

## **2015 STATE-OF-THE-SPORT REPORT**

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### **SHOW SLIDE - 2015 STATE-OF-THE-SPORT**

Each year, in preparing the State of the Sport I reflect on the things we accomplished and I look ahead to the opportunities and challenges in the future. From this perspective it is clear to me that we have much to celebrate, some new opportunities to capitalize on, and some challenges to face; and we embrace all of it with confidence and enthusiasm.

We have constructed the business of USA Swimming around the three pillars of *Building* the base, *Promoting* the sport and *Achieving* sustained competitive success. *Build, Promote and Achieve* is the mantra that has set the course for the direction of our business.

It may be monotonous to hear about *BUILD, PROMOTE and ACHIEVE* every year, but let me assure you that it has been a disciplined commitment to these three core objectives that has forged the bedrock of our business success. We know precisely what our priorities are and we hold ourselves accountable to the highest standards.

Let me now share with you this past year's accomplishments.

### **SHOW SLIDE - BUILDING THE BASE**

#### **BUILDING THE BASE**

I am occasionally asked which of our three priorities is the most important. In a way, this is like asking me which of my children I love most. But if pressed, I would say that *Building the base* is probably the most important, and here's why. The broader and stronger our base, the better our chances are for long-term growth and continued success.

We are blessed with a broad base of almost 3,000 member clubs. We have more than 17,000 member coaches, and these coaches are among the most highly educated and trained of all youth sports coaches.

And with more than 350,000 athlete members, ours is a system in which the cream will rise to the top and USA Swimming will always have an elite corps of outstanding National Team athletes.

With successful athletes will come greater media attention, and this in-turn will lead to an increase in promotional opportunities; and thus the ever-turning wheel of *Build, Promote & Achieve* will keep our sport growing and healthy.

It all starts with a vibrant base; and we must always strive to improve the quality of the experience for our athletes. We measure this by looking at retention rates. We retain kids age 12 and under at a rate of 62%. This percentage is good, but not great; but keep in mind swimming is not always an easy sport and it requires a pretty big commitment. Also, kids under the age of 12 are much more inclined than teenagers to try different sports.

But now, consider this. We retain kids age 13 and older at an incredible rate of 90%. This is a staggering number and reflects the magnetic appeal that swimming has for those kids who get involved and stick with it.

Cultivating partnerships is an important tactic in our efforts to keep building our base. As an example, USA Swimming is partnering with the New York City Parks & Recreation Department to assist an existing urban swim league of 600 athletes and 50 coaches, all of whom are now USA Swimming members. This is a model that we are now looking to expand in other major urban markets.

We must continually ask ourselves, *“What are we doing to invite more people into our sport?”* We have worked so hard and our sport has come so far to now be recognized as the premier Olympic sport, but if we fail to keep reaching out to engage others, we run the risk of slipping back to being seen as a niche sport.

It’s worth noting that over the past 10 years African-American and Hispanic/Latino membership in USA Swimming has grown at a steadily increasing rate. This is a good sign, but we must continue to increase our efforts to have USA Swimming’s membership better reflect the rapidly changing demographics of our country.

At the national office, we have a Diversity & Inclusion working group that includes several members of the senior staff. This working group is developing and implementing strategies to ensure that USA Swimming is continually expanding its multi-cultural base.

One of the biggest obstacles to growth is access to facilities. The effort to construct new facilities or refurbish old or unused pools must happen at the local level. It is unrealistic to think that USA Swimming can fund facility construction projects, but we have put significant effort into providing useful information and resources to clubs and communities.

Since the formation of the Facilities Department 11 years ago, USA Swimming has been involved in 124 new pool projects in 37 states and 308 pool renovations.

While the work of national office staff is important, nothing surpasses the impact undertaken by LSC and club leaders and coaches at the local level. This is why the Club Excellence Program is so important because it recognizes and rewards excellence.

Since 2002, USA Swimming has reinvested more than \$4.5M in direct grant awards given to 576 different club teams. This reinvestment with member clubs is among the most important ways in which we can impact growth at the grassroots level.

