

## Talent Pathways for Water Polo for Regions and Nationally

A meeting with Rachel Bailey, Swim England Head of Performance held via Zoom on Friday 5<sup>th</sup> February 2021

Attendees: Rachel Bayley, Swim England Head of Performance; Stuart Noyce, Chairman of Swim England South West Region Water Polo Technical Committee and Mike Coles, Secretary of Swim England South West Region Water Polo Technical Committee.

- RB explained that the meeting was a chance to catch up with the regions as regards to their various programmes to check these programmes “dovetailed” into the national programmes.
- Her role was to oversee the talent pathway for British Swimming and Swim England talent pathway which had Norman Leighton still in post as Talent ID Officer for logistics and on the ground.
- She had strategic oversight for direction of travel and budget, and was also working hard at a British Swimming level.
- She was checking that the programme was fit for purpose, etc.
- She also as responsibility for the DiSE Programme for aquatics, which looks after 176 aquatic places for 16–19-year-olds. There were 26 places for water polo, 13 for artistic swimming, and 17 divers, the remainder of places were given over to swimmers.
- Participants had to cover a number of different units including psychology, nutrition, finance, careers, Health & Safety to progress along the talent pathway.
- The course was formerly run by Dudley College, but Swim England had taken it in-house, and it was now overseen by Loughborough College.
- The course commenced in September and finished in June, and participants were given credits on completing the course towards university places.
- They work through workbooks and a number of talent camps, as well as sessions for psychology and nutrition, and these could also be used by non-DiSC camp members who were on the national talent programme.
- All the assessors on these courses are from aquatic backgrounds, and the majority of participants were distance learners.
- It was felt that these courses needed to be publicised more across the South West, as only MC had knowledge of these courses.
- SN explained to Rachel that the South West’s head coaches for water polo, Simon Tomlinson and John Spicer were appointing the various coaches to run the age groups across the South West, and in so doing were introducing these coaches to further expertise and knowledge, and so giving a coaching programme.
- At the moment in the South West, we only have the regional academy, but the pandemic had severely curtailed expansion of this programme. We were looking to split the region into three areas so more session could be held at a development level, the North with Bristol and Cheltenham; Somerset, Wiltshire and Dorset; and finally, Devon and Cornwall. This has been put on hold.
- Rachel explained that the whole point of the meeting was to get a much smoother pathway set up, with staff and increasing their knowledge and coaching skills. However, she felt that the South West were on the right track.
- We put across the point that in the South West we are trying to align ourselves with the talent pathway, but were hindered by lack of money due to the pandemic, and a fear of membership numbers in the near future.

- There was further a lack of a consistent calendar of events coming from British Swimming and Swim England. There always seems to be a last-minute decision at the top level, which then has a knock-on effect, where the local events have to be cancelled because of a national camp or competition being arranged at short notice.
- Rachel agreed that this is something that needs to be changed, and she was working hard on this.
- Inter-regions have had to revert back to the volunteer workforce due to Swim England not having the staff in place.
- The importance of this competition is, for some players, the highest level that some reach, and as such can encourage players to go on to represent their clubs in the British Water Polo League.
- The NAGs Competition, it was felt, was at the wrong time of the year and the South West only had one team enter in the last competition, and therefore, in terms of national selection, we are happy that the nomination of players, at present, comes from our South West Head Coaches rather than players being seen at various competitions.
- Rachel continued that there was presently a review of the personnel and competition framework, and how to take this forward.
- SN expressed his concerns that any review always went from the top down, when it really needed to be looked at from the grassroots level up. Rachel agreed and that's why she is looking to the region's infrastructure including support of coach development.
- It was felt that the regions are doing a lot of the work that should be done at club level, but because of lack of training or time, it is not being completed.
- Rachel added that she did not have a lot of knowledge of county level water polo, and asked for clarification.
- MC and SN explained that the region's inter-county competition had grown in recent years and had representatives from all the counties that made up the region.
- Most of the counties held their own events within their clubs to give them a selection process for the county teams.
- Discussion took place on the retention of players, as it was perceived that there was a massive drop off of players when they reached 18. One thing it was felt, was the development of the British Water Polo League which encouraged players to move into the senior game.
- Rachel mentioned "bio-banding" which takes place in rugby and football, and whether it could be used in water polo structures.
- Rachel asked how many deep-water pools there were across the South West, and how many clubs. MC replied that there were eight deep-water pools and 28 clubs playing water polo.
- The question was asked regarding coach and officials' qualifications, and how, over the last few years, water polo had suffered with the lack of courses, and how Swim England would be addressing this over the coming years. The response was that slowly this was being addressed with courses and tutors being processed, as well as officials courses moving to online. However, it was felt that this was a continual process, and coaches needed to be aware of CPDs. It was hoped that the South West's water polo coaches forum would become a medium for this to happen in future years.
- MC asked Rachel the question that had been asked in the Technical Committee's meeting regarding the payment to coaches and team managers attending talent camps in the region. She replied that she thought there had been cross wires regarding this. Apparently, some regions had requested an appropriate figure to pay coaches and team managers, and Swim England had replied with what they thought was a realistic figure if regions wanted to pay, but it was not obligatory. She would check that this was the case with Claire Coleman and get straight back to us. There has not been any such response.
- Rachel was thanked by SN and MC for the time and information given, and hoped she would remain in post for a good few years.