

# Swimming Australia look at Positive Sports Coaching

Rob Forsaith, AAP October 28, 2014, 10:06 am



Swimming Australia is among the many sporting organisations keen to tap the merits of a positive coaching pilot.

Former vice-president of the International Olympic Committee, Kevan Gosper recently launched the free online program, backed by the Oceania Australia Foundation.

Designed by Matthew Scholes, the focus is on developing mental fitness and building resilience among athletes.

"Positive psychology is relatively new, about a 15-year-old field," Scholes said.

"The research out of it is really conclusive. But it hasn't ever been packaged together for sport.

"It's not just about the positives. We look at negatives, but the way we frame them."

The evidence-based approach helps athletes perform at their peak.

But arguably the most valuable upside is that it can improve athletes' well-being and their ability to cope with life after sport.

"You can change the wiring of the brain so people are able to better handle failure," Scholes said.

"It doesn't mean losing becomes acceptable, you just understand the relativity of it all.

"That attitude actually helps athletes perform under pressure ... and when they retire they can have that resilience in other settings."

They are exactly the sort of lessons that a sport like swimming would be interested in.

Demanding an incredible level of dedication, a handful of high-profile stars have gone off the rails in recent years after retiring.

"We see it as a our responsibility to have a cultural environment that gives our athletes the very best chance of making their next transition (after swimming)," Swimming Australia president John Bertrand told AAP.

"You want them happy and passionate, so they don't burn out right now.

"But their health and well-being for the future is fundamentally important.

"For our head coach and high performance unit, we'll be utilising the learnings and research that's coming out of this program."

The prospect of a greater level of consistency in the pool is also attractive.

"We want to be No.1 in the world by the 2020 Olympics," Bertrand said.

"The question is how we do get there with an extraordinarily very small population compared to the US, China and so on?

"That means leading-edge thinking in terms of the time and direction between coaches and athletes."

Scholes, director of education at AFL Sportsready, will present the initiative at a meeting of Oceania Olympic members in Fiji next year.

Gosper suggested it could be rolled out internationally soon after.

"Either by way of the IOC's Olympic Solidarity division, or its education division," he said.

