

## MULTI NATIONS YOUTH MEET - ATHENS 11/12 APRIL 1992

### Report by Andy Figgins - Team Manager and Head Coach

#### Introduction

The Multi Nations Youth Meet, which was originally scheduled to be held in Lisbon but was moved to Athens at short notice, is an invitation event. Ten countries had accepted the opportunity to take part in an event which is essentially a junior version of the Eight Nations contest.

#### Pre Departure Organisation

The ideal of preparation and planning before departure was unusually difficult due to the various happenings in the SASA Organisation.

I had only received a copy of my selection letter, a note of team travel arrangements and the SASA Insurance Schedule details. I had not received a copy of the team selected or the order of events etc. I telephoned the office towards the end of March and requested this additional information which was sent to me giving me a fuller picture of what was going to take place at the Meet. I did notice however that there were 2 forms with the information which should have been returned to the National Travel Agency in Greece with copies to the Greek ASA. There was however a fax sent direct to the Greek ASA from the office. I was anxious that they did not just assume this was our copy to them of arrangements made with the National Travel Agency regarding accommodation and travel pick-up details, so I asked Hazel in the office to complete both forms and fax them to the relevant agencies in Greece. In addition I asked them to seek confirmation that all arrangements were in order. Thereafter I sought confirmation by telephone from the office that the Greeks had confirmed to SASA that everything was in order. When this was not forthcoming from Greece I went into the office myself on Monday 6 April and faxed the forms to the 2 agencies in Greece as the original letter to the Greek ASA was still the only thin which had been faxed to Greece, albeit on more than one occasion.

I requested immediate confirmation from the Greeks of our arrangements. This was still not forthcoming and despite more phone calls by the girls in the office, the Greeks did not respond and give us peace of mind until 10.00 am on Thursday 9 April, the day of our departure. This information was relayed to me at Edinburgh Airport by the girls in the office. I really felt quite sorry for the girls as the Greek organisers were obviously very reluctant to commit anything to paper.

I received the gifts for the trip in plenty of time on Friday 3 April along with the allocated T-Shirts for the team. In addition the cheque for the accommodation etc was with these other items. Unfortunately when I received it it was too late to be able to cash it normally and it had to be rushed through by special presentation on Monday 6th at extra cost.

I sent a letter to all swimmers the week before the meet to fill in gaps in their information ie programme of events, hotel address and telephone number and to try and focus their minds on the actual concept of being a team and swimming in a team event, as for the vast majority of the team it was the first time they had swum in a one swimmer per country per event international Meet.

I also asked Eileen Adams to assemble a first aid kit for the event, which she did. She also helped out greatly in the liaison with swimmers before we departed and in the planning which is required from team staff.

### Travel

The initial travel information which was received by all those travelling seemed to show that the flight from Heathrow to Athens took an incredibly long time but upon contacting the travel agents, I was told that there was a one hour stop to be made in Thessalonika and a two hour time difference to be accommodated. My travel problem antennae did start twitching when I noticed that we were using 2 separate Air Companies to travel from our original departure points ie British Airways to Heathrow, Olympus Airways to Athens. I had experienced problems changing carrier before, when travelling to Viareggio due to delays in shuttle departures and am now very aware of these difficulties. However, I decided that I was just being pessimistic and everything would go smoothly as we had plenty of time to spare to assemble in London.

I left from Edinburgh with all the swimmers from the North, East and Midlands and Emma Watson, while Eileen Adams left from Glasgow with the remaining West swimmers. Graeme Smith and Kathryn Burke were to leave from Manchester. All persons were to assemble in Heathrow and travel as one group to Athens.

I arrived at Heathrow expecting to meet the 2 swimmers from Manchester, but their flight showed delayed on the board which indicated a 2.35 pm arrival time. The group from Glasgow arrived and we met up with them without any problem. They had checked their bags straight through to Athens, the Edinburgh group had collected their bags at Heathrow. After a short time we went to check on the Manchester flight which we were told was just about to depart. Upon checking again some 45 minutes later we were told that it had not left due to further problems and that it would arrive at 4.30 pm which would mean that they would miss the connecting flight to Athens. Eileen and I did some negotiations with the Air Companies to see what they would do for us to help the swimmers and herself to get to Athens as we had already agreed that she would wait behind and meet the Manchester swimmers when they arrived and ensure their onward journey was without further problems.

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The reason for their non-arrival on time at Heathrow was that the first plane they boarded was declared unfit to fly after they had been on it for 45 minutes. They then were moved to another plane which was also declared unfit to fly after a similar period of time. When they arrived at Heathrow they were obviously quite shaken by their experience. Eileen did a fantastic job in persuading British Airways to give them 3 First-Class seats on their 10.25 pm flight to Athens which was due to arrive at 4.25 pm. While Eileen was negotiating we had checked in for our flight which was then delayed for around an hour and a quarter. By this time the Manchester swimmers has arrived and Eileen had checked if our flight had departed, to be told it had left on time which it had not. This was obviously a source of annoyance to us all, as the incorrect information had made Eileen keep pushing at British Airways to give her seats instead of being able to catch our flight. When I raised this subject at a later stage with Olympus on the return journey, they said that the information given to Eileen made no difference as the flight had already been closed.

