The 2014 International Festival of Athletics Coaching

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Introduction

"The Winning Difference: High Potential To High-Performance" was the theme for the seventh International Festival of Athletics Coaching, which took place at the *Scuola dello Sport, Acque Acetosa* Olympic Training Centre in Rome, Italy, from 31 October and 2 November 2014. Organised by the European Athletics Coaches' Association (EACA) and the Italian National Olympic Committee (CONI), with support from European Athletics as part of its Coaching Summit Series, the festival drew about 170 participants from 24 nations, including a delegation of 60 head coaches and technical directors from various Italian sport federations.

The programme featured a strong international line-up of presenters from athletics and other sports, including triathlon and football, who addressed topics ranging from technical improvement in youth to support networks for coaches and athletes to the importance of long-term vision. This report outlines the keynote presentations, lists the practical workshops and seminars and concludes with a brief preview of the 2015 edition.

Review and question period at the International Festival of Athletics Coaching

Developing Potential – Lessons from Europe

Wolfgang Killing (GER), Antonio Solano-Sanchez (ESP), and Piotr Haczek (POL)

Dr. Killing, the Director of the German athletics federation (DLV) ***Trainerschule,*** focused on the technical development in young athletes, advocating a multi-event education approach to optimise the development of coordination and motor skills in young athletes. Solano-Sanchez, who works with Sevillia FC Youth Academy, looked at the important role that coaches play in the long-term progress of young athletes, focusing on the methodology and structure that have been instrumental in the club's development of talented young players. Haczek, a former sports director at the Polish athletics federation (PZLA), presented a strong message of athlete-centred, coach led support structures, advocating an 'inverted pyramid with pillar structure' of support and stressing the responsibility of developing athletes as people, not creating '*athletics cyborgs'.*

Invest in Youth, Invent the future

Frank Dick (GBR)

Dick, the EACA President, presented debriefs of the European Athletics Championships in Athletics and IAAF World Junior Championships, both of which were staged earlier in the year. Though European performances have progressed in the last decades, gaps continue to exist in certain events: 54.2% of the top male performances at the European Championships were better in 2014 than 1990 but only 29.4% of the top female performances were. Though the World Junior Championships saw Europeans take 49 medals, progressing these to senior medal successes will be difficult. He stressed the need to develop specific coaching education programmes and pathways for this task. He also gave a stark warning on the costs of inactivity in young people and the challenges this poses to athletics.

Achieving High-Performance

Malcom Brown (GBR)

Brown, the lead coach to the Olympic triathlon stars Alistair and Jonathan Brownlee, described the development of Leeds, England, into a world-class centre of excellence for triathlon – producing 17 World Championship medals from 2009 to 2013 - despite the financial constraints and climatic limitations. The keys have been hard-working athletes, a great training environment and strong leadership. Speaking of his work with the Brownlees, he emphasised the importance of a long-term vision for developing potential to top-level performances. He pinpointed proper technical models and training methods, understanding the event requirements and, importantly, identifying the priorities at different ages and stages during development.

Dafne Schippers - High Potential to High-Performance

Bart Bennema (NED)

The honour of the closing keynote was given to Bennema, coach to Dafne Schippers, who won the 100m and 200m at the summer's European Athletics Championhsips in Zurich. Working on the Royal Dutch Athletics Federation's (Atletiekunie) combined events talent programme, he has guided the journeys of Schippers, including her heptathlon medal at the 2013 IAAF World Championships in Athletics in Moscow, and Nadine Visser, who claimed bronze medals in the heptathlon and 100m hurdles at the IAAF World Junior Championships. Highlighting the importance of designing training that focuses on the athlete's strengths, he said that speed development is at the heart of his approach, which also includes building work capacity and fitness while developing the technical aspects of each event. Although this approach and full time coaching and medical support are cornerstones of the Atletiekunie programme, it is certain that Bennema's positive nature and guidance has been an important driving force in the Dutch success.

Workshops and Interventions

In addition to the keynote presentations described above, the festival included the following practical elements, which took place in the training facilities at the venue:

Joans Tawiah Dodoo (GBR), who served his apprenticeship under Dan Pfaff and now has some of Britain's best young sprinting talent under his charge, including 2013 European Junior Champion Chijindu Ujah Dodoo, led two sessions on technical drills, conditioning and plyometrics for speed.

Elio Locatelli (ITA), the former IAAF Development Director and national head coach for Italy, returned to his practical coaching roots by leading a session on developing the young jumps athlete.

Vincenzo Canali (ITA), who has worked with pole vault world record holder Yelena Isinbayeva (RUS) and former European 800m champion Marcin Lewandowski (POL), led two workshops together with Locatelli on postural development in young athletes, a postural method for injury prevention and physical preparation aspects for the jumps.

Keynote speaker **Piotr Haczek (POL)**, who was a World Championship gold medallist in the 4 x 400m relay, led a session inside and outside the weights room that focused on power development in the young athlete.

Paweł Jesień (POL), who coached wife Anna to World Championship and European bronze medals in the 400m hurdles plus two European bronze medals in the 4x400m relay, led a session on mobility and flexibility training.

Ekkart Arbeit (GER), former chief coach of Athletics South Africa led a session on foundational strength and strength training in the throws.

Keynote speaker **Bart Bennama (NED)** made a practical intervention that looked at the conditioning aspects for combined events based on his work with Schippers and Visser.

Practical session at the International Festival of Athletics Coaching

Classroom session

In the classroom sessions the following seminars were offered:

Jesus Santos (ESP), the Real Madrid physiotherapist, discussed injury prevention and interventions for coaches.

Antonio Gianfelici (ITA), a physiologist to Italian Olympic teams, led a session on how coaches can better understand and harness physiology in their coaching and training sessions.

Antonio Solana-Sanchez (ESP) followed up his keynote presentation with an extensive open discussion session on his work at the Sevillia FC Youth Academy and the impact coaching methodology has had there.

Keynote speaker Malcolm Brown (GBR) gave an additional classroom session that was an in-depth look at training for endurance and the important components for developing potential in young endurance athletes.

The congress concluded with a gala reception and an opportunity for all the participants to network in the relaxing environment of Rome.

IFAC 2015

The IFAC will return to Rome for its eighth edition, which will take place from 23 to 25 October. The emphasis will be on cross sport themes, with athletics still at the core. The festival's keynote presentations, practical workshops and seminars will address the following key points:

- Preparing for life through sport (sport in youth & schools);
- Partnerships in Performance and Coaching (science & technology in sport)
- Turning our mind to advantage (sport psychology)
- From high potential to high-performance (talent development)
- Building fitness platforms and bridges (physical competency & injury prevention)
- Major campaign preparation in the final year (delivering on the day)
- Coaching management & development (developing coach education)

More information on IFAC can be found at the new website of the EACA: www.athletics-coaches.eu.

Reported by Jamie Bowie

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