

# European Aquatics (Swimming)

## High Performance Coaching Clinic - Vienna 2024

Tuesday 10<sup>th</sup> September 2024

### Operating in the Olympic Arena

Reflections from London, Rio, Tokyo & Paris

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# Preview...

- ✿ The 'health package' ...
- ✿ Athlete findings...
- ✿ The team around the athlete...
- ✿ Culture...
- ✿ Sharing...
- ✿ Authenticity...
- ✿ Coach/athlete relationships...
- ✿ 'Olympic Superpowers' ...
- ✿ Coach mental health...
- ✿ Summary...
- ✿ Q & A...



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# The Olympic Arena & The Full 'Health' Package...

## Physical Health...

- ✚ Physically fit...
- ✚ Capable of performing the sporting task/s...

## Emotional/Mental Health...

- ✚ Personal wellbeing...
- ✚ Confidence & feeling positive...
- ✚ There is no health without mental health...

## Social Health...

- ✚ Optimism...
- ✚ Interactions & relationships...



It is apparent that the Olympic staff have a major role to play in all areas –  
and will be a positive or negative influence within each.

**No action is neutral!**

# 2019 World Aquatics Championships

## Athlete Survey...

### Important Context...

- ✿ In one of the most recent 'whole' World Championships to date...
- ✿ Note that this is pre-pandemic...

### Some alarming outcomes that we were maybe unaware of...

- ✿ Over 25% of responding athletes were classified as depressed...
- ✿ Over 33% were identified as having an eating disorder...
- ✿ Over 40% stated that they wanted or needed psychological support for mental health issues...

### And so...

- ✿ Staff brush mental health under the carpet at their peril...
- ✿ It is clear that coaching environments (home, camp & meets) can nourish or malnourish an athlete's mental health...



# The Team Around The Athlete...

## Strong Influence...

- 🍀 Head Coach driven through the Group Coach
- 🍀 Team Leader facilitated
- 🍀 SSSM Practitioner Cat A
- 🍀 SSSM Practitioner Cat B
- 🍀 MDT → IDT...

## Lower Influence – But Greater Over Time...

- 🍀 Family, Agents & Media



Barriers are fluid but agreed, each with their own areas of expertise/responsibility ; consultation must be sought if intending to encroach on each other's areas.

It can be fragile, easily damaged, relies heavily on trust and integrity and is difficult to repair once broken...

# Culture, Culture, Culture...

## It Is Your People...

- ✿ Collective ambition...
- ✿ Collective understanding...
- ✿ Values & beliefs...
- ✿ Aligned & understood clear lines of expectation...
- ✿ Holistic buy-in (staff, athletes, families, agents)...

