

SWAD Program Direction

It was apparent from the change in the level of swimming performance between 2002 IPC World Championships in Argentina and the 2004 Paralympics in Athens that the level of competition and performance in the world of disability swimming will continue to rise. Historically, Canada has been one of the leaders in this area of competitive aquatics. Canadians have excelled in all seven Paralympic events with many of the swimmers winning medals in all seven. As the world changes and the sport evolves it is apparent that producing an all around (a seven event) swimmer is going to become harder and harder. The past two Paralympics have produced 48 and 40 medal performances respectively. To expect this type of performance in Beijing is unrealistic and foolhardy for a number of reasons.

1. The existing National Team is aging and the ability of these athletes to swim all seven events over the 9 day format is unrealistic as the rest of the world begins to specialize in particular events and strokes.
2. In order to increase the talent pool, we must look at developing the existing swimmers in the program and also identify and develop new talent. This point has been identified by the Paralympic Sport Review Process as an area of concern.
3. The rest of the world continues to improve in this developing sport and push the performance bar higher and higher. As a result, people are looking at the sport more like an able bodied sport with stroke specialization and a smaller event repertoire.
4. The result reporting system IPC swimming currently has in place relies on countries to submit their results for the world rankings and the world rankings leading into Athens included times that were done at the 2002 IPC Worlds. As a result, you cannot get a realistic picture of what the rest of the world is doing in competitions. This inevitably leads to a number of surprises at the major events we attend. While it is speculation, many people are contemplating that we will not see a full Chinese squad until we step on to the pool deck in Beijing.
5. We as a country are going to have to be more selective in our opportunities to attain medals in Beijing. Specialization will be a key focus.

Based on these facts, we must develop a plan for the remainder of the quadrennial that will ensure a strong performance in Beijing by the existing National Team and bring along the young swimmers in the country so that they will be ready to compete in 2008, 2012 and beyond.

The 2004-2005 season was a year that saw a number of changes to the SWAD program that have started the program on its road towards Beijing. These changes included:

- § Performances from the Paralympics generate a 2 year card that has traditionally had a +/- 2% maintenance. The maintenance requirement was changed to 1% to keep the swimmers' performance at a level where they can continue to build towards improved performance at 2006 Worlds and then progress from there to 2008.
- § Implementation of the first SWAD Development camps in both the east and west that brought 28 of Canada's young swimmers together and educate them and their coaches about what lies ahead. This program direction will continue through the rest of the quad. As a result of the camps and their impact, we have had 3 new Junior Carding swims; 1 new Senior National swim and 2 new Senior International swims.
- § In co-operation with US Paralympics, the development of the Can-Am Disability Swimming Championships over the rest of the quadrennial that will allow the best SWADs in both Canada and the US to compete head to head twice a year in a effort to provide better competitive opportunities.

- § Providing the National team with programming that provides better international racing opportunities that will allow them to compete against the best in the world on a more regular basis and provide training camp opportunities that will help develop the team over the long term.

The quadrennial plan is the backbone of the program and all other aspects of the program will support the direction of the program in order for it to be successful. It is very important that we have integration of all parts of the program if we are to have success in the future.

The first year of the quadrennial is almost over, but we have seen improvements in various aspects of the SWAD program, but there are a number of areas of weakness that we must address. If we take the time to strengthen and fortify these areas of weakness, the whole program will continue to move forward. The quad plan is the backbone as mentioned above and addressing these points of will enhance and strengthen the quad plan. The quad plan from here on in will be considered a three year plan leading into the Paralympics.

As you can see from the attached Quadrennial Plan, you can see that the basic structure shows 11 cycles until the Paralympics as of September 1st 2005. It basically breaks down into 2 – 18 months cycles. With the first cycle running from September 05 – December 2006 concluding at IPC World Championships in Durbin South Africa. The second cycle runs from January 06 – September 08 concluding at the 2008 Paralympics in Beijing. These 2 – 18 month mesocycles are broken in to 11 macro cycles range in duration from 8-17 weeks approximately. The cycles always culminate with a major meet, either a Can-Am Disability Swimming Championships or a major international competition.

The Can-Am program is very important as it provides a venue for our developing swimmers to experience a pseudo-international competition in a domestic environment. It will be a good testing ground for our developing SWADs to develop the racing skills needed to take them to the world stage.

