

World Class Development Day – 2018 Website Summary Report

On 11th April 2018, during the school Easter Holidays, Swim England East Region hosted an event unlike anything they've done before. A new role was created in 2017 by the region, with the view of driving performance results up over the coming years. It's well known that the end results in terms of performance and the sustainability of repeated successes is down to a long journey, often over many years, that brings together a large group of stakeholders and supports them in their development - so where to start? The concept of having to run separate educational events for athletes, coaches and parents on what is already a very busy calendar was going to be a challenge, but not an insurmountable one. This was overcome swiftly by offering a three-stranded event that gave coaches, parents and athletes an opportunity to access an event at the same time, on the same site. We introduced Swim England's *World Class Development Day* (WCDD).

This article zones in specifically on information delivered to the athletes, centred around planning at competitions. The talks offered practical information that was both realistic and useable. The aim was to stimulate the young attendees (all under 18) to think about the 'controllable' elements that both before and during the meets can be prepared for, rehearsed, and implemented to ensure the variables at a meet are kept to a minimum. Some stimulating questions across the day presented to our athletes:

- When should I eat at meet?
- What should I eat and drink between heats and finals?
- What is my pre and post pool process in terms of refuel, recovery and reviewing?
- How early does the preparation start for a meet?
- Is the only goal for every race to win medals?
- How do I manage multiple races?
- What are the communication channels between me and my coach and me and my parents?

Throughout the day, we wanted to encourage the athletes to engage with the answers to these questions, apply them to their own swimming, and take these forwards into their meets going forwards. So, where does it all start? The start of the season offers a nice clear point from which to plan, but do swimmers think one meet ahead? One cycle ahead? A whole quad cycle ahead? Whilst very few athletes will make it to an Olympic final, the concept of what we were trying to achieve was applicable to every single athlete. No matter what level a swimmer attains, that pinnacle moment in their swimming journey will be the result of many years of highs, lows, successes, failures, wins and losses. And as such, if the goal really is to win an Olympic medal in eight years-time, there will be many processes, lily pad hopping and learning opportunities that will precede it.

So firstly, establish a season long goal. Break this down using the SMART principle (Specific, measurable, achievable, realistic, time-bound) into medium, and then short term goals. These goals will require focussed working on various areas, be this technical swimming skill development or being aware of the type of fuels required for the body to function well across a six day meet. For example, "my goal is to win a medal in the 100 and 200 freestyle at British Summer Nationals". For those events we can see the fastest qualifier (averaged over three years) is 2.05.8 and 58.9 (this data is available on British Swimming's *off the blocks*, which every British swimmer, coach and parent should sign up to!). Lets break this down further with the coach and ascertain the splits required to achieve those times, the number of strokes required per length,

distance off the walls, and watch some videos of what 'world class' women's 100 and 200 freestyle looks like.

At British Summer Nationals there are heats and finals in those events, so we are looking at four races (if we are going to final for a chance at a medal) – perhaps relays too if the club has relay teams in the 4x100 and 4x200 (again heats and finals). Suddenly a goal of medalling in two races could end up being 6-8 races (all of which need to be at your best) during a relatively short time frame. At an Olympics, the added bonus of semi-finals will make a simple two-event programme become six races! How can this be rehearsed? Disregarding times and treating in some in-season meets and opportunities to rehearse these lily pad opportunities; 6-8 events over weekend targeting stroke counts, balancing of races (front end speed, back end speed, negative splits etc), fuelling for multiple events, racing warm ups and swim downs, mental rehearsals, pre-and-post pool exercises, racing tactics etc. Immediately then, every single meet has a purpose. Merely approaching every meet as a 'qualifying opportunity' for counties, regionals and nationals (during the window) is likely to work against achieving the long-term goal. However treating every meet as opportunity to learn and develop some of those vital elements, that at the main meet of the year have to be executed well, will increase the likelihood of success.

The example we gave to the swimmers, in terms of event planning was the East Regionals (as the WCDD took place in the Easter holidays and was likely the next meet of importance for the attendees). A three-day event with heats and finals, similar to nationals with them being in the evening. We asked them to break down their meet programme (including potential finals and relay events), to include:

- Travel to the event and to and from the hotel/pool.
- Bed time / alarm time to ensure 8.5hrs minimum sleep.
- Pre and post pool routines on land.
- Warm up plan (to fit into 25 minutes warm up pool time available)
- Swim down (to fit into 10 minute post session pool time available) and mid-session post pool recovery routine.
- Meal planning across the weekend as well as snacks – Luke Buxton from Absolute Sports Nutrition gave two great presentations on the nutritional requirements of swimmers to both athletes and parents.
- Packing the bags before, or at least prepping racing kit, a day or two before the event.
- Agreed communication procedure for post-race technical feedback and ensuring this is coach only and not coming from parents (their role fulfilling the transport, accommodation, food and drink preparation and emotional support as required) – this keeps it simple and clear for the swimmer.

The athlete could then plan their entire meet out, print a copy and have this on them at all times, even adding actual times as session times are published the week prior, thus avoiding the 'ad-hoc' method where too many things are left to chance. This approach, whilst not water tight, prepares the athlete by minimising the things that can clutter an athletes mind and mean they are not focussing on the process goals for their racing that ultimately will dictate their performance quality. It is vital to recognise though that not everything can be planned and controlled, and keeping the focus off these 'un-controllable' elements is something that minimises stress and energy wastage for the athlete. Examples include:

- What lane a swimmer is in.
- Another swimmers race tactic.
- Delays due to technical problems.
- Negative results of previous races/meets (past is past).

Please note, this is not a recipe to create an Olympic champion, nor is it the answer to all the issues swimmers face when approaching and during a competition. It does however articulate some of the things an athlete can do (regardless of their performance level) to improve their organisational skills at a meet, increase the likelihood of achieving their goals, and to make *every* meet an opportunity to move forwards in one or many areas. Most of this information is not new, or revolutionary, but Swim England East Region created a new role in their staffing team to ensure more athletes, parents, clubs and coaches were supported, and allow athletes irrespective of their ranking or medal winning potential to have more tools at their disposal to maximise their own potential and become the best they can be. If you wish to contact the Swim England East Region Swimming Talent Officer, please contact Kevin Pickard via kevin.pickard@swimming.org.