

SwimBC Coach Development Opportunity - 2017 ASCA World Clinic

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Mark McGrann – Senior Assistant Head Coach, Chena Swim Club

One of SwimBC's strategic objectives is to enhance and up-skill the coaching community in British Columbia. The goal is to empower coaches to consistently develop athletes to join Canada's National Teams and to achieve success in the international arena.

In 2017, I was granted the opportunity to attend the 2017 American Swim Coaches Association World Clinic in Washington DC as an adjunct to Swimming Canada's Select Coaches Group. This exciting initiative provided me with the chance to attend the ASCA World Clinic and participate in Swimming Canada's post conference seminars to review and discuss concepts, viewpoints, training models and other ideas that emerged. The prospect of being able to listen, learn and develop from some of the world's elite coaches and participate in coaching development workshops helped me define my coaching philosophy and programming and also enhanced the process of self-evaluation, discovery, and creativity for specific aspects of my current and future coaching positions.

The conference's comprehensive diversity in swimming related discussions complemented by the range of leading speakers, presenters and swim specific workshops was a very unique environment to experience. Outside of the established and successful international coach presentations, the annual event acts as a platform for several facets of World and American swimming i.e. CSCAA/College Track, Business Track, Senior Track, Age Group Track and High School/NISCA Track.

With a host of options available to me at the conference, I decided to divide my time predominantly by attending the major guest speakers talks and, where the schedule allowed, I participated in age-group, high school and business seminars to learn from accomplished professionals about areas of competitive swimming and program management that I've had limited exposure to at previous career development events. Three of the presenting coaches that I found most insightful, relevant and thought provoking, in-line with my existing program and career ambitions were; Ray Looze, Dave Durden and Kevin Kinel.

Ray Looze - Breaststroke Training & Technique

Ray Looze was the first 'Main Topic' presenter on day one of the conference. Ray is Head Swimming Coach at Indiana University, 2016 USA Olympic Assistant Coach, and 2018 USA Pan Pac Head Coach. He is the coach of Lilly King - 2016 100m breaststroke Olympic champion and current 50m & 100m breaststroke World Record holder.

Ray's observation of common elements of world class breaststrokers were:

- Low stroke count
- Fast recovery of ankles and arms

- Narrow kick
- Wide pull, “with the exception of Adam Peaty”
- Limited exposure of body when underwater/effective body line when underwater

For the purposes of his presentation and as a means of identifying core elements Ray ‘broke down’ breaststroke into several components and highlighted relevant focus points:

Pull/Arms

- Recovery, keep arms on horizontal line & execute the movement as fast as possible for reduced drag
- Avoid dipping hands on front

Kick

- Knee position no more than 6 inches apart (if physically possible)
- Ankles outside knee line
- Fast heels, close quickly and squeeze and hold line

Timing

- Fast hips = fast hands
- Ride the line, as long as it is fast
- Breathe as hands ‘come around the corner’ & look forward not down
- Keep hands and feet shallow to avoid drag

Underwater Pullout

- Downward trajectory and head below hips
- When practicing the execution, make all repetitions explosive i.e. no ‘easy ones’

Pullout Recovery

- Shrug shoulders
- Flex body when shoulders are rolled
- Keep chin down
- Recover arms close to body & do it fast!

Flip Turn versus Open Turn

An interesting method that Ray spoke about referred to his athletes practicing predominately flip turns when training breaststroke, only working on traditional breaststroke open turns when engaged in race specific speed and pace elements of his program. His justification for using this practice on a consistent basis was to ensure that his athletes generated more speed from the walls in comparison to the speed that can be produced from a regular breaststroke turn. The athletes are directed to perform a freestyle pull immediately before they turn which equates to one single

breaststroke pull for stroke count purposes. When working on actual breaststroke turns Ray's athletes perform 'flat wall' skills only i.e. using walls without ledges or with the aid of timing pads.

Ray's Top 5 Breaststroke Drill Choices...

- Head Up breaststroke with hybrid kick - fast flutter kick, switching to dolphin kick when arms in recovery phase
- Breaststroke kick on back
- 1 Up - 1 Down Drill; effective for when timing is momentarily lost
- 2 Kick - 1 Stroke; press chest to hold body line
- 4 Pulls - 1 Stroke; faster action/explosive movement plus one single dolphin kick placed on each recovery movement

Specific Pullout Drills...

