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## Water Polo Conference , Day 2 – Experts take part in round-tables and more panels

Russell McKinnon, FINA Media Committee Member NZL)

Day two of the FINA World Water Polo Conference concentrated heavily on “the other side” of the sport – sponsorship, marketing and what big companies desire for their advertising dollar. Then coaches and experts took over for several round-table sessions in the afternoon.

The five continents were represented with coaches and water polo experts giving their opinions.

### Session 1

The first session of the day was dedicated to staging exciting events.

Luke Campbell, of Great Big Events, presented his company’s ethos of how best to display sport to gain the biggest reaction, promotion and enthusiasm. GBE was responsible for the presentations of all the disciplines at Budapest 2017.

He spoke of innovation and the use of music, large video screens, voice of the event, graphics and packages, scripts, broadcast coverage, sport protocols, results and timing, technical infrastructure, cameras, pyrotechnics and setting the atmosphere.

Campbell spoke of how innovations included the introduction of athletes; crowd engagement; music suitable for local consumption; tweets on the big screen and the assimilation of statistics.

“It’s important to choose the right people to work at each of your events.”

He said the person needs to know the sport, the terminology and know when and when not to speak.

“This is an integral part of the element.”

Paola Bosio, a sport presentation expert, based her presentation around entertaining fans in a positive attitude to create an unforgettable water polo event. She stated that music is 50% of the success of the event and that a professional DJ is a must for a major event. She reiterated what Campbell introduced with energetic music and the use of professional speakers, “not those improvising”.



"The speaker becomes the professional voice. The speaker needs to educate the fans. His/her role is "to entertain, pre, post and during the match".

She suggested there could be two speakers with one just covering the match.

"They must be good speakers and you need to train them."

She also suggested that there be artistic swimmers, graphics for goals, swim-ups, timeout, kiss cam, fancy dress, dancing and children. This could contain dancers, acrobats, cheerleaders and light shows.

The next theme was on how to make the game more attractive.

Jochen Farber, head of Olympic Channel Services, was joined by Peter Diamond, NBC Executive Vice President Programming, and Marco Birri, LEN expert.

Farber said the Olympic Channel, launched after the Rio 2016 Olympics, contains 11,000 pieces of content, which is all available to federations.

The channel has 6.7 million followers on social media and 1.4 billion views since August 22, 2016.

The idea is to become a comprehensive sport database with current and historical results. Diamond said the sport of aquatics is helping in "making improvements" and that "everybody is moving in a like-minded direction".

He pleaded with water polo to "stop the whistles. People just don't understand. If you're trying to attract a wider audience, reduce the whistles. "International Ice Hockey has got it right. Let the players play."

He asked for referees to be "brought into the game" by "microphoning" them so that spectators can hear what decisions are,

more quickly.

He said FINA had made a lot of progress across all its events.

“The key word is modernise.” He said the first and most important thing is to fill venues. “Cameras are drawn to empty seats.”

He urged organisers to rig nets with lighting for when goals were scored and anything that can be done to the field of play to make it clearer.

“Clarity, simplicity and understanding for spectators, was important.”

Friendly statistics were also a must, he said.

Like in Cancun, Mexico four years ago, he stated that television operates in half hours and that water polo at 67 minutes a match was the wrong length. It needed to be inside the hour or 90 minutes. Building stars and doing everything possible federations can do on social media was the best way to enter the competitive landscape around the world.

“It is time to act. If you don’t act you will fall behind. Seize the initiative with the enthusiasm coming out of this meeting.”

Birri, on making the game more attractive, said we needed to make the game more “visible”.



He stated that the sport had excitement, impressive skills, crowds and exposure. There were benefits and he touched on brand development, creating logos, coherent branding guidelines, advertising banners. The field of play needs to look like an arena and spectators must say “that this is an event”. He believes it is a good television product, but the format needs to be

short and spectators given clear and informative graphics.

“Make it easy to understand and create a show and also respect the competition schedule (for television). He mentioned “storytelling” as a way to promote our athletes.

## Session 2

Pere Miro, Deputy Director, International Olympic Committee, gave an interesting and humorous talk on Water Polo and the Olympic Games.

“Credibility, values, understanding, fair. This is credibility.”

