

On Wednesday 29<sup>th</sup> of May, around 100 coaches, students and university academics converged on Anglia Ruskin University in Cambridge for the biggest coaching development event the region has ever hosted. Due to the size of the rooms being used, the event was open to coaches outside of the region and we had coaches attending from Buckinghamshire, Surrey and London. The events aim was to allow coaches to network, stimulate some different thinking and hear from a number of different speakers who would hopefully inspire some great learning. *Comments hoping to stimulate further thoughts and discussions are from the regional swimming talent officer and are in italic.*

For the first hour of the day coaches made the most of the nice weather, fuelled up on coffee and enjoyed being able to talk without monitoring a warm up, risk missing a race or juggle the 1001 other things that fill a coaches day. They then moved into the main room for a brief introduction from the East Region's Swimming Talent Officer. He then handed over to Swim England's Director of Development, George Wood, who took the first talk of the day. George spoke passionately about where the sport is at in England and Britain, setting the picture for both Swim England, Sport England and Government strategy for the coming quad. Looking at the scale of learn to swim and what the primary objective for the sport is – get people swimming. George introduced Sport England's newly launched talent plan and picked out some key areas that would no doubt impact on swimming in the years ahead. With the Commonwealth Games returning to England for the first time since 2002, Birmingham 2022 will certainly be high on the agenda for all sports and a nation looking to deliver a post-brexite show to world. It was great to get the day underway with some insights in the bigger picture context we all work in, and how that landscape is likely to evolve over the next 5-10 years.



Next up on the line-up was **Paul Greaves (@paulgreaves01)**. Coming from outside the sport allowed our coaches to gain some great insights and see some of challenges that other coaches around the country face and how they overcome these. Paul is a trampolining coach, but also a lecturer in sport at Sheffield Hallam University. He spoke about his journey through quite a challenging club environment and how everything wasn't laid on for him in terms of resources, something our club coaches certainly could relate to. Driving a very small programme forwards from very basic facilities came about through that intense passion, belief and aspiration Paul possessed to bring about positive changes in his environment but very much in a coach led way. He spoke at length about the differences between ego-based environments, versus task-based ones. There is a whole plethora of research that indicates that a task orientated athlete working with a task orientated coach and environment is one that brings about the desired outcome. *This related nicely to the whole 'process driven' approach that has been spreading through the swimming world for a few years but is still yet to full take hold to level we would perhaps like.*

Paul spoke about the lack of facilities he worked in throughout his formative years and how he felt this actually benefited him in the long term, with the struggles and challenges making him stronger as a person but also made him be more creative and stronger as a coach in the way he looked for ways to find performance. Paul rounded off his talk looking at his time with his most successful athlete, Bryony Page – Olympic Silver Medallist at Rio 2016. Working with her along her meandering journey and reaching that moment in Rio (medal aside), where she delivered her best performance on the day that she possibly could. *You could certainly see the level of pride in a relatively young coach,*

*who followed his dreams all the way to the top – a very inspiring story.* Some great anecdotes around the crowdfunding campaign for him to attend the games, his experiences whilst he was out there and his memories around being interviewed by Clare Balding live on the BBC. It was great to welcome Paul to our event and we will look to do some reciprocal visits as his training centre is nicely positioned a short drive away from Ponds Forge in Sheffield.



After a short break we welcomed **Jon Rudd (@coachjonrudd)**, who is the Performance Director for Swim Ireland. He joined us for two talks, which centred around building a performance environment in a club setting and technical work done with Olympic Champion Ruta Meilutyte and World Champion Ben Proud, both of whom were at Jon's former club as teenagers. Jon took us on a journey from the humble beginnings of a programme in Plymouth to the powerhouse that was in place 27 years later when he moved into his role with Swim Ireland. He highlighted some of the differences between clubs that want to get better and clubs that just want to exist – herein lies a big problem for ambitious swimmers in the clubs that just 'tick over' and don't drive things forwards. He spoke in depth about the challenges working with people's minds and not becoming overly focused on the physiology of their body. If a coach can convince the athletes to make the right choice in their heads, the body will deliver the desired outcome. So the question was posed; how can you create that environment

that is performance focussed and athletes make the right choices? Bricks and mortar are only the beginning i.e. a world class facility does not equal quality environment and coaching. "The environment is not what you're in, it's what you make of what you're in. And if what you're in is amazing you tend to get found out pretty quickly if you're not doing a great job with it" – *a great insight here, outlining the fact that culture and coaching comes first and facility the last piece of the puzzle, not the first.*

