

The New Man at the Helm of the Edmonton Keyano Swim Club Canadian Coaching Personality: Steve Price

Not since the days of club founder Dave Johnson's arrival in Edmonton, has there been such a positive vibe within the Edmonton Keyano Swim Club (EKSC) and the Alberta swimming community. The search for a proven leader to guide the club back to the days of Cheryl Gibson, Peter Szmidt, Harry Taylor, Chris Bowie and Keltie Duggan had finally paid off and Canadian Olympic Coach Steve Price is the man for the job.

Price, who hails from the greater Vancouver area, is no stranger to building Canadian National Championship Teams and International level swimmers. "I guess you can say that I have always loved the sport of swimming," said Price. "I started off my career as a swimmer with the Hyack Swim Club under John Campbell and Ron Jacks back in the late 1970's and early 1980's. Ironically, once my swimming career ended, my first part time coaching job was also with Hyack as well as coaching summer league in and around Vancouver. In 1984, I was hired as a full time assistant and Head Age Group Coach at Hyack under then new coach Bill Sawchuk. Bill was my first mentor as a swim coach and I learned a lot about age group coaching and the club management aspects of swimming from his guidance."

After six years of coaching under Bill Sawchuk, Price felt that it was time to captain his own ship. Price began looking for head coaching jobs anywhere around the country where he could put his own visions and programs in to play. "I had a great run with Hyack but I wanted to run my own club," said Price. "In 1991, I applied for a Head Coaching position in Thunder Bay, Ontario that had recently become available and got the job. I had taken over from Bill Humby who had taken over from Peter Abbink. It was a great opportunity with a great base of age group swimmers to work with. During my years of coaching in Thunder Bay, I had coached great swimmers such as Andrew Foulds and Andrea Schwartz as well as learning and living all the trials and tribulations that goes along with being a Head Coach. More importantly, as I ran my own program, I felt that my eyes had been opened to all the possibilities of High Performance Coaching for the first time."

In 1994, Price felt that it was time for another coaching change. The head coaching job with the Regina Optimist Dolphins (ROD) had been freed up and was ready for new leadership. Little did Price know that his coaching

career was about to take a huge leap onto the International scene. “I loved the three years that I spent in Thunder Bay but I felt that it was time for me to move on to my next challenge,” said Price. “When I arrived in Regina, I hit the ground running. I had taken over from Murray Drudge and had an assistant coach in Sean Baker at the time. The club was predominantly an age group club yet had talented age group swimmers emerging onto the National scene. During my first year as head coach with ROD, we won the Top Age Group or “TAG” Rankings which was the best Canadian age group swim club honor provided through the Swim News age group rankings. Even though winning TAG was a significant accomplishment, I also had a goal of wanting to develop and sustain a Senior National training group as most of our top swimmers had moved on before my arrival. It seemed that our hard work had paid off in a short amount of time. In 1995 we had two ROD swimmers, Doug Wake and Andrea Schwartz (who had followed me from Thunder Bay) make their first Canadian National Team to the Pan Pacific Games in Atlanta, Georgia. However in 1996, Andrea Schwartz had made the Canadian Olympic Team and I was selected as a part of the Canadian Olympic Coaching Staff to Atlanta, Georgia. Andrea swam to a 5th place finish on the 4x200 freestyle relay which was a great accomplishment for ROD, the swimming community in Regina as well as an honor for me to have been selected as a part of the Canadian Olympic Team Coaching Staff.”

After the 1996 Atlanta Olympics, Price spent one more year with ROD and felt that it was time to move on and better his craft. Price wanted to continue his coaching progression on the National and International scene and was given the opportunity to do so. “In 1997 I was finishing my level 4 Coaching Certification when I had received a two year coaching mentorship from Swimming/Natation Canada (SNC) under University of British Columbia (UBC) and Canadian Olympic Coach Tom Johnson,” said Price. “When I moved out to UBC, I wanted to learn the ins and outs of High Performance Coaching. It was basically coaching 101, but at the highest level. I was not the coach of record for any swimmer yet I got to work with all the swimmers. I also worked very closely with the entire support network for our athletes at UBC. At the end of my mentorship program in 1999, I was hired as a UBC Dolphin and Vancouver National Center Coach. It was amazing to watch everything come together for the Canadian Olympic Trials in 2000 where our program at UBC had put 11 swimmers on the Olympic Team to Sydney. Between 2000 and 2006 I had been a part of countless Canadian National and CIS (University) Championship Teams. I was also

selected as a Canadian National Team Coach to the 2002 Pan Pacific Games in Yokohama, Japan, the 2003 Pan American Games in Santo Domingo, Dominican Republic and the 2006 Pan Pacific Games in Victoria, British Columbia, Canada not to mention being a part of another five Olympic swimmers making the Canadian Team to Athens in 2004.”

