ASA South East Region

Off shore Competition – Geneva 2016

21st January to 25th January 2016

**Team Manager’s Report**

**John Rowley & Elizabeth Rowley**

Pre - camp organisation was efficiently and effectively completed by Kristie Jarrett (SER Regional Development Officer) and John Rowley (Team Manager). The prompt team selection meant we could get paperwork out quickly. The production of a booklet early in the run up to the event containing detailed information about the Camp was widely welcomed by parents and swimmers.

The Team met at Group check in Heathrow Terminal 5 and all team members were punctual and brought the required paperwork. British Airways check in was also efficient and swimmers had plenty time to obtain food before boarding. There was time and space at the Group Check In area to distribute the swim kit to the swimmers as they arrived. Geneva was a short flight 1hour 30 minutes.

On arrival in Geneva a representative from the Swiss club met the team. We were given named travel cards that gave us free travel on public transport for our entire stay. The club minibus transported our luggage and two members of staff to the hotel to check in and collect room keys. The Athletes, coaches and one Team Manager went straight to the pool via public transport for a one-hour training session. Going to the venue gave us all an opportunity to check out the venue and get a feel for the competition ahead. The whole group then returned for an evening meal and Team Talk before retiring to bed at approx. 10.00pm

Each day we had breakfast at 6.00am and then caught a bus at approx. 6.30am to arrive in plenty of time to do a pre-pool session prior to the warm up at 7.30am. Warm up lasted 75 minutes and ended 15 minutes before racing began. This early arrival also enabled us to secure a good position on poolside.

The heats generally finished about 12.30 and the team returned to the hotel for a rest. We split into two groups so that the athletes who finished early left early with one TM and one coach, the others returning slightly later with the other coach and TM. Athletes were able to buy lunch provisions from a supermarket opposite the hotel. This system enabled every one to have at least two hours rest in their rooms before returning for the Finals in the late afternoon. Everyone agreed that this break/downtime was beneficial. Journey time on the bus was about 20 minutes and buses were every 10 minutes.

The evening finals finished about 7.15pm enabling us to return to the hotel for our evening meal at 8.00pm. Meals consisted of a starter, main course and dessert. The dietary needs of all the athletes were met. Breakfast buffet was very good; tap water was available and perfectly safe to drink. The kitchen manager was extremely helpful and concerned that we had exactly what we wanted.

On the final day we decided to reschedule our main meal at lunchtime, to enable us to take the athletes out for a brief tour of central Geneva on Sunday evening – much appreciated by the swimmers. The hotel went to great lengths to make this happen. We did feel it was necessary and appropriate to purchase a small gift for the Hotel staff.

The hotel was very comfortable and staff very helpful. It was located close to the main rail station – Gare Cornavin - giving easy access to the airport. It was a five-minute walk from a direct bus route to the pool, approx. 23 minutes away. We became very familiar with the Number 11 bus route during our short stay in Geneva. The area the hotel was located in felt very “safe” and the hotel was extremely quiet and well-soundproofed rooms meant that all got good nights sleep.

The flight home was again smooth and all parents were present at the airport to collect their sons/daughters. One girl travelled home alone but the TM spoke to her mother to ensure this was okay and the swimmer was escorted to the bus station at Heathrow by a chaperone.

One swimmer, Thomas Flaherty returned home on the first day due to illness. He first felt unwell as soon as we arrived in Geneva – heavy cold, cough and temperature. TM – Liz discussed with parents via phone and it was agreed that he should return home, as he was unable to swim. Parents paid for an Easy Jet flight back to Luton and TM John took Thomas to the airport and saw him through check-in.

The swimmers conducted themselves in a professional manner at all times. They were punctual, polite, focused and a delight to work with. Clearly the strict selection procedure had ensured that the right calibre of swimmer was participating. Their performances in the pool were very good and they received very thorough feedback from the coaches.

We were disappointed that we didn’t get the cash prize for top team (which we were) but apparently that money goes to top club team – which we were not.

David Murphy from Oxford won top junior boy and won a very nice Swiss watch and 750 CHF.

The Team Managers queried some of our DQs. On one of them the referee refused to show us the DQ card but 50 minutes later the TM persuaded the referee that we were entitled to see the card. This reminded us that TM need to know precise FINA rules about making a protest as we had to do some hasty reading up on laptops and mobiles on poolside.

However, overall a highly successful off shore camp in every respect.

