

# Renegades Newsletter

## Nov. 14

This week we offer up a chat with Barry King, head coach of the Indiana University women's water polo team. His roster this coming NCAA season includes former Renegades Alynne Reade and Shelby Taylor. He has some interesting ideas about the sport, what makes a good player and sings the same refrain when it comes to combining sports and academics, namely .... excellent grades and study habits are every bit as important as the ability to skip a shot under the bar or throw down a 1:01 for the 100.

### **Compare water polo in Canada and the United States:**

I think there are many more similarities than differences. Sometimes I think what kinda exacerbates the differences is that people start thinking there are fundamental differences when that really isn't the truth. There are some very slight, but noticeable differences, about the way the game is played in the two countries. I think the game is refereed a little more physically in Canada. The other thing is that because of the differences in the number of available athletes, the American game is predicated a little bit more on swimming ability. And because of that, our style generates a bit more of a counter-attack approach to the game. Just look at the amazing game our two national teams played in the Pan-Am Games final. Six periods and 20 penalty shots by each team and the final margin is a single goal. There is very little to choose between these two teams.

### **Name the things you look for when you evaluate a prospective player for your program:**

Every coach has his or her own "one thing" that they look for above others when they are evaluating talent. For me, I want to see an ability to make your own space. I can't necessarily always define it, but I know it when I see it. Can you pass the ball well when under pressure? Can you use your body to create that inch or two of space that you need to be able to complete the play? That's what I'm looking for when I watch a girl play. Your ability to do that pretty much points out that you have all the athletic skills needed to play the game. Can she handle pressure; can she give pressure? These are the things you have to be able to do in order to play the game at the collegiate level.



## **What about the relative merits of size and speed?**

You don't always get them in the same package. But of the two, size is less important, I would rate length, speed, and then size in that order. Length is height and reach. It's really the measure from your bellybutton to the tips of your fingers, Wingspan might be a way to describe it. It's hard to define, but you know it when you're looking at it. There's plenty of 5-9 kids who play like they're 6-2 and there's plenty of 6-2 girls who play like they're only 5-9. I think size is a little less important and length is an important physical measure of a truly good player. Especially considering that from the water level down, we're pretty much all the same. The difference is the amount of space you cover above the water and that's where length really comes into play. Most players are sort of within the same area speed-wise.

In many ways, water polo isn't all that complicated a sport. You swim, you get the ball, you throw it in the other team's net. At Indiana, we want people who can swim and attack. The inside joke on our team is that there are only two positions - goalkeeper and utility.

## **What intangibles do you look for in a water polo player?**

It all goes back to an ability to make space. If you have an athlete who can do that, then they have one of those intangibles. Things like game sense, competitiveness. One thing we don't hear enough goes like this: A lot of times we'll ask a kid, "What is it you want out of your collegiate experience." Very, very few of them answer with 'I want to win.' And if they do, it's the fifth or sixth thing on their list. So when somebody actually says 'I want to play on a team that wins championships' they immediately move into a different (recruiting) category. We want those kinds of kids. We want people who want to win and not just participate.

## **Dumb question, but I'll ask it anyway; how important is academics in the development of a water polo player?**

What you are doing in the classroom is even more important than what you are doing in the pool. Don't limit your collegiate opportunities by what you're doing, or not doing in the classroom. If you do poorly or average in high school, you are going to eliminate opportunities for yourself because there will be some schools that you will not even be considered for.

Don't limit yourself by doing average in school. Do the class work and do it the very best that you can. Some athletes see the athletic load as one that bypasses the requirements of academics and that's just not the way it works anymore. You've got to have both. Water polo, collegiately in the United States, tends to be played at institutions that have high academic expectations of athletes.

Here's the perfect example. My team's collective GPA is always better in the spring which is our competitive season than it is in the fall. Because the demands of the travel and the play and the practice eliminate any options of essentially wasting that time.

We're much more focussed, we're much more attentive to our calendars and schedules; it just makes it easier for us. Athletics can be the greatest of supporters of your efforts intellectually. But if you don't have the correct priorities, it can be the worst of burdens, also.

