UBC AQUATIC CENTRE

and

Joszef Nagy

A Report by Laurel Bailey
Head Coach ~ Warrender Baths Club

18-24 January 2010
UBC Aquatics

Overview
In May 2009, Warrender swimmers Craig Benson and Sally Wood were giving the opportunity to visit the UBC programme to work specifically with Breaststroke Coach Joszef Nagy. I was meant to go with them but due to issues with my passport I was unable to attend. Instead, I spent one week in Vancouver from 18-24 January 2010.

Joszef Nagy
Hungarian Coach, Joszef Nagy, has been in Vancouver at the University of British Columbia for nearly 4 years. His role is funded by Swim Canada and he currently coaches 4 female breaststrokers. Nagy is renowned for his previous work with Mike Barrowman, Roque Santos and Sergio Lopez, and was once the Hungarian National Champion himself for 200 Breaststroke. Nagy claims that he did not know enough about breaststroke as a swimmer and has made it his life aim to make up for this as a coach.

Facilities
The University of British Columbia hosts an indoor 50m pool as well as an outdoor 50m pool (which was not being used frequently whilst I was there). The indoor pool can also be reconfigured into six 25m lanes across the widest span, and six 25 yard lanes across the narrowest span of the pool. The pool was constructed in the 70's and is not dissimilar to the Royal Commonwealth Pool in Edinburgh. There is a very basic weights room off the back of the pool, which is probably only about 5m x 5m. The facilities are not what I would call world class but are certainly very adequate as proved by the number of Olympians coming through the Swim Canada programme there.

About the programme
There are four programmes working out of the UBC Aquatic Centre. As mentioned above, Joszef Nagy is the Swim Canada employed specialist Breaststroke Coach. He coaches four females, one of which is world record holder Annamay Pierse (200m Breaststroke). In addition to this, Tom Johnson is the Technical Director of the programme, also employed by Swim Canada, and currently has 5 Olympians under his tutelage. Brian Johns, Scott Dickens, Tanya Hunks, Savannah King, and Brent Hayden have all represented Canada at the Olympic Games. There is the UBC Dolphins which make up one of the four Clubs in the Pacific Dolphins Swim Association, with the newly appointed Head Coach Chad Webb running the programme. Webb also heads up the Varsity team, the UBC Thunderbirds.

UBC Dolphins
From the information I was able to gather, there are about 400 swimmers involved in the Pacific Dolphins programme, which includes four Clubs based in and around Vancouver. This does not include the Varsity swimmers or swimmers in Nagy and Johnson’s programmes.

Annamay Pierse
Annamay Pierse is 26 years old (born December 5, 1983), with Irish parents and 7 siblings (Sister Hannah Pierse is all in Nagy’s programme). These two points about Pierse are exactly why she is so tough according to Nagy! Pierse has been swimming with Nagy since shortly after he arrived in Vancouver 3.5 years ago, when she moved
from hometown Edmonton to Vancouver in order to work with him. She enjoyed an 18 month period where she was Nagy's only swimmer, perhaps contributing to her incredible rise in the breaststroke standings over the last four year period. In 2009, Pierse broke the 200m Breaststroke World Record (2:20.12) in the semi-finals of the World Championships only to be beaten into second place in a much slower time (2:21.84) by little known Serbian, Nadja Hidl. When I asked Nagy what he thought of this, he said he had been very, very annoyed at the time, as Pierse had not followed the race plan in the semi’s. She had been instructed to go easy in the semi-final and Nagy said as soon as she broke that world record, he knew she had made a big mistake and would struggle to be able to swim as fast again in the final the following night.

Other Swimmers
Also in Nagy’s programme is 20 year old Martha McCabe, also a World Championship finalist in Rome 2009 in the 200 Breaststroke, finishing 7th in 2:23.36. Hannah Pierse and Haylee Johnson are the third and fourth members of Nagy’s squad, both 2:23 short course 200 Breaststroker’s. Hannah is a younger sister of Annamay’s and Haylee is the daughter of programme director Tom Johnson.

Training Schedule
The typical weekly schedule for Nagy’s group is as follows:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Day</th>
<th>A.M.</th>
<th>P.M.</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Monday</td>
<td>Swim (LCM) 6:45-8:45**</td>
<td>Med Balls / Land 1:30-2:15</td>
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<td>Swim (SCY) 2:30-4:30</td>
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<td>Tuesday</td>
<td>Swim (LCM) 6:45-8:45</td>
<td>Weights 1:30-2:15</td>
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<td>Swim (SCY) 2:30-4:30</td>
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<td>Wednesday</td>
<td>OFF</td>
<td>Med Balls / Land 1:30-2:15</td>
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<td>Swim (SCY) 2:30-4:30</td>
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<td>Thursday</td>
<td>Swim (LCM) 6:45-8:45**</td>
<td>Weights 1:30-2:15</td>
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<td>Swim (SCY) 2:30-4:30</td>
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<td>Friday</td>
<td>Swim (LCM) 6:45-8:45</td>
<td>Med Balls / Land 1:30-2:15</td>
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<td></td>
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<td>Swim (SCY) 2:30-4:30</td>
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<tr>
<td>Saturday</td>
<td>Swim (LCM) 7:45-9:45</td>
<td>OFF</td>
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<tr>
<td>Sunday</td>
<td>OFF</td>
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**In these two sessions, Nagy’s swimmers join in with Johnson’s programme in order to give them a break from Nagy! He is still present at the workout, observing and filming technique.**

