

NPD REPORT – DIVE CANADA & USA GRAND PRIX'S 2003

These 2 competitions were pencilled in as our toughest test leading up to the World Championships and these meets certainly proved just that.

We targeted these competitions as the measuring stick for what we can expect in Barcelona in a few months time and as a vital chance to assess our strengths and weaknesses. This will enable us to prepare and adjust strategies where necessary as part of our fine tuning process leading into the World Championships.

Dive Canada – Victoria, BC, Canada:

The competition format was for all divers to compete in the preliminary rounds with the top 12 advancing to 2 x semi finals of 6 divers. The top 3 placed divers from the semi finals then advanced to the Final 6 where the medals were up for grabs.

Women's 3 metre springboard:

Number of Competitors = 21

GB Representatives: Jane Smith and Tandi Gerrard.

Both girls dived very well in the preliminary rounds however both girls missed one dive badly and this cost Tandi a definite place in the semi finals. She was very unlucky to finish in 13th place just 8 points from the top 12. However, Tandi was using a new and difficult dive for the first time in International competition and now is the time to practise this. Jane faltered on one dive only but the class of her other dives were such that she comfortably advanced into the semi finals in 11th place. Jane then stepped up a gear in her semi final and in a thrilling competition, qualified for the final 6 by less than a quarter of a point over her German rival. As can often happen in a final, anything goes and the favourites often feel the pressure. Jane, feeling quite relaxed with nothing to lose, really attacked her dives and startled her fellow competitors with her outstanding form. This led to several of the more fancied divers crumbling under pressure and with an excellent list of dives; Jane Smith took the Silver Medal.

Women's 3 metre synchronised:

Number of Teams = 8

GB Representative: Jane Smith and Tandi Gerrard.

There were 8 countries in this straight final and it included the Russian Olympic Champions from Sydney 2000 who were hot favourites. As it progressed, the Russian pair were simply too good for everyone and cantered to victory with the Germans and Aussies battling for the minor medals. Team GB of Smith and Gerrard were right in medal contention but faltered with their new and difficult dive in the 4th round to drop away from the medal battle. However a good last dive saw them finish in 4th place and if they can become more consistent with their new dive, they will be serious players in a very even event worldwide.

Women's 10 metre platform:

Number of Competitors = 20

GB Representatives: Karen Smith and Stacie Powell.

In what was a rather scrappy preliminary with many divers making mistakes, it came down to who could make the least mistakes as to who would qualify for the semi finals. Seventeen year old star Stacie Powell was a little inconsistent but nailed her last dive to qualify in 9th place and for someone who is still learning her trade in the senior ranks, this was an excellent result. Karen Smith with one dive to go appeared as though she would qualify comfortably but made a mess of her last dive to miss out on a semi final position by less than a point! Karen had been laid up the morning of the competition and to her credit, despite feeling poorly, competed bravely and was just lacking the strength to finish off her competition that was required and she had to settle for 13th place. Stacie drew a tough semi final and got off to an average start with her first dive. However, Stacie got right into the spirit of things and proceeded to dive superbly and only a slight blemish on her 3rd dive prevented her from sneaking into the final 6. Her last dive, the difficult 407C was again superb and she amassed some 77 points for this dive, the second highest scoring dive of the contest! Superb effort from this young lady and she can only improve with more experience under her belt.

Men's 3 metre springboard:

Number of Competitors = 22

GB Representatives: Mark Shipman and Tony Ally

As always, this event is filled with divers of such equal ability and standard, that it can boil down to nothing but consistency or even a slice of luck to make the top 12. The key for us is not to make mistakes at crucial times and unfortunately, Shipman faltered right on the line! Mark was always in the top 12 as the competition went along but on his second last dive, he misjudged his entry and dropped out of the top 12 to finish in 13th place. By now I was starting to really hate the number 13!!!!!! Tony Ally on the other hand got off to a poor start but calmed down and produced some excellent dives when really needed and rode his luck to edge Shipman into 12th place. Tony moved into top gear for his semi final and with an excellent list of consistent dives, qualified for the final 6 in 3rd place. The final was an incredible standard with the Commonwealth Champion (Despatie) riding high from the crowd support until a blemish on his 3rd round dive saw the US Champions overtake him. Ally continued to dive mistake free and his last 2 dives under pressure were tremendous to drive him into the Bronze medal position. This result is a lesson for all our divers to never give up and to hang tough. Tony went from almost missing the top 12 to the bronze medal whereas the top 2 from preliminaries failed to win the final.

Men's 3 metre synchronised.

Number of Teams = 8 official teams and 2 exhibition teams

GB Representatives: Mark Shipman and Tony Ally

Again this was a straight through final and the Canadian pairing were in top form and were simply too good for everyone. Team GB were in top form and only some polish on a few dives and they could have threatened for the gold. However, Tony and Mark were back to their best form for quite a while and they fully deserved their silver medal in what was a very even contest. Good effort and plenty of room for improvement and an increase in degree of difficulty will be required if we are to challenge for medals at the World Championships or Olympics.

