

Coaches & Judges Debrief Clinic
UANA Pan Am Games
Location: Windsor, Ontario
Date: August 20th - August 24th, 2019

Welcome and Introductions

This session was a panel discussion made up of three prominent judges and 3 high level coaches. The judges commented on 3 areas they observed in the UANA competition that need our attention in order to be more competitive on the World stage. The 3 FINA A judges who served on the panel were Teresa Alentejano, Shannon Korpela and Louise Kennedy. The coaches were then asked to address these areas and provide tips, tricks and training techniques they would recommend for improvement. The coaches who served on the panel were Anna Voloshyna, Ukrainian World Champion and Olympic medalist, currently coaching USA National Teams, Nathalie LaGrange, former Canadian National Team Coach and Olga Asseva, Mexico National Team Coach for the past 20 years.

General information:

- Read the FINA Artistic Swimming Coaches and Judges Manual regularly as it is a living document with continuous updates and clarifications. If needing further clarifications contact UANA coach's subcommittee chair. This will be a new person soon and who's name can be found on the UANA AS website at uana-aquatics.com. If they do not have an answer, they will ask FINA for clarifications and share that information with you.
- Judges are requesting that routines end with the accompaniment (i.e. no additional moves being performed after the music has ended).

Judges' Concern expressed by Shannon Korpela:

- Height - arms/body, legs (page 44/45 of the FINA manual)
- Extension - definition FINA Manual page 207, "range to which something can be stretched to the fullest with the entire body"
- Clarity - FINA page 31 "clear definition between positions and directions"
 - **Coaches Responses:**
 - Heights are low, athletes are performing as if "enough" is "good enough". Suggestion to train with other athletes performing with higher expectations to raise the expectations your athletes have for their own performances; don't be afraid to add difficulty to your routines to raise the expectations for your athletes performances. Adding this difficulty will teach athletes how to use their muscles/strength to their fullest potential. Always move the athletes forward in their development. The body has unlimited potential and when a coach expects and believes this, the athletes will strive for better
 - Height is related to the buoyancy of each athletes' body; center of gravity is also different for each athlete and this affects height. Consider the physical base of each athlete and you will be able to better improve height. Some athletes are much more dense and therefore need more strength training to achieve the same height as a more buoyant athlete
 - Balance strength training with age and level/stage of the athlete's development. Adding weight to an athlete when they are not ready can be detrimental to the athlete's development

- Flexibility can be natural, but most athletes will need to train more intensely during his/her development. Elastics out and in the water will be needed.
- Clarity - adding an angle must be clear for the judges. If it is not clear to the viewer it should not be included
- Height - use the judges height chart (page 44/45 of FINA manual). This can be shared with the athletes, so they understand what score they are trying to achieve in relation to how high they need to be. Sculling technique is very important. Poor sculling technique will greatly impact height in all positions
- Extension - work with young athletes throughout their development. Do stretching training every day.
- Clarity - moving too much water makes it difficult to see clarity of positions. Make sure leg is dry before raising to avoid bringing up too much water

Judges Concern expressed by Theresa Alentejano:

- Synchronization is a problem in almost all routines:

Coaches' Responses:

- Synchronization of every count and the exact position is very difficult and will require much training
- When creating routines, work right away with synchronization. Corrections need to be immediate as athletes will memorize the wrong position if you do not correct immediately. Land drill is very important as more can be clarified as land drill requires less physical effort. Hybrid speed needs to be increased over time as perfection is achieved. The largest mistake in synchronization is incomplete movements (not finishing the movement completely resulting in varying final positions for each swimmer)
- Be very specific with instruction of positions, especially starting positions of actions as this changes the entry into a figure resulting in synchronization errors.
- For pattern changes, identify the "click" pattern counts to begin and end a pattern change. They need to be very clear. When choreography is done you can play with how many synchro errors and have athletes work towards lowering the number of synchro errors each time they swim the routine. This is motivating for the athletes
- Choose music that is easy to count. Choosing music too difficult to count will result in obvious challenges for the athletes resulting in synchronization errors.
- All athletes need to be sure they know the exact counts. They must request clarification. All swimmers need to be on the "same channel". Use of technology to support synchronization is important as athletes can see where they need to make changes, (video, etc.).
- With Jr./Sr. two hours can be used to perfect movements as athletes can maintain training in longer periods.
- For younger athletes use more video to support training.
- Always add more synchronization into your training and try to make it more fun/motivating for the athletes

Judges Concern expressed by Louise Kennedy: Poor pool pattern, pool coverage and poor propulsion affects both execution and artistic impression. We are looking for both pool coverage and power

- Many judges draw a diagram of the pool coverage keeping a record of a(n) athletes' coverage of the pool,
- Poor placement of an element/movement, can result in a judge not being able to see, appreciate or reward the action.
- Logical flow of movement through the pool without backtracking to cover all areas
- This is an easy thing to fix by drawing your pool coverage to ensure good placement and pool pattern
- The judge's eyes should continuously move, following the routine as it moves fluidly from one location to another

Coaches' Response:

- Don't be afraid to adjust choreography throughout the season as athletes become stronger and able to cover more of the pool
- During competitions athletes sometimes forget about the propulsion and the result is poor coverage of the pool
- Speed swimming during training can improve propulsion
- Artistic "**swimming**" ...athletes need to **SWIM**
- A quote from a judge, "If you're not spinning, you should be moving!"

