

The 29th European Athletic Coaches Association Conference

Dublin, Ireland



The Park Plaza Conference Centre in Dublin – venue of the 29th European Athletic Coaches Association Conference in 2006

Introduction

One hundred twenty-two coaches representing 19 countries attended the 29th European Athletic Coaches Association Conference in Dublin, Ireland from the 10th to 12th November 2006.

As it was at the previous year's conference, the theme was "The Winning Difference" but, in a break from tradition, the focus of the five

keynote presentations was on the coach and coaching rather than technical aspects. EACA President Frank Dick explained that his aim was for the main speakers, three of whom had experience mainly outside athletics, to explore "3D Coaching", the 3 Ds being Design, Development and Delivery.

Technical aspects were addressed in the programme of 25 workshop options offered in five sessions and organised in the now famil-



Peter Keen

lar grid of five disciplines and five key topics. The workshops were delivered by the EACA's regular crew of international experts who were paired up with experienced coaches from Ireland.

The conference was hosted by Athletics Ireland at the Park Plaza Hotel and Conference Centre. European Athletics provided support for the conference in the form of a subvention to the local organisers and scholarships covering the congress fee and accommodation cost for one participant from each European Athletics Member Federation.

Main presentations

The coach as team leader and team player
Alan McNish (GBR)

McNish is a former Formula 1 driver who now leads the Audi team, which recently won the USA Sports Car Championships. Using the example of his own career in motor racing, he said that he considered his car engineer as his coach. He then described the shift in his

coach's role over time from an instinct-led, one-man band to a leader of a team support network of skilled individuals managing ever increasing amounts of high quality data. He compared this change to that in other sports. He highlighted the need for coaches to have a global view, communications skills and the ability to work with athletes who are very much ego driven. "Coaches should not be techy specialists", he said, "but must constantly strive to be the best out there."

Customer focused coaching
Peter Keen (GBR)

Currently Performance Advisor for UK Sport, the county's agency for elite sport, Keen previously coached elite cyclists, including Olympic Champion Chris Boardman, and managed a national coaching structure as Performance Director of British Cycling. Critical of the popular Long Term Athlete Development Model, he said that it did not allow for the fact that elite performers were by nature special and often developed on a pathway that was parallel but different from the system the model implied. Drawing on his own coaching experience, including the occasional mistake, he outlined key points for working with top athletes as clients. These included knowledge of the complex high-performance environment, management of personal-professional boundaries and knowing the time to let go and refer a talented individual on to another coach.

Managing the coaching process
Vadim Velichenok (RUS)

The former chief coach for junior and senior teams in the USSR and Russia, Velichenok is now the Director of the IAAF's Regional Development Centre in Moscow. He gave descriptions of the RDC Moscow's various activities, including its coach education measures within the IAAF system. He then discussed goal setting and career planning for athletes. He supported his ideas with the main conclusions of his personal research into the careers and performance development of top athletes from around the world, pointing

out that medallists at youth and junior championships often have a greater biological age and longer period of training than those they beat but as they get older the picture changes in favour of more slowly-maturing athletes.

Professional attitude to coaching

Frank Dick (GBR)

Considering the difference between the words “professional” and “commercial”, Dick, the EACA President, stated: “in our commercial world a professional coach must be valued and rewarded through appropriate economic compensation.” He said it is important for coaches to see their work in terms of a business and stressed the importance of through planning and contracts with clients. After discussing the intrinsic motivation and purpose of coaches using statements by famous coaches from different sports to illustrate his points, he described five career options – personal coach, coaching development director, specialist team coach, chief coach and coaching consultant. He then suggested appropriate amounts for each type of coach to charge clients. “Coaching consultants”, he said, “should expect \$1250 per day of one on one coaching or per one-off lecture plus a \$500 per diem when travelling away from home.”

The coachable coach

Pat Duffy (IRL)

Duffy, the CEO for Sport Coach UK, started by discussing the art and science of coaching then defined coaching as a “process of guided improvement”. Referring to a number of academic studies, he outlined the career development of both athletes and coaches, highlighting the point that it takes 10 years or 10,000 hours to become really good at anything. He said that technical, tactical, physical and mental skills are not enough for an athlete to excel and that a coach needs to be able to provide motivation, mental strength, adaptiveness and social competence. Quoting the famous definition of insanity: “doing the same thing over and over and expecting different results”, he said that the key to becoming

a better coach is to commit to continuous personal development.

Workshops

Between the keynote presentations, the conference participants had a choice of five event-group workshops. Each workshop met five times, discussing a different theme in each session. The themes were staggered so that a participant could follow a particular theme across all the event groups or all themes from the perspective of a single event group.



Group discussion during a workshop session

Workshop leaders were:

- Sprints & Hurdles – Loren Seagrave (USA) and Tom Comyns (IRL)
- Middle & Long Distance – Peter Thompson (GBR) and Nial Moyna (IRL)
- Jumps – Wolfgang Ritzdorf (GER) and Drew Harrison (GBR)
- Throws – Ekkhart Arbiet (GER) and Steven Maquire (IRL)
- Combined Events – Jitka Vinduskova (CZE) and Maeve Kyle (IRL)

The themes addressed by each workshop were:

- The foundation – from beginner to early teen
- Developing years – the mid teens to junior years
- Elite performers – post junior to the peak performance years
- Monitoring coaching effectiveness
- One Europe in addressing performance trends



EACA President Frank Dick making one of the main presentations

EACA Report

The conference was also the main opportunity for Dick, the EACA President, to address the members of the association. In his report he restated the benefits of membership and said that his target was to increase the number of members in order to give the association a solid basis for future operations and improved services. Dick also reported on the progress of the IAAF Academy and his role on the IAAF Coaches Commission

Conclusion

The novel approach of turning the focus of the keynote speakers away from technical aspects toward more general issues related to the work of coaches may have surprised some participants used to a more traditional programme. The delivery of the concept was greatly aided by the high quality of both the invited speakers and the workshops delivered by the EACA's experienced team of presenters together with their local partners. This quality was commented on by a number of participants.

Informal feedback on the organisational and logistical aspects of the conference was generally positive, although there was criticism of a change of date from the conference's usual first weekend in November slot. Also of concern was the fact that the programme of activities was rather tight, which meant that some interesting discussions had to be cut short.

The EACA has decided to go back to its original dates and the 2007 conference, the association's 30th, will take place in Moscow 2-4. It has also said the issue of the programme would be addressed in the planning of the conference, which will have the theme: Preparation for Peak Performance.

Reported by Bill Glad

Details on the presentations and information on EACA membership are available on the EACA website, which can be accessed through www.iaafacademy.com.