



European Youth Forum Goteborg 2006



Summary Report

Overall we thought the Youth Leadership Forum was excellent, very well organised and very interesting. It was a once in a lifetime opportunity to get to know people from so many different countries, share and exchange ideas both in terms of the organisational structure of athletics in their home countries but also some of the coaching aspects. I felt that I learnt a lot from listening to others and also sharing some of our own ideas. Everyone on the Youth Forum made an excellent effort to get to know each other and that was what made the week so special and so successful. On the course it was suggested that we create a discussion forum (via internet/website) through which everyone could keep in contact. To date this forum has been put in place and many of us have remained in contact since. This was very encouraging – knowing that friends we had made are only a phone call or email away. I think this is definitely one of the first successful steps in making ‘Europe smaller’. It is very important to have these youth forums as this generation of young leaders will be the coaches of the future and it makes everything a lot easier when we all know each other already. In general I found the course very inspirational and motivating. Sergey Bubka’s talk on Monday was very interesting where he talked about his life story and how he got involved in athletics. The amount of sacrifices he made to become world champion and world record holder. He left his hometown at an early age with his brother to train in a larger town where they had better facilities and equipment, training at 6am in the mornings etc... To make it to the top you have to make these sacrifices. Also he told us he never did weights training till he was 18 as he thought it was very important to allow the skeletal structure of the young child to grow properly. Prior to that he had done a lot of training using just his own body weight. Sergey had the right idea – get the technical skills of your event correct at a young age and master them well. Once you’ve mastered the skill its easy, focus on getting stronger and faster as you get older.

The Unesco workshop on ‘Champions in the Mind’ was used to get people to become more aware of the importance of mental preparation in sport. Makis made a valuable point that athletes at an elite level are more than likely doing the same training or similar hours of training and that maybe perhaps the only thing that separates the winner from the loser may just be their mental preparation. During his seminar he got us developing our mental skills by creating a mental map of the different stages you go through in terms of goal setting and execution of your game plan in competition. The main outcome of this seminar was to set your goals, take your dreams seriously, follow your desire, develop self confidence, believe in yourself, use stress and pressure to your advantage, unit aggression with relaxation i.e. be aggressive in your sport but in a relaxed and controllable manner.

Tuesday’s talk was on Morals and Ethics in Sport. Each of us were divided into groups and asked what would we do in a certain situation. Irrespective of the situation we are presented with we should review and reflect on our own values in sport and we should try and embrace our values both on and off the sports field and maintain fair play both as a coach or an athlete and lead by example. Other topics that were discussed were drugs in sport and fair play. Towards the end of this seminar and Wednesday seminar we were asked how would we like to see European Athletics in 10years. Personally I thought this generated a lot of good ideas and gave us a few ideas of how we may improve things in the future both in Europe and back at home in our own countries. I will elaborate on this a little bit later in the recommendations section. These ideas were put to the EAA president and council and there was very positive interchange between the council and EYF. This concluded the Forum and at this point the EYF put words into action (‘Making Europe Smaller’) by creating a website (Bebo website set up by Darragh. Username is youthforum2006 and Password is goteborg) where we could simply share photos, taken during the forum, and also a means of keeping contact with each other. A group was also formed by representatives from all the 10 discussion groups so that this would make personal contact easier.

In conclusion I found the EYF very enjoyable, I’ve met so many new people all around Europe who are very much involved in athletics whether it be as an athlete or as a young coach. I thoroughly enjoyed every minute of it and I felt we got on and mixed very well. I have kept in contact with a lot of the people from the forum. Before I went over I got some Swedish training programs for jumpers off the internet (Kajsa Bergqvist, Emma Green and Christian Olson training schedules) and while over there I got one of the girls on the course Cecilia to help me translate them. To date on the website set up for the youth forum many of the delegates have said they would love to meet up again, some ideas have been suggested – organise a competition or maybe some coaching days for different events. Maybe

this is something we should all work on in the future. Overall the Forum was very well organised, friendly atmosphere and the local committee did a fantastic job in hosting the event.

To everyone in AAI thank you so much for giving me the opportunity to be a part of this European Youth Forum. I for one and I'm sure Darragh will say the exact same, are very grateful for selecting us to go. We really enjoyed it and took great pride in being the Irish delegates at the Forum. We learnt so much over the week, we were very much inspired by some of the guest speakers and it has really made us even more motivated to pursue our career in sport whether it be as an athlete, coach, official. We look forward to coaching and working with athletes in the future.

Many Thanks,
Rosemary Daniel & Darragh Graham

Recommendations:

- 1) In Sweden they make a big effort to train up new leaders (e.g. young coaches). This year to date they have trained in 1,164 new young leaders between the ages of 17- 25. These young leaders usually coach one of 3 age groups 7-10yrs, 10-14yrs or 14-17yrs. I think here in Ireland doing something similar would be of great benefit to the sport. We should try to encourage more young people to get involved in coaching. If you think about all the athletes we lose during 16 – 25yrs (when they quit athletics) we should try and keep them in the sport, they don't have to compete, they mightn't have been the best athletes in the world but they could make very good coaches. Also we should make an effort to get these young coaches working with some of the more experienced coaches in Ireland e.g. those interested in coaching throws should get some experience working with the National Throws Coach, the same for the sprints, middle distance, jumps and race walking events.
- 2) Maybe we should set up a youth council or the AAI Committee should elect a youth delegate that would represent the views of the young people. They may bring fresh and interesting views to the table.
- 3) We should do a lot more PR work with the Press. In Sweden they really use the press to help advertise athletics. It doesn't have to be used in a commercial way. For example on the trams over there they'd have an ad where they said something like Carolina Klüft can jump 6.50m in the long jump or something like that and this is equal to the length of a double decker bus or something. I think in Ireland when you tell people you run 10sec in the 100m or jump 2.10 in the high jump it doesn't really mean anything to the normal person you have to link it to something they know and something they can identify with.
- 4) Also with the Children's Games the emphasis should be on fun and a team sport. So instead of maybe doing individual placings maybe there should be an overall team prize for the different events e.g. like the field relays already in situ. Also something like Sports Hall athletics may go down well like what they do in the UK and have top Irish athletes there for the day judging or giving some tips to the athletes. Get the top Irish athletes to promote it – Derval is the perfect example now.
If you saw the Celtic Games in Scotland on T.V. or even better if you were at it – there was something there for everyone and it was a real day out for the family – had some high profile athletes competing, fun competition with the team events and then had the different fun/novelty events for the children in the grounds opposite the track.
- 5) Organise some training camps throughout the year and invite different coaches over that are specialised in different events. Or send the top two/three in each of the junior and senior ranks to training camps for example the throwers go to Bulgaria or to link up with some of the top weight/power lifting coaches, send the jumpers maybe to Sweden (considered to be the one of the best in the jumping events at the moment) same for sprinters - maybe off to Russia, middle distance and race walkers (altitude training) try and make links with nations that are strong in the different disciplines that is one of the ways we can learn new training methods which will help our athletes climb the next step of the ladder and improve our coaching education.
- 6) There also needs to be more of a sports science or technical team behind the organisation – people looking at biomechanical analysis of different athletes – e.g. analysing Derval's technique in the hurdles and seeing where improvements can be made to knock down more off people's times. This could also be used to help identify injuries in athletes and could be used as a screening procedure to help prevent injuries. It could be set up and then athletes affiliated to the AAI could get discounts prices if they wanted to get tested. Then in the same centre there should be a nutritionist, sports psychologist, physio treatment rooms etc... Something on the lines of an academy for sport.

With the new contacts that we have now we should use them and try to help develop strong relations and networks with other countries.

