

VIEW -THE PAN PAC CHAMPIONSHIP by Dick Hannula

What a setting for the 2006 Pan Pacific Championship Meet. Victoria, B.C. Canada, the Canadian version of Britain featured excellent weather, beautiful flowers on display everywhere, double decker busses, a picturesque Parliament building, the historic Empress Hotel with an amazing view of the Strait of Juan de Fuca that separates the USA mainland and Canada in the extreme west, and a remarkably fast 50 meter pool. My wife, Sylvia, and I decided to attend the first two days of the meet. We drove the 100 miles to Port Angeles, Washington and ferried our car to Victoria on a one and one-half hour ferry ride.

We weren't disappointed with the swimming that we witnessed. I knew going in that the Australians didn't send all of their top swimmers. They wouldn't be a factor in the team scoring because of it. The USA took an impressive first with Japan taking second, and the Australians in the third place.

The Pan Pacific Championship rules allow every country to enter what appeared to be any eligible swimmer on the team in any one event. The USA sometimes entered more than four in an event. The exciting push to swim very well in the prelims was that only the two fastest swimmers from any one country were eligible to advance to the finals (anyone beyond the top two from one country could swim in the consolation finals). The American team had an even greater incentive to swim fast. The 2007 World Championship USA team was being picked from the results of this meet. These two factors made for very competitive and honest preliminary swims on the USA team. The prelims were as hotly contested in many events as in the finals.

One example was in the women's 100 meter breast stroke event. The USA went one-two-three in the prelims. Tara Kirk was 1:07.05, Megan Quann Jendrick was 1:07.09, and Jessica Hardy went 1:07.12. Jessica was relegated to the consolation finals while Tara and Megan battled for the gold medal in the finals. The question that many of the coaches in the bleacher seats were asking, "Can Jessica Hardy move up past one or both USA finalists in the consolation final to earn a spot on the USA 2007 World Championship team?"

I ran into the USA National Team Coach, Mark Schubert, in the entrance lobby to the pool before the finals that night. He answered that question, "the two fastest swimmers, regardless of the preliminary placement, qualify for the World Championship". This set up a great finals race with Tara and Megan. They finished first and second with Tara just barely edging Megan in that final. Unfortunately both swimmers were about a half second over their preliminary times. Consolation finals were swum after the finals in this meet. We were all wondering whether Jessica Hardy would unseat either Tara or Megan for the World Championship team in the consolation finals. Jessica did just that swimming a new meet record and the fastest time of the day with a 1:06.43.

World records were broken on several days. We watched Jessicah Schipper of Australia break the women's 200 meter butterfly world record with a 2:05.40. Michael Phelps followed her swim with a new world record of 1:53.80 in the men's 200 butterfly. Japan's Ryuichi Shibota actually led into the final turn with Michael swimming the final 50 meters more than 2 seconds faster than Shibota. Later in the meet Aaron Piersol lowered his world record in the 200 meters backstroke to 1:54.44, and Brendan Hansen

did the same in the 200 meter breaststroke with a 2:08.50. The USA looks to have a lock on the men's 200's in the strokes (butterfly, back, and breast).

Natalie Coughlin (USA), the world record holder and Olympic champion in the 100 meter backstroke was beaten by Japan's Hanae Ito in that event (1:00.63 to 1:00.66). Nothing is guaranteed by past performance in swimming, but it would have helped if Natalie had stayed clear of the lane ropes. She bounced off the ropes on the way down and also on the way back. She was gracious and offered no excuses, and came back to have an outstanding meet in her other events.

I came away from the competition impressed with the depth and the competitive spirit of the USA team. At the same time we have our work cut out for us to be successful in the 2007 World Championships in Australia. Australia has an extremely strong women's team. Except for Schipper, they weren't at the Pan Pac Meet. If Ian Thorpe and Grant Hackett and the other Australian missing men are in top form, it will be a major challenge to defeat the Australians next year.

One of the racing tips that I have long believed to be true was in evidence in the 100 and 200 meter races free style races. Breathing at every stroking cycle or nearly so after the first few strokes is necessary to be successful. Winners clearly did just that and too many unsuccessful swimmers attempted to hold off breathing in one or more stroking cycles too often in the early and mid part of their races. This has been a truism, especially in long course competition, for as long as I can remember. Many a short course 100 yard collegiate champion has failed to master the long course 100 meters for this very reason. I can remember Coach Dick Jochums counseling a collegiate short course

champion at the 1975 Pan American Games in his 100 meters long course race. That was a major part of what proved to be winning advice.

The free style, especially noticeable in the 100 and 200 meter free races, appears to be adjusting to a much quicker catch and pull through. The pull is in a direct line, no noticeable sweeps, as I have emphasized in previous articles. However, swimmers are getting into the catch much quicker and more deliberately than the standard of a few years back. The hand enters into the catch and pull. It doesn't slide, or glide into that catch. It gets there quickly and powers into a strong pull through. The result is a faster and stronger stroke. I thought of it as much more physical but still clean and efficient.

The backstroke was pretty much the same thing. The arm stroke moves into the catch and pull much the same way as the free style. The arm drops directly into the entry and makes the catch and pull almost simultaneously. Little finger entry is noticeably best in getting the hand properly prepared to engage water and the pull through. Each stroking arm pulls through at a moderate depth. Deep enough to avoid slipping but not so deep as to slow the stroking rate down. The result is a fast powerful stroke.

Butterfly and breaststrokers both had the most success with a "platform" style. That is the swimmers who maintained the most hinged position at the head and spine both during breathing and the extension out front were the most successful.

All in all, the 2006 Pan Pacific Championship in Victoria was a very nice summer break in the Pacific Northwest. Great swimmers, great swimming, and a fabulous host city in Victoria made the trip for us.