We must also continue to make investments that directly help our member coaches. We believe the best way to do this is by providing educational opportunities.

Since 2008, we have conducted more than 70 Regional Coaches Clinics in 53 different LSCs, with more than 8,400 coaches participating. Over the past three years, 11,500 coaches have completed our online Foundations 101 of Coaching course, and over the past two years almost 5,000 coaches have completed the Foundation 201 level course. Furthermore, over the past four years, we have conducted more than 150 educational webinars for coaches.

Taken together, these efforts exhibit a robust commitment by USA Swimming with its member coaches and member clubs.

Our LSCs continue to make progress through their participation in LEAP. To date 48 LSCs have been recertified for Level 1; seven have achieved Level 2; and three have achieved Level 3. I think it is fair to say that LEAP met some resistance last quad, but in this quad our LSCs are embracing the effort to improve themselves. Thank you to all LSC leaders who are working in support of LEAP.

I hope some of the things that I have just shared with you will give you some confidence that we're being smart and strategic with the ways in which we invest in grassroots programs. We're also always open-minded about listening to new ideas and suggestions for ways to better build our base.

## **SHOW SLIDE - PROMOTING THE SPORT**

### **PROMOTING THE SPORT**

When it comes to promoting our sport, there are always interesting things in the hopper.

Because there was an overlap in our National Championships and the World Championships we had to get creative with the television program scheduling and formatting. This also gave us the opportunity to try out a magazine type show, titled "Race for Gold." We were very pleased with the result and NBC was pleased as well.

Here's a sample of this format:

## **SHOW VIDEO - RACE FOR GOLD**

We are also in the midst of redesigning our website and you will be seeing some dramatic changes. With the ever-increasing numbers of people who get their news from a handheld device or tablet, we simply have to respond with an enhanced strategy for delivering the site in a mobile-friendly way. The new website redesign will be launched and running before next summer's Olympic Team Trials.

And with the mention of the Olympic Team Trials, it will come as no surprise to most of you that next summer's event will likely be the best ever. The arena in Omaha seats 14,500 and as of today there are less than 5,000 seats available for any one of the 15 sessions. If you plan to be in Omaha -- and you really should -- please get your tickets as soon as possible because we are anticipating sellout crowds.

Also, we're once again proud to report that all Finals sessions of the Trials will be televised live on NBC and the NBC Sports Network with Bob Costas hosting and Dan Hicks and Rowdy Gaines calling all the action.

The AquaZone will be the best fan experience area we have ever staged, and there will be any number of new surprises at the 2016 U.S. Olympic Team Trials. The AquaZone is also a great way to introduce the sport to large numbers of kids who might otherwise never have considered joining a swim team.

The Olympic Trials and Olympic Games provide USA Swimming with a great platform to attract new members, and one of the primary programs that we have been touting to take advantage of the Olympic year is SwimToday. The "*Funnest Sport*" campaign is the tagline for the SwimToday program and the campaign continues to draw smiles, even from finicky English teachers.

There is an enormous amount of planning that goes into these programs and I think you might enjoy a short peek behind the curtain to see how these programs come together.

### **SHOW VIDEO - PARTNER AWARDS**

Our latest out-of-the-box idea is SwimJitsu. This is a promotional and recruitment program that we have been testing in eight cities. On average, 500 kids have participated in each of the cities, a third of whom are new to USA Swimming. Our ability to convert these non-members into members will be the critical measurement in evaluating the program.

We will continue to pilot and test SwimJitsu in the year ahead. SwimJitsu is perhaps better explained in pictures: here's a short video.

### **SHOW VIDEO - SWIMJITSU**

Another project that we have been working on this past year is a documentary film about the 1976 Montreal Olympic Games, when the American women were competing against the doped East German swimmers. Sports documentaries are very popular right now and we think our timing to tell this story is right on target.