**Swimmer Evaluation**

We carried out a verbal evaluation session with the swimmers. These were their comments:

* Made new friends and being in a team with people of similar age/aspirations. Really bonded well, especially boys
* Liked the challenge of racing against the unknown
* Stepping outside their comfort zone – gave them confidence
* Swimming tired – a challenge
* Really enjoyed the whole event, felt cared for by the staff
* When a swimmer went home ill they realized this was serious
* Gained experience/knowledge of the standards expected at an International Meet.
* Swimming in a different environment against different competitors valuable
* Opportunity to get a trials’ qualifying time
* Meet people from other countries. Broke down some barriers. Gave us confidence
* Be a team
* Male bonding (the inscrutable alphabet game). ‘Not laughed this much ever’
* Being coached by other coaches, new experience, valuable, made us look at our technique afresh.

General points made in discussion

* Learning about swimmers as people, not just competitors.
* Getting long course competition experience.
* Better than last year. The rest time was required and valued. Replicated experience at Nationals and higher-level competitions.
* Food – Handling own nutrition
* Different beds, sharing with different people
* Transport was excellent. Buses frequent, free tickets, civilized.
* Swimming in a different pool. Different languages for the start of the race.
* Race differently – ‘they race back end’.
* Good experience being in races with swimming superstars
* Sitting at dinner made us bond.
* Enjoyed mealtimes where we all sat on 1 large table
* Bonding did help our performance, swimmers got behind each other. Group cohesion.

What could be improved?

* Expressed a desire for relays to add to the competition, especially between the competing national teams.

**Team Manager’s Perspective**

WHAT WENT WELL?

* Pre trip Paperwork and organisation, greatly helped by Kristie Jarrett.
* Booklet was clear and useful
* Selection procedure for swimmers ensured we had high calibre, serious swimmers
* Swimmers were punctual and professional at all times. Their behaviour and attitude exemplary. Other coaches made positive comments to us.
* Coaches were experienced and quickly created good relationships with swimmers.
* The Team official was also an excellent chaperone and it was useful to have that extra member of staff
* The staff team worked well together, decision-making shared.
* Host club was helpful and welcoming. Official was given lunch every day.
* Early arrival on poolside gave time for pre - pool and warm up.
* The rest period at the hotel in the middle of the day was very good. All Team members agreed this had been extremely helpful.
* British Airways flights were good – group bookings and group check in excellent. 23 kg luggage allowance was needed and essential
* The Hotel was very comfortable and staff very helpful. Good location
* Food very good. All dietary needs catered for and staff gave us flexibility with timings.
* Free and frequent public transport – excellent
* Tap water drinkable so no need for expensive bottled water
* Team kit looked very good and was high quality

WHAT DIDN’T GO SO WELL

Conversion rates of Swiss Francs to pounds in Foreign Exchange meant we ‘lost’ money

SUGGESTIONS FOR NEXT YEAR

* Paperwork needs to ask for everything in one hit e.g. photographic permission and a photo of each swimmer
* Don’t need a biography for each swimmer – many swimmers didn’t provide them and the ones that did weren’t used on website.
* Swimmers need two T-shirts – one for poolside and one for dry.
* Swimmers would like shorts
* Because the hats don’t say ENGLAND on them no-one would swap hats with them!!
* Swimmers need racing hats
* Staff need their own rooms
* Need to make it clear that if a swimmer feels unwell before the camp they should not attend. The statement of fitness needs revising or firming up.
* It needs to be made clear that any swimmer returning home ill or for any other reason is at their own cost.
* Consider a brief team building exercise /introducing everyone to each other at the start of the trip.
* SER provided a generous float. (£900) We would suggest that TM’s take less cash, as money is lost when currency is converted.
* Would suggest a float of about £500 in cash but take a credit card with no foreign transaction charges for emergencies.

**Conclusion**

Our experience was very positive throughout. Overall we would recommend attending this meet next year.

**John Rowley**

**Elizabeth Rowley**

**Logistics and Practicalities**

**Transport**

**Heathrow and en route**

Arranged to meet at Group Check In Zone G Terminal 5. Spacious area - easy to spot swimmers when they arrived. Team able to change into kit. British Airways and the Group Check In procedures were extremely efficient. Could check in at different times if necessary as long as booking reference was known

Team Managers had to use taxi to airport due to the additional size and weight of kit.

Once airside a meeting place agreed with swimmers – reminded swimmers they had our mobile numbers. Plenty of time to eat, stock up on drinks and look around shops.

