

GB Water Polo Leadership Group Update

Toolbox

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With British Water Polo preparing for what is set to be one of its busiest seasons, the GB Water Polo Leadership Group have published a report following their September meeting to outline their intentions for the sport going forward.

The GB Water Polo Leadership Group met last month before publishing the framework for the sport through the 2022/2023 season and beyond, with Fergus Feeney, Chair of GB Water Polo Leadership Group and British Swimming Board Member, providing the following update.

Introduction

Many people will know that British Swimming has leadership groups for several of its sports and disciplines, this includes water polo. We established a leadership group some time ago to help align British and Home Nation programmes and to develop the sport in the UK. This leadership group consists of the chairs of England, Scotland and Wales, sports development people from the NGBs and it meets several times a year.

The group wanted to update the water polo community early in the season on its current activities, priorities and decisions.

GB Programme & Strategy

To deliver against our agreed objectives with UK Sport, and the National Squad Support funding, our priority focus is entering men's and women's teams into the forthcoming LEN senior European Championships. This is an important step into developing our performances at European level and the first of what we see as regular entry into LEN European competition. Progress in Europe and competing credibly against European opposition is critical to our national squad development. We know it will be incredibly tough but we are looking to build on this over several cycles. To do this we need to support our Home Nation teams and give equal opportunity to English, Scottish and Welsh players, to create a broader base of talent for GB squads to select from.

I am delighted to see the progress that our new appointed GB WP Programme Lead Craig Figes has made to date with the GB programme and senior squads. Craig has joined our leadership group to help us shape these plans.

Competition & Events

Alongside the development of our players, coaches and officials is the need for quality competition and events. We are aware that LEN have moved the next Water Polo Senior European Championships into 2023 from its expected timing in 2024, and this has made us rethink our plans for the coming year. With a focus on the Europeans in 2023, and after a lot of discussion, we have come to the conclusion that hosting a Commonwealth tournament next year will not be the best way forward.

We have looked at venues that could host such an event and could not find any that could offer the requisite time and support at this stage. In addition to this (and linked to our funding priorities) we want to focus on giving our players the appropriate level of training and competition to support longer term progress in European competition. The leadership group are in agreement that this will be best achieved through relevant training camp opportunities alongside targeted international competition exposure rather than staging a one-off Commonwealth event.

The target of consistent performances on the European stage is tasked for the teams going forward

Home Nations

Home Nations' programmes and the involvement of Home Nations management teams and clubs are critical to the success of the GB system. We fully recognise the importance of Home Nation activity (squad development and camps) and through our sub group we will be consulting with Home Nations leads on competitions as part of our GB programme. We will be reporting back on this over the coming months.

Creating a strong domestic and international competition and events schedule will also help us develop our current group of officials as well as creating the environment to develop the referees and club, regional and national table officials of the future. To this end we have created an events sub group and an officials sub group to help move this on. An events and officials sub group has been created by the British Water Polo Leadership Group and two officials attended the FINA Water Polo Development School for Referees at the end of last month.

UK Sport & National Squad Support Fund

We continue to progress well against our NSSF objectives. With strong leadership now in place for our GB programme we will be meeting with UK Sport officials to update them on progress very soon. Our success in this over the next two years will be key to any potential future investment in the sport which is why we must be laser focussed on the national squad objectives to ensure water polo develops well and gets the investment and support we think it deserves.

Craig Figes, our GB Programme Lead, this week said: "It is fantastic that our GB teams can look forward to entering the LEN qualification tournaments and measuring themselves against the exceptionally strong standard of water polo played on the continent.

"This experience will enable us to plan the development of our players and squads in future international cycles, helping us to become more and more competitive at the highest level."

We hope to keep communicating on a regular basis with the community. Please reach out to any of the Home Nations Water Polo teams for more details and good luck to everyone for the coming season.

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