2016 will be the 40-year anniversary of the Montreal Games, and the perfect time for our film, which is titled, "*An Impossible Gold ... The Greatest Untold Story in Olympic Swimming History.*" The film is still in production, but will be ready for distribution and showing next summer. You will be hearing a lot about this film in the year ahead.

Enhanced storytelling and increased video content will become an important part of our business strategy as we point toward 2020 and beyond. We plan to do some internal restructuring and will be producing more content in a department that we are tentatively calling “USA Swimming Productions.”

### USA SWIMMING FOUNDATION

The USA Swimming Foundation is our NGB’s fundraising arm, but it is also undertaking programming that helps to both build and promote the sport. You heard from the Foundation’s executive director, Debbie Hesse earlier this morning about the great work being done.

Public recognition for the Foundation and its’ efforts will be getting a huge boost with the announcement that Missy Franklin will now become its’ face and primary spokesperson. Missy will remain in this role through 2020. Talk about a perfect match!

Hopefully you’ve seen some of our Make a Splash public service announcements during our televised events. Here’s a favorite.

### **SHOW VIDEO – MAKE A SPLASH**

### **SHOW SLIDE – ACHIEVING SUSTAINED COMPETITIVE SUCCESS**

#### **ACHIEVING SUSTAINED COMPETITIVE SUCCESS**

This past summer, USA Swimming sent a total of more than 150 athletes to various international competitions. This has been our standard practice in the pre-Olympic year, when the purpose is to give as many athletes and coaches as possible the opportunity to gain international competition experience.

What people don’t see and hear about is all the work that goes on behind the scenes to ensure that our athletes and the coaching staff are freed from distractions and given the support resources necessary for success.

Travel, housing and meals are just part of our logistical responsibilities. With the way things are in today’s world, we are extremely conscious of athlete safety and security issues. Likewise, we must ensure that a USA Swimming delegation is aware of cultural sensitivities. Our team has always been terrific ambassadors for our sport and for our country.

This quad, USA Swimming has made a major investment in its National Junior Team program. We are constantly evaluating the progress of the country’s top junior athletes. Through select camps and coaching education programs, we are investing in our future. We are also sending more junior athletes and coaches to international competitions so that they can get valuable racing experience.

Above all, we work to ensure that athletes on the National Junior Team are exposed to the values that are essential elements of the National Team program. By exposing our top Junior-level athletes to the National Team culture at an earlier age, we are readying them for when they earn a spot on the National Team.

Our team culture is often the envy of the rest of the swimming world. When Team USA walks out and onto a pool deck at an international competition, we want everyone to stop and stare. And when our athletes cheer for each other, again other nations look on in envy. We don't ever want to lose this special quality.

This team culture was evident at the FINA World Swimming Championships held in Kazan, Russia this summer. U.S. athletes brought home a total of 26 medals; 10 gold; 11 silver; and five bronze. Let's take a look at a highlight video from the World Championships.

### **SHOW VIDEO - WORLD CHAMPIONSHIPS**

One athlete who was not in Kazan was Michael Phelps. Michael swam at the Phillips 66 U.S. National Championship meet in San Antonio and he put on a show that only Michael could do - swimming the best times in the world in three events: 200 Free; 200 Fly; and 200 IM.

Those going to San Antonio for the first time not only witnessed Michael's incredible performances, but also saw a sparkling new facility that many would say might just be the best in the country. Let's take a look at some of the action from the National Championships.

### **SHOW VIDEO - MICHAEL PHELPS & NATIONAL CHAMPIONSHIPS**

Recently, USA Swimming named its Head Coaches for the 2016 Rio Olympic Games. David Marsh, Head Coach at SwimMAC in Charlotte, NC will be the Head Women's Coach; and Bob Bowman, Head Coach at Arizona State University, will be the Head Men's Coach. David and Bob are extraordinary coaches, each with incredible track records of success.

Our Olympic Team will be in good hands next summer with Coach Marsh and Coach Bowman holding the reins. We all recognize that there is much work to be done, but we also recognize that there is enormous potential and many opportunities and I cannot think of any two coaches more up to the challenge than Coach Marsh and Coach Bowman.