## Cultural Capital...

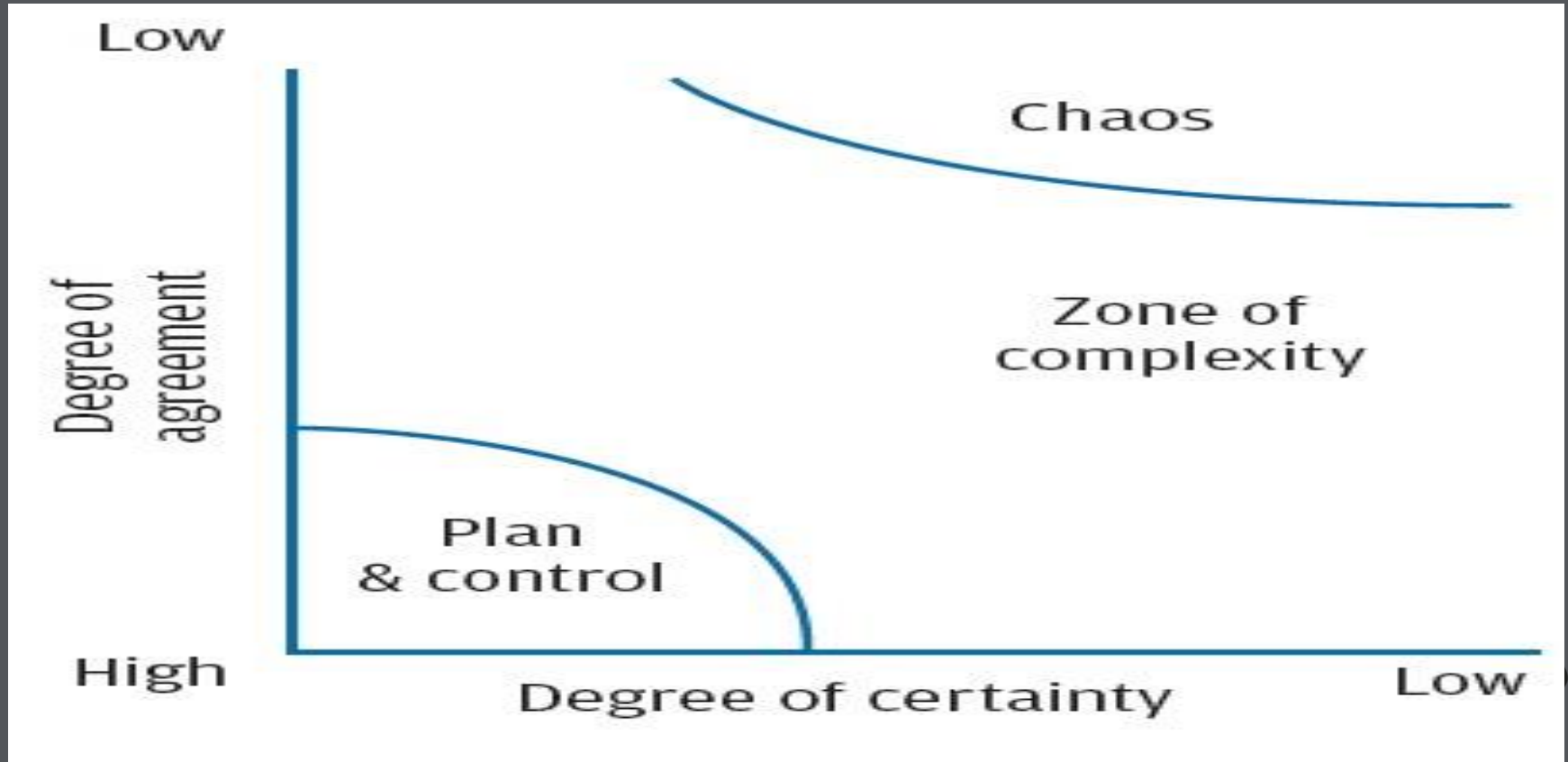
- ✿ Layman's Culture...
- ✿ Quiddity
- ✿ Uncertainties and irregularities in the Olympic arena will add to what are already high regular stress levels – in everyone!

## Where Do We Fit...?

- ✿ The 'Athlete Voice'...
- ✿ And our role. Do we 'Add Value' to this...?



# The Relationship Between Certainty & Agreement...



# Empowering Athletes & Staff With 'Authenticity'...

- ✿ YOU are accountable for your own actions & behaviours...
- ✿ YOU do what you need to do and worry less about what others are doing that may be different...
- ✿ YOU are the primary instrument in delivering in the moment...
- ✿ YOU must seek the support & guidance that can help you action this...





# Throughout - Sharing Is Caring...

## Encourage Discussion...

- ✿ Physical 'injury' seems to be easier to discuss...
- ✿ Mental challenges are inherently harder...
- ✿ The taboo here has to be broken and made 'safe'...



## The 'Be Tough' Culture...

- ✿ 'Pushing through the pain' & 'be tough' has created a stigma...
- ✿ The term 'mental toughness' often does not help as the implied opposite is that of 'mental weakness'...
- ✿ Improving – not changing – how we think...

## Stimulate Openness & Honesty...

- ✿ The use of role models who share in this domain...
- ✿ Support & listen; anything that is mentionable is manageable...
- ✿ Clarity that those in such a situation are not alone...
- ✿ Sharing creates informal education through curiosity...

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# The Ever-Essential 'Athlete : Coach' Relationship...

## Pre-Games

- ✿ Developed through familiarity
- ✿ More challenging if home coach is not accredited
- ✿ Home coach & athlete engagement
- ✿ The inter-dependent years (?)

## In-Games – What Works?

- ✿ Mutual trust & respect
- ✿ Predictability in responses & behaviours
- ✿ Discussion, liaison, sharing
- ✿ Partnership
- ✿ Understood communication methods, language, tone, timing...
- ✿ Emotional support
- ✿ The worst form of listening is preparing to speak...



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# In the Arena, Psychological Coaching Factors...