Judges' concern expressed by Ginny Jasontek, FINA TASC, Secretary and International A

Judge: When asked what the rest of the world is doing that makes them a higher level than UANA countries, she responded that they "swim with more passion, power, punch and energy" and able to "sell" their routines at a higher level.

Coaches Response:

- Work on the small sections with 100% and add more as the athletes become stronger.
- Repeat full swim throughs of routines during the competition phase.
- Beginning of season - work a lot on positions and switching positions. Increase speed as athletes are ready, (if it is not working when slow do not speed up until slow performance is strong and accurate)
- With limited pool time, use a "figure trainer" outside of the pool (platform headstand structure used to practice figures out of the water) This tool is good for position alignment and core strength. Swimmer must have a spotter when on the trainer.
- The coach must model the same power and energy that she expects from the athletes. The athlete must strive to be better now than they were an hour ago/day ago/week ago; Always strive for excellence in your coaching as well.
- If coach expects the same level of power and attitude of him/herself that she does for the athletes, this will translate into more powerful performances by the athletes. The passion and power of the music/routine will be transmitted to the judge/audience
- Always ask your athletes to perform as warriors like the warriors they are when training.
- Loss of energy at the end of a routine can be the difference. Work on routine endurance;
- Energy and power during training is higher than what is seen at competition
- Yearlong training with only few competitions to perform results in athletes being scared resulting in them being unable to use their power effectively when it is most important
- Despite being told to look at the judges' eyes, the athletes are too nervous to do so - more experience competing will result in athletes building their confidence resulting in better performance
- If competitions are not available, ask judges, parents/friends/family to come to the pool and be an audience for your athletes to perform for

- Expecting a performance level experience without athletes having the opportunity to practice performing will limit the athletes.

Q & A:

Q. Are there any resources regarding when to add weight training based on athlete development?

A. Research other sports and talk to others to learn about athlete development and appropriate times to add more intense training like weights.

Q: What types of extension training can be done each day?

A: Training - 15 minutes/day with 13-15. Have athletes demonstrate full extension and hold it to experience how it feels to be fully extended. Have athletes understand what his/her muscles have to do to be fully extended. Athletes must have muscle memory of how it feels to be fully extended. Coached flexibility training is needed daily (2 - 6 hours per week), athletes need to be coached in both extension and flexibility. Athletes should not be left to do this on their own

Q: Should stretch be done before or after practice?

A: Should be done before **and** after. Muscles need to be stretched before training to avoid injury during training. After training, stretching is more effective as the muscles are warmed up.

Q: Dynamic or ballistic (moving) vs Static (stationary) Stretch?

A: Passive stretch should be done before Dynamic stretch

Q: Pool Coverage - If a club has really limited space and lanes, how do they train for a larger space when you have limited access to this amount of space?

A: Ukraine only has 3-5 lanes - each segment of routine trained using the full length of the pool. Then stop the music and have athletes rush back to start of lane to do the next segment of the routine using full length of the pool

Q: Europe swims with more passion, what do we do to increase UANA performance passion?

A: Facial expression, training with a theme, don't "look: scared, don't "look" happy, athletes need to "FEEL" scared, "FEEL" happy; Routines need a story; athletes need to embrace the story of their routine to be able to share their story with the audience/judges passionately.

Q: How do all Mexican athletes go so fast regardless of age?

A: Natural quality is ideal as speed is not easy to improve. National team selection included 3 tests related to speed. Note: speed can compromise height and clarity - Mexico's goal is to have speed, clarity and height! Mexico also uses out of the water cross training to work on speed movements such as boxing and kickboxing.

Q: Limited training time makes it very difficult to balance all of the needs of the athletes. How to prioritize?

A: Analyze team to determine needs and focus on one goal at a time: height, clarity, speed, synchronization, pool coverage, expression, flexibility, extension...Ask yourself, "What will re-

sult in the greatest improvement at this time?” Club vs National Team training is much different when creating/choosing team members. Focus on greatest weakness first and then move on to next. For National Team, knowing your weaknesses and working on them to compete international is important. Embrace your natural strengths and use them to your advantage.

Q: What is the best plan for development?

A: Canada LTAD (Long Term Athlete Development), UK also has a program

Comment: UANA athletes need to be exposed to more competition and more competitors from other parts of the world. This knowledge will give UANA athletes a better understanding of what they can work towards.