Although sessions were scheduled to last for two hours, Nagy’s swimmers were never in the pool for the full two hours and never swam more than 6000 metres or yards in a single session. In the mornings, there may have been two swimmers to a lane, but in the evenings each swimmer had their own lane and the breaststokers were completely separated from the other squads, in a separate area of the pool. Nagy prefers swimming yards, and says he would never swim long course if he had his way (technique breaks down, unable to maintain speed, unable to observe technique adequately etc).

**Training Content**

The programme of training for Nagy’s group was obviously very much focussed on breaststroke. Nagy says that in a regular work out they may train around 60-70% on breaststroke but in a key set it is always around 90% (basically only warm up and swim down offering any break from the stroke).

During the week of January that I was at the programme, most of the swimmers were taking it a bit easier as they were very fatigued from the work they done the week before. Interestingly, Nagy said that the work they had been doing was no harder or more intense than what he was doing whilst I was there, but that due to him working them harder in land training, they were too fatigued to swim well. Whilst I was there, I did not see Annamay Pierse swim any breaststroke at all in fact she was only in the pool each session for around 45 minutes of very low intensity front crawl and backstroke.

After speaking with Craig Benson upon my return and showing him the sessions that had been done, he confirmed that it was pretty much the same kind of thing he had done when he was out there in May 2009. There are no big blocks of aerobic work, but every set is done ‘fast’. There is a lot of breaststroke kick (usually hands extended out in front, no board) and pull (never with a pull buoy, which stops the natural wave action of the stroke) and various drill work in every session. Every turn the swimmers did was a tumble, never a touch turn unless specifically doing turn practice. Nagy explained that he got fed up of swimmers resting on the wall during a breaststroke turn and now he makes them always tumble so as not to practice lazy turns.

**Sample Sets**

To provide a small sample of the training programme, a few of the sets that were completed whilst I was at UBC are listed below. They are all short course yards:

**Tuesday 19th January PM**

**Warm Up:** 200 Free, 100 IM, 200 Brs Kick, 100 IM, 200 Brst Pull, 100 IM

\[
\begin{align*}
4 \times 50 & \text{ as 25 1,1 Kick 25 Boat Pull on 1:15} \\
5 \times [4 \times 100] & \text{ (1) Fly on 1:30} \\
\quad [400 \text{ free (fins)}] & \text{ (2) Breast Kick on 1:40} \\
\quad [50 \text{ easy}] & \text{ (3) Back (Pa) on 1:30} \\
\quad [400 \text{ free (fins)}] & \text{ (4) Breast Pull (Pa) on 1:40} \\
\quad [50 \text{ easy}] & \text{ (5) Free (Pa) on 1:20} \\
100 \text{ easy} & \\
8 \times 50 & \text{ Breast as 4 kicks (underwater), 4 pulls on 1:00}
\end{align*}
\]
200 Swim Down

**Wednesday 20th January PM**

**Warm Up:**
- 800 Choice
- 4 x 100 IM (Paddles and fins) on 1:30
- 100 easy

  Turns and underwater pull out work for about half an hour with buckets

- 200 Easy

  12 x 50 Breast as:
  - (6) 25 underwater kick 25 regular breast on 1:15
  - (6) 25 underwater pull 25 regular breast

  5 x 200 Breast as:
  - 25 underwater, 25 reg, 100 as 4 strokes underwater, 4 strokes above water, 50 FAST breaststroke

- 200 easy

- 8 x 25 Breast on 0:40

- 12 x 100 Free on 1:20 (4) Paddles (4) Paddles and fins (4) Fins

200 Swim Down

**Thursday 21st January PM**

**Warm Up:**
- 400 Free, 400 as 50 breast kick, 50 breast pull, 200 Choice

- 800 Breast Kick (25 steady, 25 fast, 50 steady, 50 fast, 75 steady, 75 fast, 100 steady, 100 fast, 75 steady, 75 fast, 50 steady, 50 fast, 25 steady, 25 fast)

