



NPD Report – 2004 World FINA Diving Cup – Athens.

Rather than go through all competitions and results as per my usual reports, I will talk briefly of the highlights and the disappointments.

The 2004 World FINA Diving Cup was the biggest diving event ever! The reason for this was simple; for the first time ever, NGB's had to qualify for the Olympics. An unbelievable 50 Countries with 212 divers competing meant that there were no certainties for qualification.

Synchronised Events:

The Synchronised events were the largest the sport has seen in its short history with almost an average of 19 teams competing in the 4 events. With the top 3 teams from the 2003 World Championships already qualified for the Olympics and Greece an automatic home country qualifier, the odds of qualifying for only 4 remaining places in a battle with 15 other countries suddenly became slim.

However, British Diving as part of its Strategic Plan, had focused heavily on Synchronised diving. This paid off when all 4 teams qualified from preliminary rounds for a place in the final 12 at the World Cup. Suddenly the odds were better, 4 qualification places available but now only 8 teams challenging.

On the final round of dives in the men's and women's 3 metre synchronised competition, Great Britain were languishing in 8th place and needed the dives of their lives to qualify. Both teams produced the goods under pressure in what was a heart stopping competition.

The girls 3 metre edged out the mighty USA by just half a point and the boys sneaked in over Ukraine by 2 points.

This was a real highlight as both teams never gave up nor thought that they wouldn't qualify and I couldn't help think that how many times before have the mighty USA always been the one's to sneak through on GB? Revenge?

The Men's platform Synchronised was another great highlight and Leon Taylor and Peter Waterfield simply chased the Chinese all the way to the podium and only a blemish on their 3rd dive put them out of contention for the Gold. Their performance was so consistent and world class, the silver medal never looked out of reach.

A convincing performance and they have entrenched themselves as real medal contenders come the Olympic Games.

The women's platform synchronised was also an excellent display of diving and this event was simply a case of being outclassed by better teams. The girls produced a PB result and finished in 12th place and there was no other pairing that could have done GB more proud.

So 3 of the 4 Synchronised Events Great Britain qualified for the Athens Olympic Games. This is better than Sydney 2000 where no GB women synchronised teams qualified. In fact, only 3 Countries qualified in all 4 synchronised events and 4 countries (includes GB) qualified for 3 events. A remarkable result.

Individual Events:

As for the Synchronised events, qualification for NGB's was to be difficult. The top 12 finalists from 2003 Barcelona World Championships were qualified and approximately only 18 more places were available for qualification to the Games. This meant with some events having 40 or more competitors (men's 3 metre had 60) percentages were low of success.

Mark Shipman, Tony Ally and Leon Taylor had already qualified from Barcelona, so the pressure on those 3 was slight compared with the others.

Leon continued to impress and his 6th place (to go with his 5th at World's) shows that he is knocking on the door for a medal in the individual event as well as the synchronised. So far he has faltered on one dive each time and if he can put them all together, who knows.

Peter Waterfield found some good form and is slowly getting back to his best form. His 13th placing qualified GB for the Olympics. So in the Men's 10 metre individual event, GB have 2 competitors.

GB had already secured 2 places in the Men's 3 metre event (from Barcelona) but both Tony and Mark's performance at the World Cup was disappointing. Both divers had it didn't really matter as we had already qualified look about them and they will need to improve their attitude if they expect to make the finals in the Olympics.

The women's 3 metre event was also disappointing from a performance side of things although both girls did enough to qualify GB for the Olympics by a fine line.

Perhaps the stigma of trying to qualify the country (and yourself) was too much for them and now with that burden lifted of them, I will be interested in how they next perform.

The biggest disappointment was our women platform divers who are certainly worthy of competing in an Olympics, but unfortunately at this point in time, can't quite perform when the pressure is on or when it is needed the most. Both girls were well outside the qualification mark of top 30 but it is nothing more than inconsistency that let's our divers down.

Summary:

A fabulous World Diving Cup for Great Britain with Olympic Qualification in 3 of the 4 synchronised events and a full contingent in 3 of the 4 individual events. The failure of not qualifying one female platform diver is my only major disappointment but the selection standards were such, that only solid consistent performances would earn you a place on the 2004 Olympic Games team. I was very impressed with those divers that did qualify and it was terrific to see them produce the goods when under the severest of pressures. Normally the diver is only confronted with personal qualification but this time it was all about qualifying the country and 7 of the 9 divers produced the goods.

Great Britain finished equal 6th in the team/country ranking, also a marvellous achievement.

Finally, my sincere thanks to all the coaches for working hard, following the strategic plan and dealing with the intense pressure thrown at them. To all support staff, you were brilliant as always and kept the team together both physically and emotionally.

Good luck to all at the 2004 Athens Olympic Games.

Steve Foley.