

International Festival of Athletics Coaching

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Glasgow, Scotland

Introduction

The 2011 edition of the International Festival of Athletics Coaching (IFAC) lived up to its name and was a true international affair. With Glasgow set to host the 2014 Commonwealth Games in 2014 – not to mention London's preparations for the 2012 Olympic Games and, later, the 2017 IAAF World Championships in Athletics - there is an unprecedented focus on sport in the city and it warmly welcomed 318 participants from no less than 26 nations from the 28th to 30th of October.

The festival, which serves as the annual conference of the European Athletics Coaching Association (EACA), was hosted by **scot-tish**athletics with support from European Athletics. Joining the athletics-oriented participants were a number of representatives from other sports including football, netball, triathlon, water-skiing and skeet.

The theme for this year's festival was practical application. In addition to the formal presentations and seminars at Glasgow's Marriott Hotel, a number of workshops were staged at two of the city's top sporting venues – Scotstoun Stadium and Kelvin Hall. Seventy-five local athletes participated in these as a part of development days organised in conjunction with the festival.

There was also promotion of health and recreational running through an all-day seminar presented by **jogscotland** and a new feature, the Coaches Mall, designed to encourage exchange of experience, networking and long-term cooperation among the participating coaches.

All in all, the IFAC 2011 was a busy and successful event and both the organisers and participants seemed to be satisfied with the results. This report provides an overview of the main activities of the festival.

Keynote Presentations

The keynote presentations were delivered by a range of top international speakers throughout the three days of the festival.

Vern Gambetta (USA), the founding father of functional sport training gave a talk, entitled "From Chalkboard to iPad – The Evolution of the Art and Science of Coaching Athletics," in which he looked at how the advancements in technology and in society are shaping the way in which we coach.

Wolfgang Ritzdorf (GER), the Director of the IAAF World High Jump Centre in Cologne, addressed the "Challenges in Coaching the Jumping Events." He highlighted the discrepancy between today's performances and those of the 1980s and 1990s and provided a few thought provoking suggestions on how we can advance as a sport from where we are not.

Penny Werthner (CAN), a former Olympian and now a leading sports psychologist who has worked with Canada's top athletes at the last ten summer and winter Olympic Games, spoke about "Managing Anxiety on a Competitive Stage." Werthner's message was clear: in order to succeed at international level, physical preparations need to be complimented with psychological preparations.

Jimmy Beuttah (KEN), the Chief Coach at the IAAF High Performance Centre in Kenya, shared his experiences in helping athletes to “Deliver on the Day” – in particular the coaching philosophy used with Asbel Kiprop, winner of the 1500m at both the 2008 Olympic Games and the 2011 IAAF World Championships in Athletics.

Elio Locatelli (ITA), the Director of the Member Services Department, spoke about “Getting the Best Performance – The Critical Factors.” The internationally renowned speed and long jump expert gave a well-informed synopsis of how coaches can help athletes attain their best performance.

Don Babbitt (USA), the veteran throws coach at the University of Georgia spoke about the “Development to Elite: Across the Throws Disciplines”. He focussed on the importance of developing the technical aspects of each of the throwing events.

Practical Workshops

The IFAC organiser’s new emphasis on practical workshops, which were held at the Scotstoun Stadium and Kelvin Hall, proved to be popular with participants. These sessions encouraged a hands-on approach oriented to different stages of the performance continuum - from development to elite.

In their workshops, the coaching team behind European Junior double sprint champion Jodie Williams – Stan Madiri (ZIM) and Mike McFarlane (GBR) – presented drills for speed development.

Kelvin Giles (GBR) gave one workshop on assessing physical competencies as well as movement skills. In a second session aimed at school sport teachers, he focused on building a strong movement vocabulary for young athletes, in order for activities seen in the sport curriculum to better serve as a foundation for the development of athletes.