We can't get enough smart athletes; not just naturally smart, but kids who are respectful of their schedules and priorities. These kids tend to be better players. My starting seven last year had the best year in the history of the program and those starters had an average GPA of 3.6 on a scale of 4.0. That's practically unheard of. But like I said, smart kids usually make good players.

### **Do Canadian girls come down to the U.S. prepared for the academic load?**

Actually better than that. My Canadian kids have always been very well prepared. The one thing they're not prepared for is the stuff that happens before they get here. There hasn't been enough focus on the SAT and that kind of thing. The inattention to those sort of things can cost them from the standpoint of missed opportunities or having a greater number of schools to choose from. That attention hasn't been made to the fundamentals of getting into college. That tends to limit their field somewhat, sometimes. But when they get to college, they're fully prepared and have been some of the best student's I've ever had.

### **You bring a kid in on four years. Are you prepared to wait two years for a freshman to help your team in a significant manner?**

We do have kids on our team who are what we call "projects." These are the kids who we see getting something done down the road. Most of the time when we're recruiting anybody from Canada or internationally, it is because we think they are going to contribute right away. The number of American "projects" would far outweigh the number of Canadians who come down and aren't ready to step into a role on our team.

### **What should a young player do to develop as a water polo player?**

Play. Play as much as she can. Take every opportunity that you can to play that your family can comfortably contribute to. Play another sport that is not necessarily swimming. All games that involve a goal and a ball are essentially the same. The only things that change are the medium and the number of players on the field. It's not a coincidence that the language of water polo and the language of basketball are pretty much the same and are also very similar to the language of ice hockey. The best way to raise your level as an athlete is to have a greater understanding of just how games are played. That will go a long ways. All sports that involve a ball and a goal are essentially the same.

### **What about swimming?**

There's a certain level of swimming that is important. The way the Americans come to the game is they rise to a certain level of competitive swimming and they real-

ize they're not going to go much further and they look for another outlet. It would be better for our game if it was a little bit more in the reverse, where we come up in water polo and then learn how to swim better.

### **The Renegades, what is their reputation outside of Canada where they have established themselves as the strongest club program in the country?**

Incredibly good. You are in the midst of a cycle of athletes that any American water polo club would kill for. It's really quite impressive. But the Renegades have produced great kids going back before the kids from Brooke's cycle. Kids like Janis Pardy, Kristin Zernicke; that first group that went all the way through with the Campbell sisters as their coaches. They really established a reputation for the Renegades. The work that John and the other coaches have done with this present cycle; it's just very, very impressive. What it comes down to is that athletes beget athletes. You have these young athletes who get the chance to play with somebody like Emily (Csikos) and it's just really cool. They get to go home and tell their friends who are good athletes that "I get to play with these great athletes." It's just really cool. And then you keep getting these athletes. And they bring in athletes. And that's what the Renegades are in the middle of right now, and its really impressive to watch.

### **Water polo I.Q.**

That's all about game sense and your exposure to competition and repetition, but it also points to that player's ability to ingest that experience and make sense out of it. It takes somebody who has good critical thinking skills and an understanding of the world around them to be able to put all of those things into context.

### **Mentoring**

I don't think enough of that happens, to tell you the truth. On two fronts, we do too much separation of levels in general. You look at the European model and it's completely different. You've got 14-year-olds playing with the pros in their club modes. They're exposed to that all the time. Without the pro turning around and saying 'That's how you do that,' those kids just get to see how everything is done at that level all the time. It's one thing to watch and think 'Oh, she's really good.' But it's another thing to know why she's really good and that just doesn't happen enough.

### **What about the future for women's water polo?**

We're at a very interesting time right now in North America for women's water polo, in particular, because the first group of women's players to have come through the Olympic system starting in 2000, are all starting to retire competitively. One of the challenges now is to make sure that that whole group stays in the game in some fashion so they can give their knowledge and experience to future players. The Americans are looking at almost a full-scale retirement after 2012, just like the Canadians are. At least 50 per cent of both squads will be gone and the real challenge will be keeping the retirees in the game in some capacity. It's also a very exciting time to be a teenage girl play-

ing the sport in either country because there is going to be a huge intake of young players to rebuild these two national teams.