

LEARNINGS FROM THE 2024 EUROPEAN JUNIOR SWIMMING CHAMPIONSHIPS, VILNIUS, LITHUANIA

Our team performed superbly; and below are some summarised key learnings taken from the GB Junior Team that we want to share, to help GB perform even better in the future:

- All athletes were strong on their “pre-race” timelines. Most swimmers utilised the Prep (S&C) Coach prior to their events with pre-determined routines from their home programmes. That said, more understanding from all coaches and athletes is needed around what prep/priming **is the most suitable for preparing to race**. Some of our best results came where swimmers had primed from their previous race; and maintained a state of “readiness”, having recovered from that previous race. **What’s to learn from this? Could some of the advanced land routines that athletes now do, inhibit performance?** Do coaches fully understand what the land exercises are doing and importantly, do all athletes have a baseline of this type of work? **As a point of note, multiple athletes on the senior team do not do full prep routines prior to every race. The key aspect to preparing to race is increasing body temp (and maintaining it) prior to that race.**
- All athletes had various levels of “**race-processes**” that they wanted to focus on for each race. A key conversation point that the coaching team highlighted extensively was to be “**Process focused – not process heavy**” i.e. swimmers shouldn’t be so overly focused on process; that they become anxious, worried and not actually race “in the moment.”
- 29/29 athletes had a “timeline/plan” to prepare for their race. But only 3/29 swimmers had a timeline/plan of action for post-race. The coaching team positively impacted this over the event to give swimmers greater understanding - that to ‘manage’ a Championship meet of 6+ days long then RECOVERY is the first priority, after and between races. All athletes learnt to “flush” their system first, before changing into their training suit to swim down fully. Only after the full swim down did “coaching conversations” fully take place. This allows the athlete to calm down physically and emotionally, before any discussions take place. **Craig Robertson has this week published more information on Swim Down protocols – please see this for more information.**
- **Competitive level** – Domestically our Juniors are rarely challenged enough to swim fast in the heats of a Championship event. Whilst coaching conversations were had before the event, swimmers only fully realised the actual level of the EJC when they experienced this for themselves. Wherever possible, coaches should be coaching their athletes to swim FAST in the AM at domestic events. Not only does this teach them the importance of performance in the heats, but it teaches them how to fully recover for an important final session, when it matters!
- This links into the above, but a key area for development with our Juniors is to manage emotions during a Championship event. The aim is to keep the “highs and the lows” as minimal as possible. i.e. flattening that undulating wave. Calm consistent emotions over the week to stay on task. **Optimum performance, anytime, anywhere, against anyone.** Pre-race and Post race timelines really help athletes stay on task. The post-race timeline is arguable more important, based on our observations last week. Reframing in the context of their own swimming journey and age, is essential **we are here to perform ... and learn for the future!**
- **Managing racing load.** Many athletes on the Junior team had programmes that **became big** due to the relay team needs of the week. When away with GB, the coaching team will aim to ‘rest’ key swimmers from heat swims, but this cannot always happen. One athlete had to swim 7x100 Back events over the week, on top of other individual races. H-SF-F, individually. Then two relays H & F. This was managed well by the athlete and the group coach. But others struggled with this. **Are we preparing athletes for this sort of load?** (through training preparation and recovery strategies?). As coaches, are we being too ‘soft’ on our swimmers at British Summers/Trials by limiting our athletes to just a couple of races in the week? **Ultimately, are we preparing swimmers for the maximum load potentially requested of them at a Championships event?**

**Any questions please chat with me on poolside at AGB Summers or email me directly
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