

The 8th International Festival of Athletics Coaching

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Formia, Italy

More than 120 coaches from 22 nations participated in the eighth edition of the International Festival of Athletic Coaching (IFAC) in Formia, Italy, from 28 to 30 2016. Staged at the *Centro di Preparazione Olimpica* (the Italian Olympic Preparation Centre), the event was organised by the European Athletics Coaches' Association (EACA) in partnership with the Italian Olympic Committee (CONI) with support from European Athletics.

During the event, EACA President Frank Dick reiterated the often-made the point that coaching is as much an art as it is a science, and the weekend certainly epitomised this with its blend of research-based knowledge from performance experts and practical experience from world-class coaches. The programme included a total of nine keynote presentations by distinguished speakers from athletics and other sports, interactive seminars and workshops as networking opportunities.

Perhaps the biggest highlights were the interventions of 74-year-old South African Ans Botha, who coached Wayde van Niekerk (RSA) to the 400m gold medal (and world record) at the 2016 Olympic Games in Rio de Janeiro. In an interview-style-keynote, Botha gave an intimate insight into van Niekerk's journey to the top. She revealed how concerns about the number of injuries he was sustaining led to his switch from the 200m to the 400m and then she gave interesting explanations of the detailed level of planning required for top-level success, the need for speed in the 400m and the power of the coach-athlete relationship. In a roundtable discussion later in the day, Botha



Frank Dick

shared some of her experiences and challenges as a high-performance coach who happens to be a woman.

This report provides an overview of the event by giving short descriptions of the weekend's top sessions. For further details visit the EACA's website <http://athleticscoaches.eu>.

Keynote Presentations

Stefano Morini (ITA) and Marco Bonifazi (ITA) - Creating a High Performance Environment

Morini, Italy's two-time swimming coach of the year and Bonifazi, the Italian Olympic Swim Team's Technical Coordinator, talked about the importance of the 'team' behind the med-

als, with an emphasis on managing the training loads of athletes and understanding the adaptation and maladaptation from those training loads. Their collaborative approach resulted in Gregorio Paltrinieri winning the 1500m Free-style gold medal and the Italian team claiming a total of three medals in Rio.

Brian Cunniffe (GBR) – Integrating Sciences and Coaching

Cunniffe, a performance lead at the English Institute of Sport, gave a presentation on support services in which he reaffirmed the need for a coach-led approach. He spoke about a philosophy of ‘maximising impact and minimising noise’ and provided some interesting observations from the field of sport science and medicine.

Martin Buchheit (FRA) - Monitoring Training Loads

Buchheit, a sport scientist, technologist and the strength and conditioning coach for the Paris Saint Germain Club of French Football’s Ligue 1, focused on the need to quantify training loads in order to better understand the training stimulus as well as to learn from mistakes and from success.

Paolo Benini (ITA) - Winning Psychology

In the final keynote presentation, sport psychologist Benini spoke about the importance

of preparation and planning to ensure athletes are mentally prepared to succeed. He gave coaches some practical pointers around communication and helping athletes to find a winning mindset.

Seminars & Practical Workshops

The expertise in the field of performance and performance science on display in the keynotes was matched in the practical activities by the experience of the presenters. The jumps stream’s sessions on high jump, horizontal jumps and pole vault were led respectively by Wolfgang Ritzdorf (GER), General Manager of the IAAF World High Jump Centre in Cologne, Germany, Elio Locatelli (ITA), the CONI Technical Director of Sport and Olympic Preparation, and Vitaly Petrov (UKR), who has produced a number of world and Olympic pole vault champions - his latest success being Thiago Braz da Silva (BRA), who lifted the Olympic title on home soil a few months earlier. The throws stream focused on the discus and shot put and was led by René Sack (GER), the coach to two-time World Championship medallist Nadine Müller (GER). The track stream was led by hurdles guru Malcolm Arnold (GBR), who talked about both short and long hurdling and shared experiences from his 46 years of coaching athletes to 70 major medals.





Other practice-oriented speakers included human movement expert Vincenzo Canali (ITA), who led a seminar related to injury prevention in high-performance sport in which he emphasised posture and postural control, Giuseppe Banfi (ITA) from the University of Milan, who presented the latest research on cryotherapy in athletics and Daniel Giorgio Di Mattia (ITA), also from the University of Milan, who led a session on the latest anti-doping guidelines and procedures.

The practical sessions also included demonstrations for coaches on how to use technology in their coaching. There was a seminar from CONI's Sports Science department using the biomechanics lab integrated into the Olympic Preparation Centre and product presentations from Beast Technologies and Lisport.

Olympic Debrief

EACA President Frank Dick and Vice President Elio Locatelli reviewed the 2016 Olympic Games in Rio, identifying where Europe's medals were won and lost. Europeans claimed only 25.5% of the medals in athletics, a contin-

uation of the downward trend in world-level results in the last four Olympiads. However, their in-depth analysis did highlight the successes in several technical events as well as the positive progression of a number of Europe's World Junior medallists to Olympic finals. Dick called for Europe's athletic federations and coaches to foster greater cooperation to improve collective performance on the world stage.

Next Edition

The International Festival of Coaching returns to the Italian performance hub of Formia in 2017, from 3rd to 5th November. For programme information and registration details check the EACA website.

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