

Day 3 of Swimming Coaches' Golden Clinic

Russell McKinnon, FINA Media Committee Member

The third and final day of the Swimming Coaches' Golden Clinic at the Hotel Intercontinental was again heavily attended.

The morning session produced some excellent talks from two diverse coaches in Canadian and Chinese swimming.

In the afternoon, Swimming Canada CEO Ahmed El-Awadi spoke to Safe Sport and its impact in the current litigious world.

The final presentation of the clinic was from Hungarian Olympic coach Balazs Virth and his programme that guided 800m freestyler Rio bronze medallist Kapas Boglarka.



John Atkinson — The Resurgence Of Canadian Swimming And Athlete Development

John, the high performance director of Swimming Canada, said “what is right is not always popular”.

He said his role since 2013 was to make change after a poor performance at London 2012.

Canada needed to change, from the competition schedule to athlete funding and new principles developed. Selection policies were reviewed, how to develop coaches, reviewing the high-performance centres and to become better planned than other nations.

John's role was to provide leadership; execute the plan; make things happen; move things forward and don't stop looking to progress; not to do our best, but to do what was necessary; and great support from the CEO and staff.

He spoke of what Canada perceives as high performance with a top-eight nation performance at Olympic Games and defining what a high-performance athlete was.

He outlined the competition schedule with the aim to swim fast at the April trials each year.

To keep up with the rest of the world, John talked of the need for 48 weeks of training and two weeks of national competition each year.

Peak performance windows

March-April and July-August were picked as the peak performance windows and 50m-pool qualification for national championships.

National team operations

- Expectations put into place (all or nothing)
- Staging camp requirements 50m/25m training space
- Hotel within 15 minutes of pool
- Easy travel from staging camp to competition venue
- Protocols for length of staging and final prep at location
- Three leads report to John — head coach, IST lead and team manager.

Overall team protocols

Improving trials performances to main events; progressing from heats to semifinals/finals. Focus on performing, not medals.

No-compromise support

This is where targeted investment principles in order to support training, competition and education opportunities that are directed towards athletes, coaches and programmes most capable of reaching the podium.

John said he was more in favour of smaller teams with better chances of success than larger teams.

4x200m freestyle at Rio 2016

John started the presentation with a video of the 4x200m final in Rio where Canada claimed its first medal in this event — bronze.

He explained that it was the poorest performer of the relay teams, but he decided to target this team for a medal in Rio.

With the bronze, six swimmers went home with a medal, three times the number of the two men's pool medals in 2012.

High performance centre

There were five when John arrived in Canada, but soon reduced to three, increasing the quality and reducing costs of travel, which is huge in Canada.

Selection policies

“Being the best in Canada will not get you on the national team. If you can progress from the heats, you will make the team,” he said.

Coach development

- Select coaches' group
- Targeted development
- Apprentice opportunities
- Key staff were named
- 60 coaches involved in development opportunities.

The plan to 2016

From 2013 until 2016 where the progression converted to 15 finals and six Olympic medals.

He explained how he visited every athlete for three days in their home environment to get athlete buy-in.

Better planned than any other nation

The plan has been set to 2020 and the plan for 2024 is about to be set with the plan to 2028 on the near agenda. By thinking that far ahead John can go to venues well ahead of other countries to get the best possible facilities tied up.

That success from Rio was followed up at the 2017 FINA Junior World Championships and 2018 Commonwealth Games.

By using statistics he could show funding agencies how well Canada ranked, making swimming the number one sport in the country, even though Canada is mainly a winter sports country.

The future

Canada needs to continue and action will be taken, especially with men's relays, to get Canada into the top group in the world.

XU Guoyi (CHN) — Adapting Coaching Style To Different Environments

As the highly successful coach of two-time London Olympic gold medallist Ye Shiwen, Guoyi spoke on the individual conditions of the athletes and the training of his elite athletes, in particular.

In 2009 at the National Games, Ye Shiwen came in ninth and then won the gold medal at the 2010 Asian Games and gold at 2012 London Olympics.

Designing of the training session was key for her 200m and 400 IM successes, considering it is a “physically demanding and painful” event.

He thought that going from 200m to 400m training, then she would become even better at 200m.

By introducing fresh and innovative training methods, this meant she became fast in the final 50m freestyle at the Olympic Games.

He explained what the regime was for the “harsh” training. The requirement for the 400m IM was her best plus 10 seconds and then decreasing rests between sets.

He talked of support for backstroker Xu Jiayu — efficiency in daily drills (8x50m with a requirement of 24 strokes in 28 seconds). He said Li Zhuhao was not as focused or as hard working as Xu.

Training should be arranged according to the pace and the intensity of the competition. Technique should be focused on the swimming training process; designing and repeating technique training closely around the technical characteristics of swimmers.

“Technique is paramount”

“Without good physical conditioning, everything is back to zero. Poor technique would be a heavy toll for our athletes every day. “Everybody says ‘technique, technique’. Firstly, reduce drag; secondly good body posture will also assist drag reduction. I think gripping is most important and pushing is just a natural posture with good gripping.”

He talked of XU at FINA World Swimming Championships (25) where he reaches six strokes.

“If every day we are having intensive training then we would be shortening their career. This is something I am pondering every day.” Li Zhuhao was unwilling to do the 200m butterfly, but now he is flourishing, Guoyi said. He still needs to fine tune his technique and “make him more solid as a swimmer”.