### **SHOW SLIDE - CHALLENGES**

#### **CHALLENGES**

Like all youth sports, USA Swimming faces challenges when it comes to membership growth. Sadly, participation is decreasing across all youth sports, and that includes swimming. We can no longer simply assume that kids will find their way to our clubs.

The SwimToday program and the “*Funnest*” sport promotional campaign are important recruitment tools. But the truth is that the most important recruitment efforts are those done at the local level. We will continue to look for ways to better promote swimming, but it will be clubs and LSCs that can really make a difference in fighting against the slide in membership participation.

The future of college swimming is another challenge we face. Over the past year we have seen dramatic shifts in the landscape of college athletics, and changes will continue to occur in the year ahead. For this reason, USA Swimming has made a significant three-year financial commitment to support the College Swimming Coaches Association in its efforts to protect and preserve collegiate swimming. We also now provide the Association with office space at our national headquarters building in Colorado Springs.

We will continue to work on expanding our role in developing ways to collaborate with the NCAA in order to ensure the health of swimming at the Division I, II and III levels. USA Swimming is currently the only NGB which is a true partner with the NCAA, as we manage and run the rosters, results, rankings, championship entries and selection for all three divisions.

We provided similar services for the Pan American Games and its 44 countries, giving further evidence to the benefit of our investments in technology and online services. These partnerships are important to future organizational relationships.

Safe Sport has been and always will be a priority for USA Swimming, and we have come a long way since 2010 largely as a result of the commitment and buy-in of our members and the Safe Sport champions at every level of the organization. In the upcoming year our focus will be on three strategies: (1) To empower our Safe Sport volunteer champions; (2) to use swim meets as parent engagement opportunities; and (3) to encourage and support club level leadership to embrace Safe Sport.

Our sport is now facing concerns with water quality issues for the Open Water swimming competition at next summer’s Rio Olympic Games. Athlete safety in Rio is our number one concern, and we are working in a supportive role with the U.S. Olympic Committee and FINA to ensure that all athletes will be competing in the safest conditions possible.

We have established an open line of communication with the three U.S. athletes who have qualified to swim in Rio, and we are sharing all relevant information with these athletes and their personal coaches.

## **CLOSE**

Over the next 10 months our sport steps into the spotlight. The 2016 U.S. Olympic Team Trials in Omaha will unquestionably be the greatest event USA Swimming has ever put on, and as we do once every four years, we will be selecting an incredible group of athletes to represent our country at the Olympic Games.

The Olympic Games have been called the last stand for family television viewing. Family members of all ages will gather in front of their televisions and they'll learn about the athletes representing our country. The Games will be broadcast live in the U.S..

And when those special moments come when a U.S. swimmer steps onto the top podium and our national anthem is played as the American flag rises, I hope that each of us will also think of all those age groupers and the excitement and joy they feel riding off in mom's or dad's car to go to another swim practice.

Let us think, too, of all the coaches who have chosen swimming as their profession; and the volunteers who give of their time to support our sport. The USA Swimming Foundation has as part of its mission that the sport builds champions in the pool, and champions in life. I believe this to be true. Our sport spans the generations and strengthens the fabric of families and communities.

Kids learn about the benefits that come with hard work. They learn about the importance of being part of a team. They develop self-discipline and a respect for authority. They learn the value of teamwork, the joy of winning and that failure should never be construed as final, but rather as an opportunity to learn and grow. These are the reasons why it is important to continue to build our base and promote our sport.

Let's take a look at one more YouTube clip in which some people you'll recognize will tell us why swimming is the "*Funniest*" sport.

### **SHOW VIDEO - WHY SWIMMING IS THE FUNNEST SPORT**

In closing, I would be remiss not to mention to you that there is a group of people in Colorado Springs who make up the professional staff at the national office. These are some of the most passionate and most talented people that you could ever come to know; and working beside them is a true honor and privilege.

Thank you all for the work you do in service to this great sport.

Thank you all ... and GO USA!