Men's 10 metre platform:

Number of Competitors = 21

GB Representatives: Peter Waterfield and Leon Taylor.

The premier event was filled with the best platform divers in the world and this just happens to include 2 from Great Britain. Both Peter and Leon are clearly 2 of the World's best platform divers now and with the Canadian's and Australians performing dives that until a few years ago were thought impossible, this shaped up to be some competition! Peter and Leon were not in top form in the preliminary rounds but both did enough to qualify for the semi finals whilst the Aussie dominated the early proceedings. Leon performed some superb dives in the semi final but was not quite sharp and was still suffering the effects of a viral infection that he has had for some weeks. The good news is that Leon was good enough to advance into the final 6 with a 3rd placing in his semi final and one felt that his best was yet to come. Peter was also a little down on top form but a sensational 307C helped Peter to move into 3rd place in his semi final also and a place in the final 6. The final 6 was further evidence of the shift of power away from USA and Europe with 5 of the 6 divers in the final coming from Commonwealth Countries. In fact, it was reminiscence of the 2002 Commonwealth Games with 2 divers from GB, 2 divers from Australia, 1 Canadian and 1 German. Who's the odd man out?

Well the final was absolutely brilliant with several dives scoring 10's from the judges (including Leon's 307C) and dives scoring well into the 90-point range and above. The lead must have changed almost every round but after 3 rounds, it became a battle between Leon and the 2 brilliant Aussie divers (Helm and Newbery). Peter struggled with consistency and although he dived steady, he never quite hit top form and had to settle for 5th place ahead of his Canadian rival, Despatie. Coming into the final round of dives, all 3 divers had the same dive, the extremely difficult 5255B that must be a first! Leon was leading over Helm by some 3 points with Newbery another 10 points behind. Who could do the best back twister? I'm pleased to say... Leon! Leon out duelled the Aussies on the final dive to win the gold medal by some 13 points. A superb performance from Leon and pleasing to see him back to his best.

Men's 10 metre synchronised Platform:

Number of Teams = 9

Team GB: Peter Waterfield and Leon Taylor.

In what is usually our strongest event, team GB struggled in the optional dives to drop away from medal contention in a very close and competitive field. After a brilliant start, Team GB looked in business but a disappointing 4th round dive saw any hope of a medal disappear. Final placing was 6th. The Aussies proved too strong for everyone and were fairly comfortable winners with Team Ukraine proving to be a real threat and taking the silver medal in what was a surprise. Although we were not at our best, this event has grown in class and any medal in this event will be hard earned in the future.

Summary:

This was the best ever results in the Dive Canada meet and certainly the most number of medals GB has ever won on tour.

One Gold, 2 Silver and 1 Bronze medal was excellent. Despite these impressive results, we had 3 x 13th place and we must get tougher mentally so we can walk through the door when it is ajar! Too many times did we stumble at crucial times during the competition. We cannot afford to do this at the World Championships or World Cup because we will not even make it to the Olympic Games. There are no second chances, we must seize the moment with confidence and not falter at the last hurdle!

Overall, outstanding results with plenty of room for improvement.

USA Grand Prix – Woodlands, Texas, USA:

This meet shaped up as a mini World Championships with only the Chinese divers missing due to the Sars virus scare. The venue was the beautiful Woodlands outdoor venue and this beautiful amphitheatre style setting amongst the trees, really did provide a superb atmosphere. Sometimes small is better and with the stands full on most days, it was conducive for an excellent standard of competition. US Diving also brought in the 4 x Olympic Champion, Greg Louganis to sign autographs and thrill the participants that was a nice touch.

Women's 3 metre springboard:

Number of Competitors = 26 (plus 7 exhibition)

GB Representatives: Jane Smith and Tracey Richardson (Tandi Gerrard as an exhibition diver)

All girls started in good form and Jane and Tracey were very steady without actually nailing any dives. In another very even and keenly contested competition, Jane played a little safe on her last dive and suddenly dropped from a secure place in the top 12 to 14th place. Tracey who was always just outside the top 12 gave it her best shot on her last dive but came up short of a place in the semi finals finishing in 13th place, my favourite number! So both girls missed out on the top 12 and again, mainly through carelessness. Tandi performed very well but was just a little too inconsistent and although she was only diving exhibition (can't make semi finals as only 2 per country permitted) her final placing would have been 22nd.

Women's 3 metre synchronised:

Number of Teams = 9

Team GB – Jane Smith and Tracey Richardson

This was the first time Jane and Tracey had competed together in synchronised diving and whilst it was a trial run to see the possibilities, it turns out very well. They placed 5th with a good score and only had one blemish that ultimately could have cost them a medal being only 7 points away from the bronze. An excellent result and a worthwhile exercise that gives us good options towards Olympic qualifying.