Be overt as a coach in your ambition and ensure that the club in its entirety buy into that. Therefore from the word go anyone joining the club or who is part of the club knows what the club's purpose is. Every coach is on board with that vision and you are all singing from the same hymn sheet. Looking at the club with a frank honesty of where are we now, what are our strengths and what are our limitations? "Limitations are not excuses, they are temporary barriers". Jon asked coaches to question within their own clubs what is the current culture? Does that culture align to your ambitions for the programme? How can you develop that and ensure it is entrenched in all corners of the club. Objective decision making is vital to ensure you can cover your backside with evidence. Is there buy in from coaches, athletes, families and committee? Building in quarterly (or more regularly) parents meetings to ensure strong lines of communication and issues are not left to fester. Moving on Jon spoke about the need, regardless of programme size, to integrate differentiation in your programme. Does the 1500m freestyler 18 year old do the same as the age group 100 breaststroker? Why? If you have more than one lane you have the capacity to differentiate. It's more work, but that's the coach's choice. That's not to say everyone does different stuff, but across a season how much 'value added' have you offered in the individual. Certainly some drills, skills and sets are generic and applicable to everyone, but conversely there are some parts of a training programme that are specific for a specific group, be that sprinters, distance swimmers, medley swimmers, age groupers, seniors, etc. So coaches need to ask themselves, does that individual athlete feel and believe across the season that I have added value?



Jon looked at the model of swimming in Ireland and club swimming in England with the national centres and in effect said it's a swimmers right and a coaches responsibility to be in a programme that's meets the swimmers needs and ambitions. So coaches have a choice, either create an environment where you can cater for the long term development of your athletes, or accept and encourage them that at the appropriate time they need to move on for their own development – *parking the ego situation of 'losing swimmers', something which in British club swimming means too many swimmers are 'held back' because of the coaches interests and not because of meeting the needs of the swimmer.*

Jon zoned in on what he called 'the big threes'. These are your macro game changers and are three things that can be focussed on a quarterly, annually or even quadrennial targets basis (as the programme evolves the tweaks are more minor so can be done over shorter periods). The key groups that determine the clubs success and work in these targets are; coaches, athletes, parents/families, club committee and partners/providers. Give them three things that if they get right, and every other group gets right, collectively will create wholesale change in the programme. Expanding on this Jon spoke about ensuring there were levels of degree and certainty – everyone likes to know what's going and ensuring there is a plan as it lowers stress levels for everyone. Good business planning is essentially in a club becoming successful so there is a real need to plan a swim club like a business. Monthly fees, 12 month commitments from swimmers, administration fees for late/non-payments. It helps the club function more effectively as they can forecast and plan for growth. Having training standards, attendance expectations, behavioural expectations, illness and post meet protocols, everything being communicated in advance so everyone knows where there are – all these things contribute to a performance environment.

Top 100 Times All Events	% of Top 100 Swimmers Who Become Top 100 at Age 17/18 Years	
Age Group	Female	Male
10 & Under	7.4%	5.8%
11/12 Years	10.4%	19.2%
13/14 Years	24.0%	35.0%
15/16 Years	47.5%	52.3%

One standout slide is shown here and was simply titled 'educating patience'. If there was one piece of data that every coach could use to explain why it is important for patience when athletes (and parents) who aiming for senior success, it is this picture. The numbers sort of speak for themselves, but in short, 17/18 success in the vast majority of cases is not based on age group ranking – *a wonderful take away for our coaches to share that although being from the American swimming system, shows the underlying principle for patience.*

Jon rounded of his first talk with a few gems with the coaches:

- Patience is everything.
- Nothing will land in your lap.
- You have no entitlement. Be ready to move if your ambition doesn't match that of your environment.
- Be ready for knockbacks. And then dust yourself off & go again.
- Stand by your values as a coach – and as a human being.
- As with chess, always be at least one move ahead.
- Find mentors you objectively value and subjectively trust.
- Don't expect commitment without displaying it yourself.