On our return we again got to Geneva airport with plenty of time to spare. Enabled us to do a verbal evaluation with swimmers, where we split into smaller, more manageable groupings

**In Geneva**

Initial trepidation about negotiating the buses trams and trains in Geneva was unnecessary. Geneva is a compact city with an integrated transport network of which the city is proud.

We made the following journeys:

* Airport to Pool
* Pool to Hotel and back
* Hotel to Airport 1 (By Buses)
* Hotel to Airport 2 (By Train)
* Transport from the Airport to Pool, at Centre Sportif des Vernets. Took the train to Gare Cornavin, which is one stop, just under 10 minutes, and transferred to a Number 15 Tram straight outside the station. Travelled to Acacias. Both Trams and buses have displays that chart the route and the up coming stops. It was very straightforward. The walk to the pool was along the banks of the river L’Avre. It took about 10 minutes.
* The journey from the pool to Hotel was made numerous times. The number 11 route from Vernets to Grand-Pre took just over 20 minutes. The Hotel was a 5-minute walk from the bus stop. Buses ran every 10 minutes with a slightly different schedule on a Sunday (Dimanche). The Number 11 bus returning to the Hotel has the Jardin Botanique as the final destination on that route. Going to the Pool it has Bout-de-Monde.

The travel cards provided by the Hotel need to be carried with some form of identification like the EHIC card or a driving license. On one journey 4 inspectors got on the bus and checked everyone’s tickets and Travel cards. It seems all Hotels in Geneva provide the travel cards, and there use makes getting round the city straightforward and easy.

* When a swimmer returned home on the Friday we used the bus service outside the Hotel. A Number 8 bus from Canonniere one stop to Vidollet, changing onto the Number 5, which travels to the Airport passing the Untied Nations buildings. The journey time was about 25 minutes.
* When we discovered that the Central Station Cornavin was a 10-minute walk down the hill we decided on our return to the airport we would use the train. Trains ran very frequently to cover the short distance to the airport, which is comparatively close to the city center. The journey time was under 10 minutes and there is a regular service throughout the day.

The area of the Pool has the landmark Rolex Building opposite. A large Ice Hockey Rink was adjacent to the main car park.

**The Hotel**

The Hotel Ibis Centre Nations - was accommodating and flexible. The Restaurant manager was particularly helpful. Our requests about rooming, (Boys on one floor girls on another) and our dietary needs were all taken care of. The bright modern décor of the downstairs space that we used regularly for team meetings was just right for our needs.

* Note that you need to use your room key in the lift to activate an instruction.
* Beds comfortable and soundproofed, but small.
* The hotel also had free Wi-fi, which was accessed by a password given with the room keys. This was helpful enabling the sending of Photos and information back to England.
* No kettles in rooms
* Electrical plugs – didn’t need Swiss plugs; there was also EU plug sockets in rooms & hotel was happy to loan converters if asked.
* Breakfast was buffet style, and plenty of choice. Fruit Salads, Yogurts, numerous types of bread and rolls, Coffee, tea on tap, continental breakfast choices of Croissants etc.
* Dinner was three courses, and no meal disappointed. However service was slow so meals took between 60-90 minutes. Resulted in revising lights out times.
* After dinner we used the restaurant space to debrief. If the restaurant had been busier we would have used the area to the left of the reception desk. The open plan nature, and our being sensitive to other guests of the Hotel meant there was always an option.

**The Meet - Geneve Natation 1885 – Challenge International**

The meet attracted some ex world an Olympic medalists. Laslo Cheh was the big draw. Everywhere he went he was asked for his autograph and he delivered in the pool breaking several meet records. The prize money on offer was a pull factor for these VIP swimmers. The three days of competition were of a high standard. Laslo Cheh was the big draw. Everywhere he went he was asked for his autograph and he delivered in the pool breaking several meet records. Flanders was the other big international Meet happening at the same time where the ASA’s England team was competing. Listening to the American swimmers who were following the circuit, the next stop would be Luxemburg.

For our swimmers the competition was not the elite VIP swimmers but the young swimmers from national federations. We were essentially up against young swimmers from France, Hungary, Switzerland, Algeria and Slovenia. Our team was well balanced and on paper potentially strong. But we didn’t get the programme until the morning of the first day, which meant we were flying blind in terms of swimming and race strategies.