After the 2006 Pan Pacific Games, Price took some personal time off for rest and reflection. He was due for another change in his coaching career yet was unsure about staying home, or trying something abroad. “I took some much needed time off after 2006,” said Price. “I thought about where I wanted to coach and decided that a complete change of scenery and a different coaching atmosphere would do me good. I applied for a coaching position as the Irish National Coach at the National Performance Center at the University of Limerick in South Central Ireland, and was hired on a three year contract. I was looking for a program with a four year plan towards 2012. The program was quite unique as I was coaching a squad of 12 swimmers from all over Ireland. One of my goals was to re-develop the program from within. For example, a goal of ours was to final at the upcoming 2007 European Junior Championships in Antwerp, Belgium which had not happened in over 10 years. We had three of our swimmers final and re-write the Irish National record books in the process. The one thing that I can say about the swimming in Ireland is that the swimmers there are some of the toughest and appreciative swimmers that I have ever had the pleasure of coaching. One of my swimmers, Fiona Doyle, represented Ireland at the Junior World Championships and Melanie Nocher, who competed at the Western Championships in Victoria, British Columbia this past February, went on to Beijing, winning her heat in a National record time.” Both girls trained with Price for a period of time last season.

It was in 2007, while Price was in his first year of coaching in Ireland, that he got the call to come back to Canada. “I had been contacted by Cheryl Gibson and a group of EKSC Alumni who wanted to bring the swim club back to the forefront of Canadian and International swimming,” said Price. “After numerous talks with Cheryl and the President of EKSC, the offer was too hard to pass up and I made the tough decision to leave Ireland and return to Canada to start my Head Coaching duties at EKSC in October of 2007.” One of the deciding factors for Price, was a commitment from the City of Edmonton to return the Kinsmen Sport Centre back to an International standard for competing and training. Also, there will be additional 50 meter

pools built in the city over the next few years which bodes well for the clubs development.

Price made sure that the new set up at EKSC would be one that would be tailor made for success from the grassroots to the International level. “There were many changes that were made to EKSC club structure which made my return to Canada that much easier,” said Price. “The first was that the Head Coach be made the director of Swimming Operations with the Board of Directors acting as an advisory board and fundraising coordinators for the club. The second change was basically the de-construction and reconstruction of the clubs infrastructure. We realized that we needed to sacrifice performance to create a foundation for the club for years to come. The third was to actively search for an Assistant Head Coach/Age Group coach which was needed. We had advertised the job around the World and had received 35 applications with only three Canadian based coaches applying for the job. One Canadian coach in particular, Jason Chugh, had stood out from the rest. He impressed me with his vision and knowledge of the sport and the fact that he took the initiative to go to Australia to work with Stephan Widmer at the Queensland Academy of Sport in Brisbane, Australia for a year was enough incentive for me to hire him. He is a welcomed addition to the club.” Price added, “In addition, the club has made a commitment to bring the Edmonton Keyano International Swim Meet back to the standard it was in the 70’s and 80’s. We will be seeking International competition to come to Edmonton to compete against Canada’s best Age Group swimmers. Because the facility has been upgraded, you will see more National meets coming to Edmonton as well. This includes the North American Challenge Cup this past August and the Western Championships coming this February.”

With nearly a year gone by, Price has set up EKSC with all the right tools leading into the 2012 Olympic trials. “The main goal here is to provide our young talent with every opportunity to develop throughout the ranks of swimming from the grass roots to the International realm,” said Price. “We wanted to reconnect the current Edmonton membership with their successful past. We had four Olympic banners, from 1980 to 1992, hung in the Kinsmen Centre commemorating the Olympic accomplishments of past Keyano swimmers. These were presented to the Keyano Olympians at the EKI last season. It is important for our current and future Keyano swimmers to know that EKSC has had an Olympian represent Canada at every

Olympics since its inception. From 1996 to 2008, swimmers had moved to other clubs but had represented EKSC at one time.”

Moving into the next quadrennial, it would seem that the Edmonton Keyano Swim Club has made a commitment to their city and country, to bring their club back to the World swimming stage through the leadership of Head Coach Steve Price. “We have standout performers such as distance swimmer Kier Maitland who place 2nd at the Canadian Olympic Trials in the 1500 as well as coaches, parents and all our swimmers who are here to make EKSC the best club in Canada,” said Price. “We have made the necessary changes and are now looking forward to the challenges and successes which lie ahead.”