round – December 18 – Tugun, QLD
- Round 1-3 - Nutri-Grain Series – January 14-16, North Bondi, NSW
- Round 1-3 – Super Surf Teams League, – January 14-16, – North Bondi, NSW
- Round 4-6 – Nutri-Grain Series – February 4-6 – Kurrawa, QLD
- Round 1-3 – Nutri-Grain Next-Gen Series – February 4-6 – Kurrawa, QLD

NUTRI-GRAIN SERIES RETURNS ICONIC SYDNEY BEACH

It's world renown for its "beautiful people" but Bondi will be host to some of the toughest in the country when the iconic Nutri-Grain iron series returns to its sand for the first time in more than a decade.

Now the domain of models, actors, celebrities and billionaires, it is also one of the spiritual homes of surf life saving.



Bondi Beach is recognised around the world.

In January the best ironwomen and ironmen in Australian Surf Life Saving will hit Bondi for three days of racing to kick off the Nutri-Grain iron series.

The series will then head to Queensland in February for the final three rounds.

Bondi on January 14, 15 and 16 is where Sydney guns Lizzie Welborn and Jackson Borg are already dreaming of home town success.



Jackson Borg in action at the Nutri-Grain ironman trials. Pic: Harvpix

Unlike a host of NSW athletes who have headed north to Queensland to further their careers over the years, Welborn and Borg have stayed put in Sydney, training and racing for the now powerhouse Newport surf life saving club on Sydney's northern beaches.

The pair have resisted the lure of switching to a Queensland club to instead spearhead NSW's challenge in the next Nutri-Grain series.



Ali Day celebrates winning last season's Nutri-Grain series. Pic: Harvpix.

The final field for the upcoming event is yet to be determined with trials to be held in December.