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Water Polo Conference, Day 2: Aaron Feltham, the athletes' voice in Budapest

FINA Communication Department

FINA Athletes Committee [1] Member Aaron Feltham of Canada was part of the athletes' panel on April 26 in Budapest,

Hungary, where the FINA World Water Polo Conference [2] is currently taking place.

Voicing the players' point of view in the various discussion together with other athletes invited, Feltham also sat at the round table on the second day (April 27) to review the rules with the rest of the group of experts taking part in the exercise.

FINA asked him about the number one thing to be changed in water polo.

“The discussions here in Budapest have been very good. Some great things have been brought up. I really like some rules changes that have been proposed but I still am a firm believer that marketing and the emotion of our sport is the number one thing.”

“We have the ability in this day and age to ask the general public's opinion and find out what they think, especially those who are not immediately in the water polo circle. We can find out so much information and what they are truly looking for and what would make it attractive to them. I think this is how we are going to grow exponentially. We don't even know the potential of our growth because we have not tried to exploit it yet. The marketing of the sport is

where I see the most potential.”

Australia's Aaron Younger agrees with Feltham regarding the marketing work that has to be done.

Video of Aaron Younger: “It’s the marketing that has to change” | FINA World Water Polo Conference



For Feltham, water polo has so much to offer.

“The uniqueness of water polo comes from the fact that it is a team sport in the water. We have extremely fit athletes and we are known to be some of the fittest athletes in the world. This comes hand in hand with great bodies and really good looking people.”

“I don’t see any shame in promoting that in an age where health and fitness is becoming more important especially in markets like the Americas. To promote that physical fitness on every single level and promote our athletes, our specimens of good and sexy bodies is a perfectly fine thing to market for us. This is the amazing product that we have now.”

Referring to the success of Team USA, Canada’s neighbours, Feltham is convinced that this has had a huge influence in the development of the sport.

“Any time you have success near you, people are following it. Then it is all about how you exploit it and show it off. You can have success and people get excited for a small period of time or you can try and ride the wave a little longer. It takes a clever marketing strategy to push and transform that success into a positive thing.”

“The women (USA) are doing really well. They are a great inspiration for our kids. We just need to reach the kids and tell them a story. We can tell that story and make it appealing, make a successful product to attract more people.”



As often as possible, Feltham confesses that he loves to be involved with local clubs and help at grassroots level.

“I do a little bit of contracting work for water polo clubs in Calgary (CAN) and I just love to help and do stuff. I sometime volunteer for a week or a month to help on specific projects and I really enjoy that, connecting with the athletes.”

Feltham advises kids to just try it!

“It is such a cool sport because you get to swim and splash around. You get to throw a ball and play with that which is fun too. You are in a team atmosphere so you have a bunch of new friends to be around. Those three things come with amazing skills once you learn them. You just have to try it!”

He continued by mentioning various interesting rituals water polo players do that are still unknown from the wider public.

“The personality of the people in water polo are incredible. At big events, you can grab any athlete and ask them about their story. For example, some players throw their cap in the water before they jump in. We can ask them why do they do that. Some players like to do five jumps, some goalies like to kiss the cross-bar, we can ask them when that ritual started.”

“All of these things create a closer connection between the players and the fans and future fans. It would also bring the players closer to FINA and they would feel like we care about what they do.”

Feltham concluded the interview by saying:

“One of the great things with this Conference so far is that we have seen a lot of timelines for the different projects that are proposed, like Reform 21. If we see that Reform 21 take the first steps that is going to be huge.”

“We know that in order to make progress we need an action plan. Myself and the Athletes Committee would really love to have an active role and be involved in all of this. It is great to have been invited to come here and give our vision. To be involved in the conversations and go to the Reform 21 brainstorming sessions would be even better. We have an amazing Commission that is very talented not just as athletes and I would love that we can give our input on how to help the events and make them more fun. The athletes point of view is huge.”