Women's 10 metre Platform:

Number of Competitors = 24 (plus 5 exhibition)

GB Representatives: Karen Smith and Stacie Powell

Stacie Powell again showed why she is one of GB's future stars with another outstanding performance. Whilst still a little inconsistent with some of her dives, her tenacity certainly makes up for it. Her desire to make it into the top 12 is in simple terms, the reason why she does. Her most difficult dive was again her highest scoring dive and she found herself advancing into another semi final against the world's best. Gutsy performer. Karen is still adjusting from injuries and fitness and was below her best. There were some encouraging signs for her and it was her last dive that let her down again. Her 19th placing is not indicative of her capabilities. Stacie went for broke in her semi final and she was so pumped up, her control skill fell away and nearly every dive over rotated due to her adrenalin rush. I can't fault her for going for it and it is only inexperience that prevents her from the next step. Although she finished 6th in her semi final, the experience of these big occasions should hold her in good stead for the future. Impressive.

Women's 10 metre synchronised:

Number of Teams = 9 (plus 3 exhibition)

Team GB: Karen Smith and Monique McCarroll

Monique McCarroll had been sidelined with a back injury for the past few weeks and basically could not train until the day or two prior to this event. This meant that Karen and Monique had not partnered each other in a competition (or training for that matter) since February. So, with no expectation and little pressure on them selves, they proceeded to dive like they had trained together for years! Only a poor dive in the 4th round stopped them from having a PB and challenging for the medals. There 5th placing is very encouraging for the future and I believe if both girls can stay fit and strong, then Olympic qualifying is a real possibility. Well done.

Men's 3 metre springboard:

Number of Competitors = 33 (plus 3 exhibition)

GB Representatives: Mark Shipman and Tony Ally

Tony struggled with his board-work and balance, which in turn affected his forward and reverse spinning dives. Despite this, he was still in with a chance at the top 12 if his last dive was up to his usual standard. Unfortunately, under pressure, his board-work faltered and his last dive was poor dropping Tony into 24th place. Mark was diving very well and again was well placed inside the top 12 going into his final dive. Whether he went to sleep or played safe, only Mark will know, but he performed a below average dive and fell away from the semi final places into oblivion and 14th place. Thank goodness it wasn't 13th hey? Disappointing results.

Men's 3 metre synchronised:

Number of Teams = 13

Team GB: Mark Shipman and Tony Ally.

I would say that the disappointment of their individual results stung the boys into action and they were not far away from top form. A superb list of dives placed the Team in 4th place and only some rather dubious judging for the Russian duo, edged them out of the bronze medal. An excellent result and if they can tidy up some of their finishes on entry, they could well threaten for a medal at World Championships.

Men's 10 metre Platform:

Number of Competitors = 25 (plus 3 exhibition)

GB Representative: Peter Waterfield and Leon Taylor

It is not often Peter does not make the top 12 at an international meet but he just couldn't get going and dived flat. There was not his usual sparkle and the harder he tried, the worse he got. Better to have this kind of meet now and save the best for World Championships! I hate to say it, but Peter finished in 13th place. I'm having nightmares with that number! Leon continued his march towards perhaps another medal with a steady showing in the preliminary to place in 5th and a place in the semis. In what was a strange semi final, Leon faltered slightly on several of his dives and struggled to keep pace with his rivals. The reason I said it was strange, was that Leon's rivals also messed up several dives, but nailed a good dive just when required, whereas Leon never quite hit back and placed 6th. Disappointing performance by both guys.

Men's 10 metre synchronised:

Number of Teams = 9

Team GB: Peter Waterfield and Leon Taylor

Performances in Sport can change in the blink of an eye and sometimes it is failure or dissatisfaction with one's performance that can change the mind set and produce a marvellous moment in time. Peter and Leon produced one of their lifetime performances to win the Gold Medal in what was one of the most exciting finishes in platform synchronised diving you could ever see. The Australians led all the way with Team GB snapping away at their heels. The rest of the world were left in their wake and could only sit back and admire these 2 countries going head to head for the title! The final round and Australia enjoyed a 7-point lead over GB. Both teams had for their final dive, the hardest dive in the world. (5255B). Who could do it best under pressure? Team GB went first and amassed some 98 points for the dive, almost a record and certainly the best I have seen Team GB perform. Australia performed a beauty needing some 91 points to win but clearly it was not as good as Team GB and their 87 points dropped into 2nd place. Brilliant competition and a classic confrontation between the 2 best synchronised Platform Nations in the World (behind China). The World Championships promises to be one exciting competition and this event should be a classic. Sensational result.

Summary:

Despite some ordinary results in the individual results, the synchronised results were outstanding and give me confidence that we are on track to qualify for the Olympic Games in all disciplines. Our 5 Medals over the 2 major competitions is our best ever haul and there is no doubt that GB is becoming a force on the International arena. We must not become complacent though as clearly we still make stupid little errors at critical times and these prove to be costly. It is vital that coaches train our divers to compete in the next phase leading up to the World Championships. The divers must learn to train exactly how they want to compete. It's no good going through the motions and pretending that training is not difficult. We must make it difficult and put ourselves under pressure even under training conditions and make every single dive count in training. An excellent result overall but inconsistency remains our biggest threat.

Steve Foley

National Performance Director.