The 3rd European Discus and Hammer Conference

Tallinn, Estonia

Offering a speaker line-up that included three legends of the sport and some top coaches, the Estonian Athletic Association, Eesti Kergejõustikuliit, welcomed 71 participants from 12 countries to Tallinn for the 3rd European Discus and Hammer Conference on 16 and 17 October 2015.

The host country’s Gerd Kanter was joined by fellow Olympic champion discus thrower Virgilius Alekna, who appeared in a recording made by video link, and by all-time great hammer thrower Yuriy Sedykh. They and the other speakers on the programme helped to illustrate the conference theme “There are different ways to the top” by discussing their careers and a range of topics, from throwing technique to injury prevention to the composition of their support teams in presentations, practical sessions and panel discussions.

The conference was a part of the 2015 European Athletics Coaching Summit Series.

This report summarises the highlights of the two days.

**Day One**

in athletics. He explained that even though many other top throwers use four turns, the three-turn technique was the best for him and therefore a major factor in his career. Discussing the details of his training, the planning of which was done by the famous coach-academic and 1972 Olympic champion Anatoliy Bondarchuk, he emphasised the importance of throwing throughout the year, using event specific strength exercises and paying attention to maintaining speed. For strength training he would throw hammers of various weights up to 20 kg. He said that one of the most important things for long-term success is to avoid “stupid” injuries, which usually happen outside the circle.

For personal reasons Alekna, Lithuania’s 2000 and 2004 Olympic gold medallist who also won two world championships, one European championship and various minor medals in the discuss over a long career, had to cancel his appearance at the last moment. However, he was able to record an interview by Skype with Estonian coach Ants Kiisa, which was then played during the conference where it was translated by journalist and athletics announcer Timo Tarve.

Following the interview Kanter, the 2008 Olympic Champion who also won the 2007 world championship and many other medals, led discussions with Sedykh on experience and performing at major championships. The two, who are from different generations of top performers compared their views about staying healthy, maintaining stability at a very high level, acclimation, preparing for the qualification competitions throughout the year, etc.

The conference theme of different approaches came up a number of times. For example, Sedykh spoke of how his coach Bondarchuk remained at his side throughout his career while both Alekna and Kanter chose to work without a coach after reaching the top, though both had the strong support of a physiotherapist.

**Day Two**

The second day sessions, which took place in the Tallinn Sports Hall, started with presentations by Estonian coach Indrek Tustit, first on the warm-up and cool down for throwers and then on injury prevention using case studies of Kanter and Märt Israel, the 2011 World University games champion and world championships in athletics 4th placer in the discus.

Israel then led a group of young Estonian discus throwers through a sample training session that included gymnastics, fit ball exercises and hurdle drills.

Kanter followed with a demonstration of key points of discus throwing technique, further illustrating his presentation with video examples of some of the best throws of his career. Kindly filling in for Alekna in this session, Finnish national discus throwing coach and former
thrower Anssi Mäkinen joined the discussion to give his views on the reverse and non-reverse techniques.

Sedykh and Finnish hammer coach Lassi Korhonen presented a selection of hammer throwing drills and assessed the techniques of a group of demonstration athletes. Sedykh said that the majority of coaches can see mistakes, but correcting them is a different matter. It is much easier to teach correct technique from the very beginning than correct the mistakes later. Taking the hammer himself to demonstrate, he said that throwers must keep the hammer in sight and not “be lazy” after the preparation phase of the throw and he compared the transition from the swings to the turns with hitting a golf ball. He also pointed out that the second swing should be accelerating and suggested throwers do throwing exercises with one swing. Korhonen, who focused on the four-turn technique, also demonstrated personally, starting with exercises using a stick. He then turned attention to balance, saying that the lower point of the hammer should be in the middle.

Kanter concluded the session by saying “listening to Yuriy Sedykh I recognise that the main points in hammer throw and discus throw is the same – you can’t correct your technique in later phases – the throw must be correct from the very beginning.“

Follow-up

To help the participants focus and recall the practical sessions on their return home, the second day of the conference was recorded on video and the DVD-s were distributed the next morning in the hotel or sent to the participants’ federations.

A post-conference survey was conducted and approximately half of the participants answered the questionnaire. Over 85% if the respondents agreed or strongly agreed with the statement “The conference as a whole was worthwhile and valuable” and over 90% agreed or strong agreed with the statement “I would recommend that other coaches and athletes from my country take part in future European Athletics Coaching Summit Series conferences."

Reported by Mariken Puks

Mariken Puks works for the Estonian Athletics Federation. She can be contacted at mariken@ekjl.ee