Another underlying principle of the quad plan is having the swimmers swim as late into the summer as possible. In Beijing, racing starts on Aug 29th, so the swimmers must have the experience of swimming fast in August and the quad plan addresses this with the 2006 World Trials taking place August 8-12 in San Antonio TX and in 2007 the Para Pan-Am Games in Rio de Janeiro August 13-19. There is no problem with having swimmers swim late into the summer as long as adequate breaks are given during the year and the quad plan accounts for this. The breakdown of the quad plan is as follows:

Cycle 1

August 24 – December 11th – 14-16 weeks

End point – Commonwealth Games Trials/ US Open

Regeneration/ Recovery 10-14 days

Cycle 2

December 26th – April 9th – 12-15 weeks

End point – Commonwealth Games/ Can-Am Disability Champs

Regeneration/ Recovery 7-10 days

Cycle 3

April 17th – August 13th – 17 weeks

End point – Can-Am Disability Champs/ World Trials

Regeneration/Recovery 18-21 days

Cycle 4

September 4th – December 10th – 14 weeks

End point – IPC Worlds

Regeneration/ Recovery 14 days

Cycle 5

December 25 – March 18 – 12 weeks

End point – Can-Am Disability Champs/ Para Pan Am Trials

Regeneration/ Recovery 10-14 days

Cycle 6

April 2nd – July 15th – 16 weeks

End point – Can-Am Disability Champs

Regeneration/ Recovery - 6 weeks

Cycle 7

July 16- August 19 – 5 weeks

End point Para Pan Am Games

Regeneration/Recovery – 18-21 days

Cycle 8

September 10 – December 9th – 13 weeks

End point – Can-Am Disability Champs

Regeneration/ Recovery – 10-14 days

Cycle 9

December 24th – March 30th – 14 weeks

End point - Paralympic Trials

Regeneration/Recovery 10-14 days

Cycle 10

April 14th – July 13th – 13 weeks

End point – Can-Am Disability Championships

Cycle 11

July 14 – September 7 – 8 weeks

End point – Paralympic Games

Regeneration/ Recovery – 20-25 days

Cycle 1

September 29 - ?

This basic quadrennial plan will be supplemented with training camps, small international tour teams as well as each individual swimmers own home program as laid out by the home coach.

As the program continues to evolve and move forward, the swimmers must realize their own commitment to the program and the pursuit of swimming excellence. The following 2 concepts are essential to move the program forward.

Concept 1- SWAD National Team – Travel Program

Introduction

In the two years between the 2002 IPC World Championships and the 2004 Paralympics, the performance level in disability swimming rose dramatically. The speculation is that the performance level to gain a medal in Beijing will be greater than that it Athens. Many countries are emerging on to the Paralympic swimming scene with swimmers capable of generating exceptional performances. In order for Canada to keep pace with the rest of the world, Canadian swimmers must continue to push the performance envelope both domestically and internationally.

Travel

One area identified by coaches during the Paralympic Sport Review was the need to get more competitions in the international arena. It is absolutely imperative that our best swimmers have the opportunity to race the best in the world. Over the next three years, swimmers will be provided with opportunities to race the best in the world. Meets will be identified and specific swimmers will be targeted in order to provide them with the best competition possible. Team size and composition will vary from meet to meet in order to prepare the swimmers for the best performance possible in Beijing.

The Program

In order to be eligible for travel, swimmers will have to show a level of domestic competency both in training and in racing.

§ Training competency and commitment

- Training in a SNC club program approved by the National Coach
- Submission of 3-4 month training plans covering all aspects of training
- Based on consultation with the home coach and swimmer, base training levels will be determined for the following phases of a training cycle
 - § Early cycle - (2-4 weeks) - minimum 90% of full commitment
 - § Mid cycle – (4-8 weeks) - minimum 90% of full commitment
 - § Taper – (2-3 weeks) minimum 90% of full commitment
- Base training will include all water workouts and supplemental training including weights, core strength, flexibility, yoga and any other related cross training.
- Fulfilling National Team training camp commitments
- Showing a commitment to swimming excellence through compliance to a structured training program, testing and monitoring.

§ Racing and Competitive Competency

- Based on consultation with the home coach and swimmer, a meet schedule will be outlined where the athlete should be racing on a regular basis during the season and each defined training cycle.
 - § Regular racing provides feedback to the coach regarding fitness levels; ability to perform while fatigued; ability to execute race plans
 - § Ability to progress performances over the course of the season; reliability of performance
- Fulfilling National Team competition commitments
- Showing a commitment to swimming excellence through compliance to a well designed and challenging meet schedule with a minimum of 2 days racing per month.