- Double & Triple pullouts - developing breath control for back end of races
- Pullouts with Paddles - helps athletes locate their 'power corridor'
- Pullout with Fins - teaches timing of fly kick/body dolphin
- Inverted Pullout - to refine the execution of fly kick/body dolphin
- Resisted Pullouts - using socks, suits etc

Coach Ray's Training Methods & Objectives:

- Breaststroke athletes of his program spend 90% of their volume on appropriate drills and resistance activities with 10% on swim only elements
- Ray has prioritized pull and resistance work as the most important area of breaststroke training. Small semi inflated tyres are his preferred piece of resistance equipment
- Within Ray's program the highest percentage of time spent and swimming volume for breaststrokers is invested in pulling
- He advises that ideally, an athletes stroke count when performing the last 25-50m of a race should be no more than one or two strokes above their average number
- Ray challenges his athletes to reach a level of conditioning whereby they can pull effectively throughout any breaststroke event
- Taper tip; stay on resistance work, even throughout taper
- He did acknowledge however that moving forward, he intended to include more kick content in the breastroker's program
- When making changes from season to season Ray recommends a 10% change only
- Ray is an advocate of negative split swimming as a fundamental part of the athletes conditioning and training. A simple example being 6 x 400 IM on 6 minutes, descending time to best effort with a negatively split 200m breaststroke after each 400m IM
- All breaststroke athletes are trained to compete 50, 100 and 200 metres breaststroke

- Every practice is filmed with the display/screens set up to show the footage on a continuous reel and with a delay so that athletes can quickly view their training skills during their rest intervals

Dave Durden - Backstroke Technique & Planning a Re-Taper

Another speaker was Dave Durden. Dave is Head Swimming Coach at the University of California, Berkley, 2016 USA Olympic Assistant Coach, and 2015 & 2017 USA World Championships Head Coach. Dave is the coach of Ryan Murphy, a 2016 100m backstroke Olympic Champion and current World Record holder.

Dave Durden, similar to Ray Looze's presentation, discussed individual elements of the stroke in a specific order: body position, kick, drill progressions and timing. His training methods, stroke development work, drill practices and progressions require that his athletes understand the importance of these technique focused 'building blocks'. They are promoted by Dave as being the foundational pieces that strongly influence performance.

Following a brief introduction and explanation about his role, career journey and program, Dave's presentation was depicted and supported on the main ASCA World Clinic stage with his own physical demonstrations. He explained and elaborated on his drill progression sequences in a precise fashion, carefully articulating the objective of each exercise and its relevance to modern day backstroke swimming. The visual and physical nature of Dave's presentation created an immediate connection with his audience and reinforced the message that when coaching world class level athletes, skill development and stroke fundamentals are of key importance - no different from the challenges faced when teaching and coaching grassroots and age-group level swimmers.

Communicating that same message and utilizing his methods has been extremely useful to me this season when working with my own athletes; however, delivering that message in the form of a written report without demonstrations is more challenging! Essentially Dave uses line and posture drills that firstly incorporate controlled recovery phase movements. The next progression is series of single arm drills which merge with backstroke timing exercises facilitating a closer connection to the complete stroke.

Body Position

- Rounded shoulders
- Hips at surface
- Tighten & suck in core, 'hollow boat'
- Majority of rotation through shoulders and hips, small rotation of hips

Kick

- High frequency
- Constant
- 'Small'/contained kick range
- Toes inward
- Snap the movement, hips to ankles

Entry Position & Catch

- Rotation initiated at hips and followed at shoulders
- Enter outside the shoulder line
- 'Clean' entry with fingers slightly separated

Underwater Kick

- Use entire torso
- Kick starts just below ribs
- Push to gain depth, kick to gain speed
- Tight core, loose hips and ankles i.e. Traffic cone body shape when underwater - "Start small, finish big"

Breakout/Underwater - Swim Transition

- Nose & toes break surface together
- Flat & limited rotation on opening strokes, establishing high body position and catch

Turns

- Ryan Murphy styled, on entry to the turn submerge slightly when using lead arm
- Feel pressure on back as signal to initiate beginning of turn movement
- Get head into face down position quickly

RE: Planning a Re-Taper

Rule #1. "Don't use the word, Taper". Plan to swim fast approximately three/four weeks after swimming fast

Goal for trials/focus meets, keep it simple "Swim a best time"

Four topics to ask yourself before commencing the re-taper,

- What worked, what didn't, what to do next?
- Culture and communication expectations?
- Did the athletes allow themselves to perform?
- Begin strength training again (check body weight)

The next phase...

- Do not repeat sets
- Identify specific days within the re-taper that you expect to see performance
- Stay with whatever got them there i.e. pattern of training, content, etc

What Dave learned...