Don Babbitt and former international thrower Shaun Pickering (GBR) led workshops cov-



Dalton Grant (l) and Wolfgang Ritzdorf

ering the shot put, hammer and discus as well as one focusing on power training.

The javelin was covered by Terseus Liebenberg (RSA), who is the coach of 2011 IAAF World Championships in Athletics bronze medallist, Sunette Viljoen. Working with a group of developing Scottish javelin athletes, Liebenberg broke down the technical model of the event so the key aspects could be better understood.

Wolfgang Ritzdorf gave two workshops in which he took the participants through the development of reactive strength as well as general jumps drills in two of his practical workshops. He then teamed up with the former European high jump medallist Dalton Grant (GBR) to deliver a innovative Master Class to some of Scotland’s top high jumpers – including video analysis and discussion with the athlete on the “Anatomy of Competition: The Tough Decisions.”

Vern Gambetta delivered three well-attended practical sessions that focused on developing foundational strength and the importance of core strength development as well as remedial exercises for injury prevention.

Vincenzo Canali (ITA) delivered an excellent workshop on athlete conditioning for all events and then he teamed up with renowned pole vault expert, Steve Rippon (AUS), to deliver a

pole vault specific conditioning session and a vaulting clinic with local athletes.

Ian Mirfin (GBR) led the UK's first RaceRunning workshop with coaches and some of the top young athletes in this new event. The session, which was an introduction to the event, also allowed coaches the opportunity to discuss the successful interventions in coaching athletes with a disability.

Seminars

Complementing the keynote presentations and practical workshops, a wide range of seminars designed to promote questions and discussions from the participants were delivered by the feature speakers, workshop leaders and others.

Dave Sunderland (GBR) and his Scottish athlete Lynsey Sharp (European U23 800m bronze medallist) discussed their journey in developing as a young endurance athlete.

Penny Werthner followed on from her keynote to discuss techniques for managing anxiety as well as the role that coaches can play in an athlete's psychological preparations.

Elio Locatelli led two fascinating seminars on his specialist events, sprints and jumps, using the latest biomechanical research to enhance discussion.



Terseus Liebenberg (!)

Toni Minichiello (GBR), coach to Jessica Ennis (2010 European Heptathlon Champion and 2011 World Heptathlon silver medallist), based his series of interactive seminars on his experience developing Ennis from an eleven year-old. Included were discussions with coaches on the transition of athletes from promising juniors to senior international performers.

Jimmy Beuttah drew on his coaching experiences to discuss building the complete endurance athlete and preparing for major championships.

Laura Forrest (GBR), sport physiologist from sportscotland Institute of Sport, gave an insightful seminar on understanding and harnessing physiology in the context of training and performance.

Emma Gardner (GBR), sports scientists at Lucozade Sport, discussed nutrition in her seminar entitled "Mouth to Muscle: Fuelling Performance."

Frank Dick (GBR), the EACA President, used his seminar to look at the coaching profession, how coaches can utilise coaching associations and the development a meaningful coaches' licence.

Coaches' Mall

The Coaches' Mall was a new addition to the 2011 IFAC programme was an opportunity for coaches to further develop their knowledge and to energise their personal coaching networks. This innovative format saw coaches mixed into groups by sport, event and nationality for open discussions, ensuring a variety of different perspectives were shared.

Each group was given a series four questions related to coaching and training problems and participants were encouraged to share their personal experiences and knowledge. At the end of the session each group shared their three key points from each question, which were all collated and then distributed to all participants at the end of the festival.

Closing Address

The festival was closed with the EACA President's address in which Frank Dick highlighted the current levels of European performances and success on the global stage.

IFAC 2012

Looking ahead to IFAC 2012, delegates can expect an equal focus on practical sessions with longer workshops as well as a break down to different athlete development stages. After a busy year in international athletics, we will also take the time to analyse the performances at

the 2012 European Athletics Championships in Helsinki and the 2012 Olympic Games.

Registration information and announcements about the format and speaker line-up are available at www.ifacscotland.co.uk.

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