## ...Outweighs All Else

- ✿ Greater perception of emotion
- ✿ Adapt communication styles to the moment and/or the individual
- ✿ Manage their own emotions
- ✿ Staff must never appear tired, unkempt or display mood swings

## The 'Big Five'...

- ✿ Conscientiousness (organisation & discipline)
- ✿ Openness to Experience (imagination & enjoyment of the complex)
- ✿ Agreeableness (trust, cooperation & care)
- ✿ Extraversion (sociable & gregarious)
- ✿ Neuroticism (negative emotion & the 'pot half empty' approach)

## The 'Dark Triad' – Athletes and/or Staff...

- ✿ Machiavellian (lie & manipulate)
- ✿ Narcissism (grandiose sense of self)
- ✿ Psychopathy (lack of remorse or guilt)



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# Where Our 'Olympic Superpowers' Lie...

## Superpower 1 - Self-Regulation

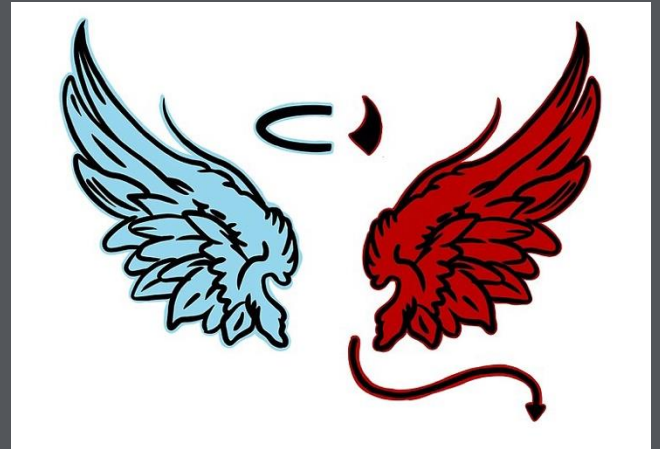
- ✿ Awareness of & managing our own thoughts...
- ✿ Identifying how they influence our behaviours...
- ✿ Making adaptive responses to current 'now' demands...
- ✿ Administering our thoughts & actively shaping our behaviours accordingly...

## Superpower 2 - Self-Control

- ✿ Resisting temptations that conflict with our goals...
- ✿ Controlling behaviours to align with our goals/targets...
- ✿ We cannot control much in life – except ourselves...

## The Interaction Of These...

- ✿ Both superpowers interact to support goal attainment...
- ✿ Self-Regulation directs thoughts & feelings...
- ✿ Self-Control inhibits sabotaging impulses...
- ✿ In the challenging world in which we currently live we can use these terms to aid those in our care as they are simple to understand!



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# Leading In – Coach/Staff Mental Challenges...?

- ✿ Coaches strive to provide an enjoyable/healthy experience for athletes...
- ✿ But coaches often approach their job in a manner which can have the opposite effect on their own wellbeing...
- ✿ We know that serving others can be physically & emotionally exhausting...
- ✿ Coaches often experience fatigue & anxiety; deny this at your peril...
- ✿ Left unchecked, such experience can reduce coach passion & motivation...
- ✿ Athletes can also suffer if this is the coach experience...
- ✿ Quality coaching requires mental, emotional & physical conditioning...
- ✿ Coach wellness starts with an awareness of common sources of stress...
- ✿ Armed with this knowledge coaches can stake steps to refresh & reload as & when needed...

# What We Must Recognise Early Enough...

## Athlete 'Urgency'

- ✚ An athlete's window of opportunity in many sports is highly limited...
- ✚ The chance of any of us finding our full potential in anything is challenging...
- ✚ We must maximise everything that is positive...
- ✚ We must minimise & ideally remove barriers & impediments...
- ✚ We must develop self-reliant, self-managed individuals...

## Coaching Tactics Into & At The Games

- ✚ The dichotomy of 'patient urgency' is now be over...
- ✚ ...and the difference between 'importance' and 'urgency'...
- ✚ Embrace challenge – or accept under performance...
- ✚ A readiness for (and expecting) knockbacks...
- ✚ ...and then dust off & going again...
- ✚ Coaches - do not expect commitment without displaying it yourself...

## Coaching Brotherhood/Sisterhood

- ✚ We have to have each other's backs. Who else is going to...?!



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# Thank You!

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