

Report on Coaches Meeting – Sunday 1 March 2009

The NSWFA hosted a meeting of coaches to discuss the appointment of Antonio Signorello to the Head Coach position, and to hear Antonio's vision for the development of fencing in NSW. Club officials and other interested parties also attended the meeting.

The meeting was in 2 halves; the first for coaches to hear and question the executive on the background to Antonio's appointment, the second to hear from Antonio.

In the first half, a report on the lead up to the appointment was given by Graham Markey. In this he made the following points:

- The executive has made a number of significant improvements in fencing over the last 4 years particularly in the areas of facilities, communications, administration and finances. However the development of fencing talent and coaching has been an ongoing issue of concern;
- An opportunity to talk to a top level Italian coach (Antonio) came up in mid 2007 and we negotiated with Antonio to come to Australia to conduct a 2 week training camp just before the Open Nationals in late 2007;
- Antonio expressed a strong interest in moving to Australia so discussions continued with him throughout 2008. We assisted him to obtain a permanent residency visa in late 2008;
- Antonio moved here in January 2009, and a contract was negotiated by the NSWFA for Antonio to be appointed our head coach. Broadly his duties are to improve the level of fencing in NSW, working particularly with young fencers and coaches. Specifically he will run squads, training camps, coach training, and be team manager/coach at National Championships;
- Antonio has exceptional qualifications in fencing coaching. In addition to a Diploma from the Italian Academy of Fencing, he has coached gold medal Italian teams and individuals over the last 8 years.

Graham apologised for the lack of communications to members about the engagement of Antonio, but pointed out the need to maintain a certain degree of confidentiality during negotiations.

There were generally supportive comments from the meeting about Antonio's appointment. However some issues of concern were raised. These included:

- A tendering process which allowed other applicants to apply could have been considered;
- Many NSW coaches rely on income from coaching. The appointment of Antonio, and the running of squads, will have a detrimental effect on that income;

- The NSWFA showed insensitivity to its existing coaches in the appointment process, particularly through the lack of communications and involvement.

In closing the first session, Graham said that nobody should doubt the enormous opportunity that Antonio offers. His long term commitment to coaching in NSW will see the sport grow overall and therefore be to the advantage of all coaches and members. Graham said that the Coaching Commission would be reconstituted in 2009 and be used as an advisory forum for coaching policy and practice.

In the second half, Antonio Signorello joined the meeting and outlined his vision for the development of fencing in NSW.

He made the following points:

- The value of integrated squads which allow our experienced and younger fencers to work together;
- The role that clubs could play by being more structured in their training sessions with a greater emphasis on group work and supervised bouts;
- The need to introduce weapons other than foil to younger fencers;
- The need to focus on Asia and to hold organised fencing tours to Asian competitions and training;
- The need to develop younger coaches and to seek out wider involvement in schools;
- His long term commitment to developing fencing in NSW, and to producing real international medal chances by 2016.

At the conclusion of his presentation, Antonio received spontaneous applause from the meeting.

Antonio has produced some summaries of his vision for fencing in NSW which are as follows:

**NSWFA 2009
Short & Long Term Project
2009→2012→2016**

The following fencing project is supposed to cover the next 8 years and it must be looked both from a present and future point of view. Our “train” will be running on different tracks:

1) *SQUADS-training together within a well organized individual and team structure is the base on which to build a higher level of fencer. Usually strong fencers have come from a large number of good athletes. To fence often with skilled and well talented partners will significantly help increase the technical and tactical level, as long as the whole system is inside a structured training program. Squads are held weekly at the moment because of the venue, but in future years hopefully they will run twice a week according to an efficient semi –professional plan. Starting from the very first session, specified team training will be our first focus of attention. NSW must have a team built in many hours of careful and detailed work, getting out of the current process of simply assembling the best fencers the day before the event. It takes years to create a real team and our state/country must believe it's a primary objective that will lead also to individual improvement. It's not the other way round! The right fencers on such a team won't be simply the best fencers, but athletes that can guarantee a constant training and especially a relevant future improvement. A mix between experienced and very young fencers is what we're looking for.*

2) *COACHES-the goal is to have at least 5 good structured clubs in and around Sydney, producing a minimum of 50 good young fencers every 4 years. I've already started constant training with a few young people willing to teach fencing soon. We'll also run coach's clinics roughly 2/3 times a year; experienced coaches with a well built structure in their club will complete our plan.*

3) *CLUBS-good clubs will come out from coaches and clubs that believe in a structured organization and follow a modern technical fencing method. New coaches who have learnt from us and experienced ones who will be helped through constant structure and technical clinics (if they need it) will support this objective.*

4) *ASIAN WAY-geographically Australia belongs to the Asian World. Only 3 hours time difference and no more than 8 hours flight will assist us to build a fencing relationship with countries like Japan, China and Korea that have achieved great results in the last 10 years. Our best children, selected with the same criteria used for squads, will be invited to go once a year to a chosen Asian U:14 competition. They'll face reality while still young and learn from their mistakes. NSW's team fencers (4) will “have” to fence to the world cup's competition in Asia. It would be great to train a week there in between these competitions. European is too far and too expensive, plus to go there a couple of times in a career won't have much beneficial effect on a fencer. When we're ready the team will go to compete for the world cup season in Europe basing its training where it's most convenient. Of course a coach will always have to be with the team.*

5) *COOPERATION-this project needs everybody's cooperation. Australian fencing can't afford to spread around its power. Internal wars will*

only make the system weaker and fencers will pay for it. We have to look beyond the squads and try to make the best fencers work together independently from who's currently coaching them.

6) 2012-2016-Under 14 fencers will be invited once every 2 months to bout in the squad. They'll slowly learn from the older ones. We're to build a new generation more experienced and stronger than the previous one. Always!

NSWFA SABRE PROJECT 2016

For sabre we need to look pretty far! Sabre here isn't taught at schools unfortunately and almost every coach is keeping the old habit to start kids with foil. We must change it, otherwise sabre will never take off!

First of all we need coaches to teach sabre to kids under 12 (when too little, foam sabres might help), no need to wait. Both schools and clubs in 4 years should produce a decent number of new sabreurs and from 2012 we can start training a real competitive team for the future.

Sabre (especially women's) is the youngest weapon, so tradition won't be a big problem like in foil or men's epee. Like other countries (USA, Japan etc) we'll be able to catch up easier with the top level.

Squads and competitions under 14 will help to increase rapidly the level of fencers and introducing the best little sabreurs into the main "experienced" team will give them the chance to grow up protected and stronger. Every 4 years from now on we'll see this weapon growth and see if there are any corrections to make.

Again coach clinics and experience near older coaches will help to create new young coaches. There's a big request of fencing around in Sydney, so it will be our duty to make new clubs practicing only/mainly sabre.

See you in 2016!

ANTONIO SIGNORELLO