Xu is now a more concentrated person, he said. During Games, he feels more pressure and there is more fluctuations. He explained how he won the 100m butterfly at 2017 Budapest. He said the core objective was to reduce one stroke a lap to 26 from the 27 in Budapest, which would mean he could break the world record. The synergy between coach and athlete is most important.

“Without trust, we are both in pain, wasting our energy and time.”

“Trust is key between athletes and coaches. We have to act as good examples for our athletes. If there is no trust between you both, then athletes might retire if they find you are not good for them. “I do not discuss my training plan with them. They execute my plan.”

If you want to be a good athlete it takes quick learning skills and being a good athlete. You need be confident in yourself and trust in yourself to be the champion. The same, too, for coaches.”

He said Ye was back in training with him after two months of recovery and is back to a high level of performance.

He said that if swimmers come to him, he can tell who coached them because of the way they competed.

“The coaches themselves need to be charismatic.”

Talking about efficiency, he said that swimmers needed to be “flat, straight, sharp, tight, high, stable”.

Xu, he said, is the best at this in the world.

Altitude training

He doesn't find altitude training as hard or challenging. It can help to improve aerobic training, breathing pace and recovery.

He gets his team into altitude training after Olympic Games/World Championships and three weeks later for the National Games, where performances were enhanced. He said many coaches “did not have the guts” to do this.

He said altitude training was “not the end, but just the means” for better recovery.

Ahmed El-Awadi — What is Safe Sport?

Ahmed is the CEO of Swimming Canada and he provided an insightful presentation on safety in sport and swimming, in particular.

He spoke of the changes and said: “What was acceptable 15 years is not accepted now”.

1. Key learnings
2. Experiences
3. What keeps me up at night
4. To share what we have learned to help others.

Ahmed said that everyone had the right to be free of abuse, free of harassment and free of discrimination.

He gave some statistics from his organisation:

- 200 complaints per month
- 20-30 major complaints per year
- 5-10 criminal complaints per year.
- The criminal complaints are growing
- 6-10 major mental health issues.

He said not to look back even though they are dealing with things from the past.

“Safe Sport is not just predator control or capture.”

However, harassment and abuse is what is seen the most in the media, he said.

Some Safe Sport questions:

- Should coaches share rooms with athletes?
- What form of discipline, if appropriate, for athletes?
- What do you do if you see a coach flirting with a young athlete, or vice-versa?
- Should coaches drive athletes home after practice?
- Should coaches massage athletes?
- Should athletes change on the pool deck?
- Do you have a mental health programme?
- Do you have a retirement programme for athletes?

Swimming Canada Safe Sport Framework

- Education
- Prevention
- Response
- Policies and procedures

He said that his organisation wants to be amazing at education and prevention and not need to do response.

“The athletes today are more comfortable coming forward.”

This is a trend being seen in Canada.

He showed a graph of the cost of dealing with complaints from minor and major incidents.

He told of how in Canada, coaches are not allowed to date their athletes.

Change management

The implementation of Safe Sport is a huge cultural shift in an organisation or community.

Responsible Coaching Movement

Screening, ethics and respect training and open and observable environments. Give feedback on the pool deck with plenty of observers, “not in the back room, one on one”.

Lessons learned

- Police record check
- Self declaration

- What type of organisation are we?
- Royal Canadian Mounted Police definition
- Eight provinces are performing different checks.

“We are obliged to act and make a decision.”

Ahmed presented a flow chart of how major complaints are dealt with at Swimming Canada.

“It is very important you be courageous” when dealing with coaches with regard to Safe Sport.

He offered some tips when renting facilities, insurance policies, training staff and making them accountable and support coaches and staff who lack confidence.

He suggests checking out Responsible Coaching Movement — www.coach.ca [1]

- Look at the IOC safeguarding athletes from harassment and abuse in sport LOC Toolkit for IFs and NOCs.
- Make an inventory of what policies and procedures you have in place. Are you actually doing them?
- Do you need to look in the mirror?

“You don’t drown by falling in the water. You drown by staying there.”

Boglarka Virth (HUN) — Road to Tokyo 2020

Balazs, the former coach of breaststroke great Daniel Gyurta and a member of the coaching staff of Hungarian teams since 2004, presented his training schedule for 2016-17.

The detail of the training on a daily basis and where those camps were staged were displayed and the individual times of world champion and Olympic medallist Kaps Boglarka were used as examples.

He explained how he trained the athletes in the lead-up to 2016 Rio with European Championships and Hungarian Open, where the Olympic team was selected.

Boglarka won an unprecedented four gold medals at the European Championships and her times were better or near her best. Balazs charted a lactate tolerance series of 6x100m freestyle from February to July in 2016. He followed this with a graph of 8x100m freestyle endurance series on 1:20 and then his endurance series changing distances from 800m down to 100m with shorter rest times.

He homed in the last two weeks before London Europeans and Rio for Boglarka.

In Rio, she gained a bronze in the 800m, proving the success of the programme.

FINA website info

Participants were busy photographing his slides on the training programmes and everyone is reminded that FINA will have full slide presentations of the entire Golden Clinic posted on www.fina.org [2] on January 15, 2019.

Summary

The clinic was wrapped up by FINA Executive Director Cornel Marculescu, praising the number of

participants, saying FINA would be continuing with this event and the development programme.

He stressed the use of social media. He thanked everyone “for what you are doing for swimming and wish you good luck”.
