



PRETORIA-BASED ROCCO MEIRING IS HEAD OF AQUATIC PROGRAMMES AT TUKSPORT

COACH'S CORNER

BACKGROUND

'I'm 52 years old, grew up in Brooklyn, Pretoria, and competed in swimming, rugby and water polo at school, university and national service. I went to Menlopark Hoërskool, where top athletes like Karen Kruger [who went on to become a South African long jump champion] were my classmates. In those days athletics was very much the elite sport at school and the top athletes were treated like royalty.'

COACHING EXPERIENCE

'I started coaching swimming during university when I was injured for eight months. At first it was just my professor's kids, but soon I taught the whole neighbourhood's kids to swim. I could hardly say no to my professor or to the parents of the kids in our community. Soon I expanded to taking up the coaching position at the Carmel Jewish school. When the previously named Health & Racquet Club opened in Pretoria, the Carmel kids bought me a 40-year membership and I got dedicated lanes to coach them in the Highveld winter. In terms of coaching qualifications I have a Level Five

ASCA [American Swimming Coaches Association] grading, the highest possible. In SA I'm level three - for level four you need to have coached a swimmer to the Olympics. I've got about 60 kids from junior national level and up - the youngest is 12, and the oldest is 23. Among the top senior females are Tatjana Schoenmaker, Kaylene Corbett, Nathania van Niekerk, Samantha Randle and Christin Mundell. The prominent senior male swimmers are Ruan Ras, JP van der Merwe, Ruan Breytenbach and Henre Louw [open water].'

STATE OF COACHING IN SOUTH AFRICA

'South Africa has a very strong group of young coaches producing some great results. The future of swimming coaching in SA is bright. There's a lot of coaching education going on, certainly more than I've ever experienced. Swimming South Africa is also doing a good job with the CPD [Continued Professional Development] points system. This encourages coaches to pursue professional development so as to accrue CPD points, which allow you to register as a coach for the following season. This basically forces everyone

to be updated and go to clinics and courses. What's also encouraging is that coaches are at last starting to share their knowledge and expertise. The annual Speedo Coaches Conference, which we have every May, had a record 210 attendees this year. When I started the conference back in 1998 we only had around 50 or so.'

THE WAY FORWARD

'We as coaches have to find ways to continue to work together and to work smarter. We have to chase the international standards and be intent on getting up to that level and staying there. We can't afford to become isolated and out of touch compared to international norms. Also, we can't blame anything or anyone on what we don't have or what we think we don't have. We have to believe we have enough to be competitive, and we do. We have the talent, the facilities and the infrastructure - we need to get on with it. In [SA head coach] Graham Hill we have the ultimate inspiration. The challenge for us is to enable him to influence and help the rest of us more and more!' ■

A TYPICAL TRAINING DAY

- 4:48am Wake up
- 5:15am Arrive at the pool
- 5:30am First session with kids from surrounding schools and seniors
- 7am Second session with the Tuks sports school kids and seniors
- 8:45am Start day job at TuksSport
- 12pm Lunch
- 1pm Back to work
- 4pm Coach TuksSport school kids
- 5:30pm Coach TuksSport school kids
- 7:30pm Dinner at home
- 8pm Family time
- 9:30pm Bed time

QUINN ROONEY/GETTY IMAGES/GALLO IMAGES