I arrived with my group in Athens with no further problems and we were met by representatives of the Greek Swimming Association and their National Travel Agency who took us to our hotel. We checked in and the swimmers soon settled down and went to sleep. I stayed up as I had to go to the airport to meet Eileen, Graeme and Katie. We met them at around 5.00 am and took them back to the hotel.

There had however been one additional problem which we faced in that the Glasgow groups luggage which had been checked in at Glasgow right through to Athens. Unfortunately this did not arrive in Athens and they could give us no idea of where it was or when they would find it. Our Greek hosts made some telephone calls on the Friday morning to British Airways to initiate the search as there had been no BA representative on duty when I or Eileen arrived. In mid-afternoon we got a message to say that their luggage had been traced and would arrive at 7.30 pm. I went back out to the airport to fetch their luggage which had now all arrived in one piece.

The return journey went like clockwork!!

#### Hotel Accommodation and Food

The hotel accommodation was perfectly sufficient and we stayed in what they called a Luxury Category hotel which would be 2/3 stars in Great Britain. The food was average, a mixture of both Greek and British styles. Helpings were medium in size but service was dreadfully slow.

#### The "Tourist Bit"

We took the swimmers to the Acropolis and to several other places of historical interest during our stay and all were really very appreciative of the incredible history of the buildings, especially the original Olympic Stadium.

## The Facilities

The pool complex, which was a 30 minute bus journey from the hotel, was one of the most magnificent I have seen comprising:

Indoor 8 lane x 50 m Pool  
Indoor 25 m x 25 m Diving Pit with full boards  
Indoor 5 lane x 25 m Pool

Outdoor 10 lane x 50 m Pool  
Outdoor 8 lane x 50 m Pool  
Outdoor 25 m x 25 m Diving Pit with full boards

Unfortunately the Greeks have been having some problems with the windows on one side of the main indoor pool and consequently they had been stripped out leaving a howling gale blowing across the pool onto the swimmers on the opposite balcony area.

## Meet Travel

The buses left the hotel one hour before each warm up and travelled back at the end of the session. The Greeks always seemed to work in full hours and in the mornings made their plans as follows:

Breakfast	6.00 am
Buses leave	7.00 am
Warm Up	8.00 am
Start	9.00 am

## The Meet

There were 10 countries taking part with the competitors being split into 2 heats of 5 and rotating lanes as follows:  
H 1 L 2 -> 6 -> H 2 L 2 -> 6 -> H 1 L 2 -> 6 -> etc. The organisation was shambolic with sessions taking up to 3 1/2/4 hours for 18 races and on many occasions there were 10-15 minute gaps in the programme for no apparent reason. The swimmers had trained in the pool on the Friday afternoon to help them grow accustomed to the pool, and this obviously helped them in their swims. The lane ropes were the type which will be used in the 1992 Olympic Games.

The standard of the event provided us with some excellent competition and in no events were we runaway winners although the boys team did produce some excellent victories. The standard was ideal and had the conditions in the pool hall been a little kinder I am sure the performances would have been even better. It was like swimming outdoors indoors! A full bound set of results is in the Office at Cambuslang but we were 3rd overall, 2nd Boys (beaten by 2 points and 2 Scottish Junior relay records) and 6th Girls. An excellent set of performances!

Please note that the meet programme was significantly changed when we got there from the one we had received.

## Social Arrangements

On the Saturday evening there was a dinner in the hotel for 3 officials of each team while the swimmers had their meal and on the Sunday evening all the teams and team staff were taken to a Taverna for a traditional Greek meal and Greek entertainment. It was at this occasion that a certain male Scottish coach was invited onto the stage to give a rare demonstration.

## The Swimmers

There were no discipline problems during the trip, and most of the group behaved in a mature way, actually appreciating where they were and what they were there for. The more experienced swimmers such as Richard Hope and Paul Latimer provided an excellent example to the other team members on preparation and attitude. I feel that one or two of the newer team members will have benefitted greatly from the experience and will be better equipped in the future to handle these situations.

## Summary

The team was a very enjoyable one to work with, and the swimmers really applied themselves well to the task in hand in general. I felt the experience of this type of meet in particular will stand swimmers in good stead for the future in the likes of 8 Nations competitions etc.

It was a great credit to the organisers at the SASA end that the team travelled a day earlier than normal thus ensuring that our travel difficulties had less effect than they would have done if we travelled the day before the Meet.

## Recommendations

- 1 Where possible we should use the same airline for the whole journey and not change carriers.
- 2 Collect luggage at each airport on a journey, it makes finding it a lot easier when you have the last reference point.
- 3 At a team event we should have a pennant for each competing club as some countries had pennants to give out to all the others.
- 4 A small Scottish type gift would go down a bomb at these meets to organisers etc and other teams.
- 5 Money for trip be made available earlier for Team Manager.
- 6 Ensure that Esso Sales Link Grid is with Team Managers before departure. Ours was sent to my old address and consequently didn't arrive at my new address until after our departure. I gave my new address in to the office at the beginning of March.
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Thanks to:

Swimming Committee for my selection and that of Eileen Adams.

All the swimmers for their efforts and good behaviour.

All the Office Staff for their help in the lead up to the event.

Eileen Adams for excellent coaching and moral support.

Andy Figgins  
Team Manager