

CASE STUDY

LINCOLN SWIMMING COACH MAKES A SPLASH IN THE US

In the summer of 2008, Nigel West – head coach at Lincoln Pentaqua Swimming Club– spent three weeks in California in a bid to learn from some of the country’s top coaches. He got there with the support of a SkillsActive Nancy Ovens Bursary – aimed at helping provide people with the opportunity to capitalise on the wealth of potential learning opportunities within the sport and active leisure sector both in the UK and abroad.

A coach for more than 22 years, Nigel has a great understanding of the sport of swimming and coaching at a high level, but has always made a conscious effort to continue to expand his skills.

“I have always said that the day you stop learning is the moment you lose desire and stop delivering,” Nigel says. “Swimming evolves every year, with new technology, new training ideas, new science backup, new land training benefits and new standards of achievement.”

Nigel’s first week in the US was spent at the University of Southern California in Los Angeles shadowing head coach Dave Salo and his three full-time assistants. UC had eight Olympic swimmers of varying nationalities training at the time – including 200m Olympic breast stroke champion Rebecca Soni.

The athletes’ morning training sessions included core work, weights and running the steps of the stadium’s viewing gallery. They then moved on to stroke specific training in the afternoon, which they repeated six days a week with only a Wednesday afternoon off and Sunday rest.



“Dave Salo has a different philosophy on coaching compared to other coaches and is renowned for his variety and fun practises,” Nigel says. “His sets are not that great in total and distance but he makes his swimmers attain goal times in training all the time. He usually only does one session in the pool a day from 2 to 4pm and works hard on the core in the morning sessions which start at 6am.”

Nigel’s second week was spent about 500miles north in Tuscon at the University of Arizona. Here, he worked alongside head coach Frank Busch – assistant coach to the American team at the Beijing Olympics. In 2008, the university won both the male and female National Collegiate Athletic Association Championships in swimming.



“Frank sent 20 of his swimmers to Beijing, so again, he was a fantasist coach to learn from and had a great amount of respect. His office was ordained

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NIGEL WEST

with many trophies won by his teams and himself. Three of his assistants and I took many of the training sessions, with a specialised strength coach taking the gym and core sessions. The training here was more conventional and the swimmers had more time off during the week. The use of long course training was minimal, with only three or four sessions during both weeks I was in Tuscon. This surprised me as in the UK we tend to focus more on long course work.”

Nigel says both universities had very good facilities – 50m pools, diving pits and he enjoyed plenty of sunshine. He says he was apprehensive about applying for a Nancy Ovens bursary at first, but would highly recommend taking advantage of the innovative scheme.

“I feel very privileged to have been chosen for a SkillsActive Nancy Ovens Bursary and feel that my time abroad was very beneficial to me. With athletes like Michael Phelps, it is not surprising America has led the world in swimming for many years. To work alongside two very renowned coaches was a great experience, as was seeing the level of team work and commitment from the college swimmers.



“I intend to use some of my observations to benefit the swimmers I coach – especially the land training techniques I saw in America. I also hope to make links with Lincoln University to expand on this side of swimming training. Ultimately, I hope to be able to deliver a top class training programme which will provide a structured pathway for swimmers to be able to achieve their overall sporting goals.”

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