- 100 easy

- 4 x 100 IM on 1:30

- 100 easy

- 800 Breast Pull with hand paddles as per the kick above

- 100 easy

- 4 x 100 as 25 fly, 50 back, 25 fly on 1:30

- 100 easy

- 5 x 200 free with fins on 2:30

- 100 easy
8 x 25 Breast on 0:40

400 swim down

Friday 22\textsuperscript{nd} January PM

Warm Up: 600 Choice

All Breast:
4 x 75 (25 kick, pull, swim) on 1:15
4 x 100 (25 kick, pull, 50 swim) on 1:40
4 x 150 (50 kick, pull, swim) on 2:20
4 x 100 (25 kick, pull, 50 swim) on 1:40
4 x 75 (25 kick, pull, swim) on 1:15

100 easy
8 x 50 Breast on 1:00
100 easy

All Breast:
2 x 100 (25 kick, pull, 50 swim) on 1:40
4 x 150 (50 kick, pull, swim) on 2:20
1 x 300 (100 kick, pull, swim) on 4:30
4 x 150 (50 kick, pull, swim) on 2:20
2 x 100 (25 kick, pull, swim) on 1:40

100 easy
4 x 50 Breast on 1:00
400 fins swim down

(This was the hardest set of the week as far as I could tell)

**Land training**

Land training was conducted each day from 1:30pm until around 2:15pm, leaving 15 minutes to prepare for the swim. On Monday, Wednesday and Friday the session consisted of medicine ball exercises and stair jumps, whilst on Tuesday and Thursday it was a weights session.

Each session was very structured and the first 15-20mins was a dynamic warm up led by Nagy which included a lot of abdominal exercises, flexibility exercises, squat jumps etc. All of the four girls in the programme would be considered fairly small girls. They are all very slim and very strong, although they do not have a lot of muscle bulk. Nagy believes it is very important in a breaststroker that they swimmers are very flexible and a lot of work is put into this in each session.

The medicine ball routine consists of about 20 minutes of continuous med ball work, a routine which the girls run through in pairs without much input from Nagy. The ball they use is about 4 or 5kg, so not extremely heavy and involves breaststroke sits, squats overhead throws, single arm throws, twists, sit ups, press ups etc. After the girls do this
they head over to the stadium and do stadium stair jumps. The only way I can explain this is by imagining what a frog would look like jumping up stairs and that is basically what they do. The idea of this is to improve the strength in the legs in a way which can similarly be applied to the motion of breaststroke kick.

**My comments:**

- Both Jozsef, Tom and all of the staff and swimmers at UBC were extremely friendly, helpful and accommodating throughout my time there. They operate an open door policy and always welcome observers in to the pool. I am very thankful to them for allowing me spend the week there.

- Nagy was an extremely interesting man, with lots of experiences and stories to tell. It was often hard to get a lot of discussion from him as he is quite self conscious about his English, but if you ask him the right questions he is more than happy to answer them openly and honestly.

- It was interesting when viewing his programme to hear that the swimmers found it so hard and challenging. There were no large blocks of aerobic sets, no high volumes, and according to Nagy it is like this all year round. I came to the conclusion therefore, that the swimmers found it so challenging due to the sheer volume of breaststroke done and the fatigue it causes to the legs in particular. Nagy cited a lot of swimmers who had come to him and tried him out for a few sessions and decided that they could not cope with his programme and so they left.

- The dynamic warm up and medicine balls exercises were very interesting and since my return I have tried some of these out with my own swimmers to see how they compare..... they have a lot of work to do, especially on the flexibility front!!!

- Nagy’s programme seemed to be a lot more disciplined than Tom Johnson’s. Swimmers were always on time, ready to warm up, never spoke whilst Nagy was talking to them, always immediately did what was asked of them. No complaints!

- I was disappointed not to see much of Annamay Pierse, and especially not to see her do any breaststroke training (especially after seeing her race in Leeds last August).

- Although the set up of the two Swim Canada’s programmes seemed to be similar to the British ITC’s, it was evident that there was not as much funding going into the programme in Vancouver. The swimmers on the national team receive funding similar to that of the British National Team members (i.e. according to world rankings). There are four other National centres situated around Canada.

- Tom and Joszef spoke of their frustrations in losing Canadian swimmers to the US Collegiate scene as the Varsity programmes in Canada are not competitive enough and do not offer the same kind of incentives. They spoke in general of Canada’s reluctance (across all sports and academia) to stand out above the norm or to be seen as excelling in any specific area. They say the general philosophy is for everyone just to be ‘good’ and that this has affected Canadian team performances in the past and is something that they are working to rectify at UBC.

Thanks......
My sincere thanks go to Scottish Swimming and in particular Doug Campbell and Ally Whike for giving myself, Craig and Sally the opportunity to spend time at UBC. It was a very worthwhile trip for all of us and I would encourage anyone interested in breaststroke to consider doing likewise in the future.