Day One we did well, Day 2 was exceptional, and the team buzz was really exciting. A little bit of tiredness crept into Day three but there were still some fine performances. The medal tally was excellent: 6 golds, 10 Silvers, 10 bronze. The momentum and success on the first day carried through to the subsequent events on Day 2 and 3.

A high percentage of heat swims were turned into qualification for finals in the evening sessions. Even for those who missed out on a Podium position, the experience of racing at this level and against the international athletes was valuable. Because most of the South East Region Team was involved there was no chance of boredom or negativity.

There was some confusion in the final presentation whether we counted as a club, or a team. We were in fact a team, and not eligible for any prizes.

David Murphy’s 200 Breaststroke performance on Day 1 earned him the top Junior award of 750 Swiss Francs and a beautiful watch. His Fina points score and his emphatic victory had set down a marker on Day 1 for rest of the weekend

**Issues**

Switzerland operates under FINA rules but as George, our Meet Official, noted there was some subtle differences in implementation. Warm ups are far less structured than in Britain.

* The two DQs of Alicia and Sophia for the same reason in consecutive heats led to email exchanges with Guildford coach Richard Garfield, which was fielded by Amanda. She spoke to the referee to clarify the infringement, and there were no grounds for protest.
* The DQ of David Murphy in the 100 Breast gave the coaches concern. After several conversations with the referees we finally got to see the documentation. It was not possible to challenge the official’s decision as the lead referee endorsed the DQ, which became a matter of race fact. However, the openness experienced when dealing with Alicia and Sophia’s DQ was less in evidence with David. Referee refused to let us see the DQ slip until 50 minutes after the race.

**Things to improve**

* Clarify who is in the running for the cash prizes in the pre competition documentation.
* The final presentation of the individual prizes on the podium was disorganized
* Publish a points running total midway through the Meet for clubs in the running for prizes
* To also publish points total for National teams to add an extra level of competitive excitement
* Some contradictions between info received in advance and reality. There were fines for not achieving QTs as Mount Kelly discovered

**The Competition**

Well run, good organization. On arrival Team manager had to get accreditation passes from the meet office. This was not as clearly signposted as it could have been. It was also the place where officials reported. These enable individuals to get on poolside. Passes are surrendered on entry to a young girl at the bottom of the staircase, on leaving the pool deck a pass is given out.

On arrival start sheets are put in named trays behind the Meet desk going into the pool. We were given 3 copies, which was all we needed. On several days we accesses the start sheets and results on a computer. This proved very helpful. Geneve operates its own free Wi-fi system, ‘Ville de Geneve’ which you log on and get a 4-digit code, which is sent to mobile.

Continental Meets are strangely lax on health and safety issues. Sprint lanes in the warm up are not rigorously policed and a different etiquette operates. No requirement to notify meet of intention to take photographs or video.

For example Officials do not operate lap cards in distance swims; it is up to a representative of the club/ team to count down the race at the opposite end to the start. Most did not bother with the cards, which is a very different philosophy.

The Pool was large enough to segregate Coaches /swimmers from Officials. Blue barriers were erected that kept 2 distinct areas. There was a 25-metre swim down pool, which was hidden behind a plastic curtain.

Apparently there had been twice as many swimmers in 2015; this meant there was more than enough space to cater for the demands placed on the venue in 2016. VIP swimmers had an area very close to the start. The Swiss Team, which was large, was based behind the erected seating where we based ourselves. They had brought their own physio who worked on their swimmers throughout the meet. We were called the SOUTH EAST ENGLAND REGIONAL TEAM in the programme.

A senior swimmer in our team took Pre Pool each day in the area next to the swim down pool. The 25 metres Swim down pool adjacent to main 50m pool, was extremely well used by our swimmers who had been given programmes to pursue while away by their coaches.

Few spectators – lacked a bit of atmosphere, especially on the Friday.

When videoing the best vantage point for filming a race is behind the spectators, but then you are a long way from the team. Every now and then someone will walk through your shot. On Day 2 and 3 Videoing took place from the pool deck, to allow to the taking of Podium photos and managing issues like the lap cards for our distance swimmers.

The venue was perfect for the level of the meet. The personnel that run the event do so professionally.

**The Centre Sportif Des Vernets**

There is a cafeteria and restaurant on the main floor. To go to the Cafeteria requires collecting an Accreditation pass and returning it when returning to the pool deck.

Restaurant offered a wide range of food (expensive and not many healthy options).

The Club Geneve Natation 1885 has it administrative offices opposite the Restaurant.

**John Rowley**

**28 January 2016**