If a swimmer is unable to or failing to meet the training and racing commitments they have set for themselves, they must inform the National Coach. The swimmer or coach must inform the National Coach of any illnesses, injuries or layoffs from training.

The bottom line is that carded athletes are not guaranteed any funded travel either domestically or internationally unless they are fulfilling their training and competitive commitments domestically.

There will be no easy races or medals in Beijing, competitive and training hardiness must be developed now.

Concept 2 – Training Camp Commitments

A training camp program is being developed to support the direction of the program as it drives towards Beijing and beyond. The training camps are important to the overall development of the team and the individual performances within the team. The commitment level required to produce a podium level performance is full time. All identified swimmers will be invited to the various camps over the course of the quadrennial and there will be a 100% commitment to the camp. There will be no late arrivals or early departures. In order to access all the services available, you will be required to attend the whole camp.

These two concepts will further push the program to the level of excellence that it is going to take to achieve podium performances in Beijing. These concepts build a level of accountability in to the quad plan and are performance oriented.

The Plan

Based on the 36 months left until Beijing and with the framework of the quadrennial plan as a backbone, there are a number of items, concepts and thought process that must integrate in order to have success.

The Standing National Team

All current members of the team must continue to improve training and performance towards Beijing. The major concept to keep in mind about Beijing is as follows:

§ “our event selection for Beijing must be focused and specific in order to optimize our strengths”

Rationale: We need to ensure that our swimmers are in the events that are going to yield the highest rewards. We will not waste time or energies in the pursuit of events that will not help our swimmers get to the podium.

How: Identifying key events now and preparing for IPC Worlds with a broad scope. Re-evaluate after worlds and narrow the scope of the event repertoire for Beijing. Use other major events (Commonwealth Games, Para Pan Ams) to push the performance bar higher.

§ “provide the NT with programming and support that will allow them to challenge the best in the world regularly”

Rationale: Develop competitive hardiness both rested and unrested by racing the best. The more quality racing we do over the next three years, the more prepared we will be for the unexpected in Beijing. Provide a support network that will enhance our ability to race well at any time.

How: Identify international meets that will help the overall development of the NT swimmers and attend. Provide PET support to the NT that will enhance the overall development and performance of the swimmers over the next 36 months.

National Team Development Strategy (NTDS)

One of the underpinnings to the future success of the SWAD program in Canada is the establishment of a program that will identify swimmers and bring them into the National Team stream. The attached document outlines the program and is essentially the framework for the Long Term Athlete Development Strategy that is required if we are to develop swimmers from the point of first contact.

Swimmers are already coming into the system at different levels. A national ranking system is being developed and Swimdirect is allowing us to track athletes that are registered in SNC programs. Off this ranking system and the NTDS, we will be able to identify where the swimmers are inside the NTDS and provide them with certain services. We have identified the need for development camps at the various levels for both the coach and swimmer as part of the LTADS. It is very important that we not only develop the swimmer, but also the coach. The addition of the Can-Am Disability Championships will also support the NTDS and provide developing swimmers with the opportunity to race like swimmers of similar calibre.

The other facet of the NTDS and how it relates to the drive to Beijing and beyond is the need to get some of the potential Paralympians (Junior Carded and developing swimmers) to the major international competitions such as IPC Worlds and Para Pan Ams in order to prepare them for the probability of representing Canada in Beijing.

Objective: Establish a NTDS that will provide swimmers and coaches with performance benchmarks they need to progress a swimmer from club integration to national team. These performance benchmarks will also allow us to support both the swimmer and the coach as they move through the system via a basic monitoring system.

Sports Science and PET support

This system and process is very new in the world of SWAD swimming and as a result, there is not a lot of data or research available at this time. In the past the SS and PET components of the SWAD program have been limited to Massage Therapy and small Physiology component. We know that the therapist component is invaluable and the results we had at 2002 Worlds with the physiologist monitoring swim down protocols and lactates had a significant impact on the performances.

It is very important that we continue to evolve the SS and PET support network to ensure that we are providing our swimmers with answers to questions or problems they may be experiencing.

Objective – over the rest of the quadrennial develop a PET and Sports Science programs that will support optimum performance at all times. Support should include, but may not be limited to Biomechanics, Race Analysis, Nutrition and Wellness, Strength and Flexibility; Psychology and Physiology and monitoring.