

Irish Swim Coaching Conference – Dublin

This conference was a great replacement for the BSCA conference that was cancelled earlier this year. The speakers included Jan Olbrecht, the world's leader in physiological testing and training along with Jon Rudd, the NPD of Irish Swimming. Other speakers included Patrick Miley, Ben Higson and John Watson but for me, the first two were worth the trip alone.

Jan was, as always, passionate about the need for testing and monitoring and alluded to all the benefits that it can bring to your programme. It can be a heavy subject and can easily overwhelm a swimming coach with science but the great thing is that Jan seems to be very open on the subject and will take the time afterwards to explain again, in layman's terms, how this can benefit any programme, not just elite performance. I would advise any who wanted to find out more to track down a copy of Jan's book "The science of winning" which will allow you to keep dipping in and finding new information even after years of reading. Again it's a heavy read but if you're interested in the subject then it's an absolute must.

The other great speaker was Jon Rudd. John is a great people person and an amazing coach. He has had massive success with some world class swimmers from a programme that started from almost nothing. Listening to Jon talk with passion about how he started and the process that he went through to become one of the best swimming clubs in the country was mesmerising. I found myself energised and ready to get back on a pool deck. John also did some practical work at the pool relating to starts along with the two coaches that he has working alongside him in Ireland but I thought Jon's presentation about club coaching was excellent. It asked and answered almost every question surrounding coaching in a club situation and attempted to relate all the problems that he'd had at Plymouth to every coach in the room. Another great opportunity to learn from one of the world's leading coaches.

Patrick Miley spoke in detail about his experience with Hannah and some of the processes he used to try and make her the best swimmer she could be and he was also very candid about his feelings when she finished fourth in this year's Commonwealth Games. It was interesting to hear his perspective so soon after the competition and from such a personal viewpoint. He also spoke in depth about the use of stroke rates but I must confess that this was very technical and left more than one coach a little baffled. I think viewing the presentation after would be much more illuminating. Ben Higson, the Head Coach of Ireland and Dublin performance centre gave a demonstration on breaststroke drills and progression while John Watson gave some great pointers on strength and conditioning in relating to starts, turns and general technique.

I thought it was an excellent conference and certainly one that I would attend again. Great speakers, great location and some great ideas discussed.

Club visit – Edinburgh University Swim Team

I was given an opportunity to stay overnight and visit the Edinburgh University Swim Team after the recent British Championships held in combination with the Edinburgh International Open Meet. Obviously this did not go to plan as the heavy snow and shocking weather meant that I could only spend a couple of hours with the coaches before having to drive home in the snow. What I found was an amazing group of coaches including Chris Jones and Shannon Rollason (Shannon was leaving at the end of the month so it was a great opportunity to talk with him but not for as long as I'd hoped). The programme at Edinburgh was far bigger than I had imagined and very well funded. They had four lanes in the 50m pool all the time and access to another six lane 25m pool down the road at the student fitness centre. This was also where their gym facilities were located (this gym was used by the All Blacks when they toured!). They had a very individual approach to coaching the swimmers who seemed to hang on every word. Chris Jones, who is the head coach, has also been at the university for a while as he swam there under Tim Jones and then continued his career in the city. I didn't get as much time as I would like at the pool after the championships but I would certainly go again and spend a bit more time on the deck with the coaches as I thought they were excellent in both their knowledge and their application. If you get a chance to visit or come across the coaches at an open meet then go and say hello as they have a lot of experience and wisdom regarding older athletes.