In sustainability, maybe it could be development. Maybe to go beyond what you are doing today.



“The youth is not interested in the Games. I am thinking which kind of synergies could be used in water polo.

“There is a need for modernisation; the need to adapt to the evolving society. Our public is probably beyond 40s. Under 40s, youth interested less and less in the traditional way we present the sport.

“We need to analyse each Games for the next Games. No one is safe,” he said of each sport.

“Everyone needs to be reviewed. For 2020, you have been the only team to increase the number of teams. That is thanks to your executive, especially your president.”

He said that we need to become more and more attractive. As a former Spanish first-league player, he said the game used to be fast, more dynamic.

### Sports sponsorship and partnerships

Richard Tattershaw, founder of Sport Hit Factory and director of marketing of Sport Group was the lead speaker.

“Sport is up against stiff competition. We’re up against Disney, the whole of Silicon Valley, more homework and parents have less time to take kids to sports events.

“Their playing field is a screen -- a screen is in every pocket. There is a growing gap between the international

federations, domestic federations and the market place. It is exploding in all directions.

“How does that body take on entertainment, on Disney, who is also in the entertainment business?”

Creating the right product for the market, creates market value, which drives revenue. Hockey redesigned itself and went to the market, he said.

“Water polo is awesome as a product, not the game.”

He spoke of the “market needs” and the success of 20-20 cricket.

“Sport generates unique passion and emotion. If you can capture love with your product, you can make hits.”

Kristian Gotsch, director of EMEA, Two Circles, spoke on evolving the sponsorship model. He brought insight to the way companies think when spending money on sponsorship, with target markets. He mentioned Brands, rights holders, media and fans. Everything is in flux. Fans are changing the way they access information. The media landscape has changed as has rights holders’ assets, because of technology. Brand strategies have changed, as well. Brands have gone digital more than television in 2016.

How to grow our sport beyond the Olympic Footprint

Dale Neuburger, Chairman of the FINA Development Commission said how FINA has allocated almost \$11 million this year towards the programme.



There are to be 160 clinics for coaches and referees with an average investment of \$7500. FINA Schools have a \$US360,000 budget for 60 schools a year. A coaches’ certification programme will have 50 clinics with an average \$US6000.

The FINA National Development Programme will see nine courses at an average cost of \$US80000. The main aim is to lift

performance at all levels. FINA will send professionals to assist countries, enabling emerging federations to structure their technical staff as well as to train them.

Other programmes include the FINA Olympic aquatics support programme with \$US25.000 for 209 federations; the e-learning platform to promote, educate coaches, officials, administrators; managers' programme for five courses per year; and the FINA Continental Support Programme with an annual budget of \$570.000, to offer support to carry out promotional activities.

Yiannis Giannouris spoke of the strategic objectives to develop water polo globally and gender equality.



He said 66 men's teams and 47 women's were competing at world level. He spoke of conducting a coaches' clinic in India and presented all the figures. He then showed Egypt and the increased opportunities there.

He displayed his thoughts on what was needed to expand the sport around the world. Ratko Rudic, four-time Olympic champion coach, said "competition is the heart of the system".

He said there was a need to review the current FINA competition system at all levels. He said more national federations needed to be motivated to enter continental qualification. Development programmes need to be introduced to gain more youth engagements. He agreed with "95%" of the water polo rules proposals. He said the rules need refreshing, respecting traditions, but also to explore innovative ideas. He promoted the need to produce a video rule book based on video material. There was also a need for a less static and more dynamic game.

Bartolo Consolo, FINA Honorary Member, spoke on grassroots development. He said only 17 countries compete in Olympics, 10 from Europe. He gave other statistics with only 35 countries competing at junior world championships. His strategies included grassroots development at club and school level and to assist national federations to development instructors to teach "swim and play with the ball": to promote and disseminate good practices that encourage initiatives for national federations and clubs to organise grassroots events.

The "swim and play with the ball programme" is to be confirmed by FINA. It is for children 7-11 to "know and practise water polo".

He also said the HaBaWaBa project (Happy Baby Happy Ball" project, which included 185 teams and 4800 participants.

The day's closing sessions concentrated on the round-table discussion and thoughts from continents and athletes about the new rule proposals.

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