Lunch was another great chance for the coaches to share ideas and spend some time talking to our event sponsor, Bedfordshire Hot Tubs (a Jacuzzi® dealership). The team from BHT were on site for the day sharing their project of working with clubs to access endless pool space with their coaches for skills analysis, for FREE! Contact our regional talent officer if you would like more information on this project – [kevin.pickard@swimming.org](mailto:kevin.pickard@swimming.org). This is another exciting development to come out of the regions innovative **Project 2028**. To find out more about this huge collaborative piece of work follow it's dedicated Twitter, Instagram and Facebook pages (search 'Project 2028')

**Anthony Bennett (@IAmAntBennett)** - Bringing us into the afternoon was a wonderfully moving motivational talk on teamwork - Anthony was a complete unknown to most of the room, other than what they had read in the conference flyer. Anthony's story was from the viewpoint of a young man who had gone from being a normal teenage boy on a school trip to laying in a hospital, given roughly a 10% chance of survival. He rallied and following being resuscitated multiple times, he went on to inspire so many others to be brave, fight the odds and go on to do amazing things. His message about taking opportunities because amazing things could happen and respecting and appreciating every single member of the team, were poignant take away thoughts for our coaches.



Rounding off our day was **Jon Rudd** with his second talk, zoning in on technical work done with Olympic Champion Ruta Meilutyte and World Champion Ben Proud, both of whom were at Jon's former club as teenagers. There were many insights into either errors or successes Jon has learned on his journey and he was happy to share these with us. Many of our coaches work with teenage athletes and this talk was hugely insightful. "Coaching and training are not the same thing" – *a great opening line to get everyone in the room on point*. Training is the easy bit, whereas coaching is what sets you apart as the professional. Can every single swimmer leave that club session with 20 or 30 swimmers in the pool and that individual feels like they've had some feedback or something personal to them, which doesn't have to be a swimming specific piece of feedback – how was the exam yesterday? Is your nan well again? Did your dog come back from the vets okay? Something that means the session was a mindless, generic 6k set that a parrot could have delivered. Jon's belief that skill and technique is king really shone through on this presentation – and he put it to the coaches, you will reach a level with an athlete where everyone is 'fit' and is doing more or less all the physical training they should be doing, so what's going to set your athlete apart and allow them to rise above the rest – skill and technique! – *Interestingly here for our coaches working with age group swimmers, is that neurological pathway development slows as humans move through their teens, thus is you want to make significant skills changes, the earlier the better. In Jon's words "ignore skill and technique at your peril". I can openly say I see swimmers at county, regional and national level who are coached first and foremost to be fast and everything else takes a back seat. Long term you are limiting an athlete's progression.*

An interesting stat from the 2009 worlds (the era of shiny suits), that every swimmer who won gold didn't turn first – so Jon put it to the group that the swimmer who does the least amount of work going out (whilst hitting a strong split), is likely to be the favourite coming back. How do you teach easy fast swimming? Great skills, great technique and great tactical awareness. It is a whole lot more than just a stopwatch, a clipboard and off we go. The diversity in the approach to athletes now is more important than ever, and very often involves a range of 'expert guidance' (nutrition, psychology, doctor, biomechanist, physiotherapist, lifestyle support). This is what networking with other sports, educational establishments and attending a range of coach education events can offer you in your programmes. Do coaches educate the 7/8<sup>ths</sup> of the week where swimmers are not with the coach? Do we talk to the school? Do we talk to the other sports? Do we work with the parents from the word go? Because if you don't, on race day when it doesn't go well, all eyes are on the coach, so build that network into your programme and more than likely you'll be a whole lot more successful. Jon picked up some key learnings from his career that he openly credited to others:

- Fly kick is the 5<sup>th</sup> stroke. At a world level there's no getting away from it and it needs to be taught properly early.
- Counting volume only makes you obsessed with volume.
- Short course and long course both bring something to the table. Embrace both!
- Resting is just as important as training. One helps you maximise the effects of the other.
- Treat training as training units. Land/pool all adds up. Ensure it is progressive and meets the needs of the individual.
- Holistically educate both parents and athletes (for AG/youth athletes, parents control so much).
- You are never ready to coach an Olympic champion and you may not even know you have one. Just deal with it and take the opportunity when you have it (as long as you have the resources).
- Pre written plans for the masses produces mass mediocrity.
- Volume is a measure but not the only measure – at school, how many 'A grades' are awarded for submitting the most pages?
- Consideration of biological vs chronological age, as well as male and female differences in terms of training methods.
- Consider how long as that swimmer been swimming? Late starter or early starter?
- Consider key education periods when planning.

