

## **Forging International Relationships**

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International Travel! What a great way to broaden the experiences of our athletes and our children! Today's world is becoming a close-knit community with instant communication via the internet. However, pictures and wireless communication are no substitute for actual human connections and experiences. Synchronized swimming provides us with a common bond worldwide. Athletes are taking part in international competitions at increasingly younger ages. If you stop to consider, European countries are geographically close to each other, and have a very competitive program for the 12 and under athletes. Younger athletes in the Americas are also competing in neighboring countries.

This past year, United States Synchronized Swimming has received several invitations for competitions with our neighbors from Canada and from South American Countries. We also extend invitations to international federations – both for national competitions and for invitational meets. Just last year, clubs in Florida, Washington and New England hosted international athletes at the invitational level. International competitors also join us at the SPEEDO Junior National Championships held every April.

Last year, our Age Group program fielded the first U.S. National Team at the 13-15 Age Group level. This Team represented the United States at the 2008 UANA Pan American Age Group Championships in Calgary, Canada last August, bringing home three silver medals. This year the USSS will also form an 11-12 Age Group National Team. These two USSS Age Group National Teams are planning on participating in an exchange program this summer with our neighbors in Mexico. One U.S. Team will venture to Mexico to train while the other will stay here and host a team from the Mexican Federation. This will allow for training techniques to be shared and new relationships to be forged.

Joining the National Teams in international endeavors, will be teams that applied through the club option program to fill slots in the 16-18 and 12 & under divisions. Other opportunities for clubs to participate in competitions abroad are listed at [www.usasynchro.org/events](http://www.usasynchro.org/events).

Often, clubs receive invitations to other countries to take part in competitions or clinics. All clubs should contact the National Office of their intentions to participate in a synchronized swimming activity abroad. Many invitations are informal, but some require Federation permission to participate. All Federations like to know of the activities of their clubs abroad. This helps forge friendships and opportunities to

increase our relations with those countries. It also provides our athletes with increased motivation to improve their synchronized swimming skills. More importantly, the athletes begin to forge personal relationships with people from other countries.

Collegiate teams often received invitations to train in other countries during their winter or spring breaks. They often take advantage of this opportunity to offer clinics for athletes from the host country, or to attend a clinic and train at facilities in that country to improve their own skills. This has also helped United States Synchro to forge new friendships abroad. Just imagine, our athletes are ambassadors abroad! This also offers us information on synchronized swimming programs in other countries, which can help expand our programs.

Exchange programs also exist for coaches and judges. Opportunities to coach abroad are frequently advertised. These provide marvelous experiences for our coaches, and help to increase our influence with other countries and vice versa. We have offered coaching education for our coaches and for coaches from the Americas for several years. This past year we expand the opportunities to attend the Coaches' College to other countries. This program has received high praise from all coaches. Our judges are often the first representatives to establish relations with other Federations as they travel and meet with other officials during the course of an international competition. It is important to include them in your travel plans for their knowledge and support, and as a resource and an integral part of your delegation.

Just as communication is vital in today's world, we must also communicate all of our international experiences to our Federation, so that we can develop and conduct a strong coordinated international program. Information on international opportunities is funneled through the Vice President, Olympic International to aid in this development. Reports of the experiences are shared with the International Relations committee to help guide them in the development of our international strategies. Please consider the opportunities for international participation in the future. I would like you to take advantage of this program and participate early and often!