- Keep the correct focus by doing the correct things
- Take confidence from the routine
- You don't have to feel good to swim fast

Coach Kevin Kinel - Creating a Culture of Hard Work & High Expectations

Coach Kinel is the Chesterton (Indiana) High School Head Girls and Boys swim coach, Duneland Swim Club Head Senior coach, and Chesterton High School Physical Education and Aquatics director, all since 1980. He has coached 6 junior national individual champions, 5 junior national individual runner-ups, 5 Olympic trial qualifiers, 4 National junior team members, numerous senior state champions and national qualifiers, and has 18 Indiana state high school records. Kevin Kinel is also a 4-time Indiana High School State Coach of the Year ('99, '08, '09, '13) and was inducted to the Indiana High School Swimming Hall of Fame in 2007.

Kevin's presentation was admittedly not one that I had identified as a priority prior to the conference. Several of the talks, Q & A sessions and speeches I had highlighted as priorities, due to either the status and record of those individual coaches or because I was more familiar with the athletes that they had helped develop. Part of the intrigue and energy at the ASCA conference in Washington was created by the huge diversity of the coaches and professionals both in attendance and talking on behalf of the membership. Kevin's presentation was very well supported and he was clearly respected by many of his peers.

Not knowing what to expect I was quickly impressed with Kevin's delivery, openness and transparency. His training standards, planning, experience, goal setting, enthusiasm and energy were apparent. He communicated clear and simplistic methods about how the training environment of his program is directly related to how his athletes expect to perform when

competing. Kevin talked about the methods he used to captivate his swimmers both inside and outside the pool by helping them become engaged in training and proactive in establishing team social activities.

Kevin's philosophy merges appropriate athlete awareness and development, trust, work ethic, available technology, purposeful swimming practices and ambition. Athletes fully understand and 'buy into' Kevin's program because it's organized and measurable. Through that process his athletes facilitate and enable the program to stand true to its design, which to be successful.

Coach Kinel presented and elaborated on the opportunities that he offers his athletes every day and attributed the following aspects as significant to his previous and current achievements;

- Make everyone feel welcome
- Coaches within the same program getting along and promoting a shared vision
- Educate, don't dictate
- Establish a feeder program
- Take it upon yourself to bring the energy. It isn't fair to expect anyone else to do so if you don't lead the way
- Develop trust
- Encourage, plan and present fun traditions away from the pool
- Teach and educate athletes about buying into responsibility
- Be punctual
- Everyone in your lane effects your practice
- Academic success should be recognized and celebrated

Swimming Canada's Post Conference Seminar & Coaching Development Workshop

Swimming Canada attended the ASCA World Clinic headed by Senior Technical Staff consisting of John Atkinson, Martyn Wilby, Ken McKinnon, Mark Perry and Iain McDonald. Swimming Canada's Select Coaches Group, Provincial and Academy Coaches including Mike Flegel, SwimBC Performance Director made up the rest of the comprehensive, skilled and diverse development group.

The full Canadian staff and coaching representation came together each day at the conclusion of the conference. Coaches were tasked both individually and in small sub-groups to attend various guest speaker talks and then follow up with critiquing, reviewing and evaluating presentations for

the benefit of others. Open discussions took place amongst the group in relation to some of the ideas, concepts and messages learned from the clinic that day and comparisons were drawn against Canadian programs at national, provincial, regional and club level.

A huge incentive when applying for this professional development opportunity in Washington was the invitation for selected BC coaches to be involved in the Swimming Canada workshops and learn from many of the leading coaches and experts within the country. John Atkinson and his staff shared the Swimming Canada vision, including the goals and objectives moving forward. He presented statistical analysis of the Canadian National Team athlete roster, reviewed results against previous years, discussed forward-thinking methods and acknowledged improvements made by competing Nation's in preparation for the 2018 Pan Pacific and 2020 Olympics in Tokyo.

The final workshop of the clinic was dedicated to the challenges of coaching our athletes at club level. John Atkinson and his coaching team reinforced the message that we can have a significant and positive impact on the nation's future successes in the international arena, specifically with regards to designing, constructing and reviewing season programs and plans. This exercise was of great value to me, particularly as at the time, I was working on my club plan for the current season. Programs were reviewed individually and coaches were challenged on the plan they presented. The process was interesting, educational, highly beneficial and a truly unique opportunity to utilize some of the best resources in our sport today.

In addition to the information and guidance that I have collected via the ASCA presentations, and then applied and adapted to my philosophy and season plan; I am particularly grateful for the insight I gained as a result of the Swimming Canada Workshops. Planning purposeful practices, set progression ideas, athlete testing methods and establishing training strategies specific to athlete performance goals have been major pieces at every planning and evaluating stage this season, and key components that I aim to develop moving forward.

I'd like to extend my thanks to Swimming Canada and SwimBC for the outstanding Coach Development Opportunity afforded to me in Washington DC. In summary, the entire experience has been of tremendous assistance to me in my role as Senior Assistant Head Coach at Chena Swim Club and my next coaching endeavour in Atlantic Canada as Head Coach of Halifax Trojan Aquatic Club.