Jon challenged coaches to look at their labelling of a warm up. Does a short dip in a cold pool have the desired effect? Are we getting the physiological benefits from a 'warm up' that we think we are? Jon looked at breaking down the warm up process into phases including 'water familiarisation', a.k.a. what 99% of us call the warm up. For nationals in reality that's the swimmer getting used to the 50m pool, their feel of the water and taking in the whole 'arena' they are in. *Of note here to coaches, here is a website link that includes some of the areas in Jon's 'phases' approach - <https://www.swimming.org/sport/land-warm-up-swimmers/>.* Jon spoke about the process of 'adding' things through the rounds – *For our club coaches, a huge thing here for both regionals and nationals is that you can work with swimmers to 'add' something in the finals around the whole warm up process. Obviously this is a coaching decision based on how confident both the coach and the athlete are of making the final.* Jon spoke about the 'first 15m' in 50m freestyle and how it is vital to get that first 5 seconds right. It's a hugely complex chain of events from getting on the block to the 15m mark, all of which have to be executed perfectly.

Something really interesting that Jon put forwards to coaches is that they must not treat each cycle in complete isolation. Each cycle has a cumulative effect based on the blocks of work leading up to this. So block two starting in January is not ground zero, more so a starting point which is elevated from that of September. Of note for those with sprinters out there, with Ben Proud all of his work was done polarised so it was done either really fast or really slow. Jon talked about the stages you go through in terms of information transfer with an athlete. As a junior (early teens)

swimmers do pretty much exactly as they are told. Then they become self-aware and rarely want to listen to their coach or their parents. During that critical phase, if you don't change and adapt as a coach, either you lose the swimmer or the sport loses the swimmer – that is on you as a coach. If you get past that stage, the swimmers become young adults, they grow to respect their coaches input and it becomes more of a collaborative process – at this point the swimmer probably knows their body pretty well and (as long as they're being honest) can offer insight and guidance to a whole new level. Learn how to actually listen before deciding what course of action to take. Don't make major changes in a final block or season leading up to a major event. Utilise failure as an education process on how not to fail again – failure is a GOOD thing. At major end of season meets, stay calm. The athletes can read you in the same way you can read them so be the person they need in that situation and stay calm. Stay focussed on process and do not mention outcome. Expect the unexpected at a major event – Jon gave the example of the women's 50m freestyle in Rio being delays as the bus driver took all the swimmers to the wrong place. He used the thought process diagram titled 'red head / blue head'. Under pressure do you get a process rehearsed response or an emotional response? Jon rounded off his talk with some videos of Ben Proud doing some drills at a slow pace, with absolute attention to perfection. It was a great way to round off the day, seeing the absolute basics done with the upmost quality, something all our coaches could take back and apply to their home programmes.

A huge thank you to Anglia Ruskin University for hosting the event and a big thank you to the Swim England East Region board for their continued support of coach development events. Over the last two years, the number of East Region clubs making British Summer Nationals has increased by 38%. Interestingly there has been a significant increase in the number of clubs and coaches attending these types of coach education events – perhaps the two are linked?

If you have any questions regarding any of the speakers above or would like to know more about coach education opportunities in the region, please contact the regional talent officer via [kevin.pickard@swimming.org](mailto:kevin.pickard@swimming.org) or head to our website. Stay up to date by joining the **East Region Swimming Coaches Network** on Facebook and Twitter and finally a date for your diary:

On **Wednesday 4<sup>th</sup> March 2020**, Swim England East Region will be running a full day conference for the first time at a professional conference centre working closely with Swim England to pool resources. The day will cost somewhere between £60 and £70 (depending on speaker costs) and will include onsite parking, breakfast on arrival, a hot buffet lunch, mid-morning and mid-afternoon refreshments breaks and as much tea, coffee, juice and water as you can consume.....and of course some absolutely world class speakers, from both inside and outside the world of swimming. We cannot recommend enough that coaches request the budget from their committees for this event, as it will be without a doubt the best coaching education event in the region that has ever taken place. Full details will be published in the autumn, but for now – **SAVE THE DATE!**

