

Tech Suits – The State of the Debate

By John Leonard

Posted: December 3, 2008

The University of Texas, less than 24 hours before its big December meet, does not have its new suit shipment.

Many Universities are told they may or may not get suits by February for the conference champs, leaving the opening that some will...and some won't. Some will qualify in super-suits and some will wear old technology.

The CSCAA pleads with the NCAA Swim Committee to put the new suits on hold once again until the mess is sorted out...and the NCAA Committee is slow to respond.

CSCAA President George Kennedy takes the principled stand that their team will not compete in the new suits.

In an international meet, the "suit police" inspect each suit before it is used to make sure it is an "approved suit" by FINA.

Rumors are rife (and some confirmation) that a suit is on the way that gives bio-feedback to the wearer to reduce or remove the feelings of pain. And its supported by 100 million dollars worth of work by a major pharmaceutical company, which clearly can benefit from a "no-pain" suit.

At age group meets across the world, high tech suits appear, making in some cases a totally unfair competition between the "haves" and the "have-nots" and in other cases provide comic relief as mommies with more money than sense buy suits that "you can grow into" for their little darlings, and watch as they flounder in the \$500 potato sack.

Coaches, happy for years to accept the support check from the swimsuit company that helps put food on their family's table, find themselves in an terrible dilemma...they know the suits are bad for the sport, but the checks are good for their bank accounts. National Federations, with millions on the line in sponsorships, face the exact same challenge....oppose the suits, but how to support the companies who are their sponsors? And the companies just did what they are paid to do...make money and make faster suits to do it.

Where does the fault lie? With FINA.

Where must the fix come from? From FINA.

Who has benefitted the most from the new suits? FINA and its bank account.

The terrible bottom line...CHAOS in the sport of swimming.

Now, Cornel Marculescu at FINA (Executive Director) is not convinced that this "issue" is not just a few American Coaches and Forbes Carlile arguing against the suits. (Dinosaurs in the muck.)

The ASCA is working daily to make sure that the WORLD impressions of need for change goes to Cornel. You can all express your opinion by emailing Cornel at

office@fina.org . Feel free to tell him that I recommended that you write. (that will make me popular in Lausanne!)

So far, USA-Swimming President Jim Wood has stepped up to make sure that FINA knows that the USA favors a review and change in the rules, and the USA has submitted relevant proposals for rule changes to be submitted to the FINA Congress next July. The USA has taken the lead in this argument in every way, starting with the ASCA Board position in September, 2008.

Signing on in support have been the Head Coaches of Germany, Russia, and Slovenia, with Australia and Canada promising written support by the end of the year. Many other nations are debating their stance on the issue now.

Domestically, Southern California and Indiana so far have passed suit legislation even stronger than the legislation we were able to get passed restricting the use of the suit to 13 and overs at the USA-S Convention in September. More LSC's will likely follow.

In January, 2009, FINA will host a Coaches Conference in Singapore, of which i will have the opportunity to play a role in both managing the conference and shaping the debates on issues ranging from the suits to the World Competition calendar. In praise of FINA, its the first real opportunity for FINA to listen to its coaching group and we hope for a real discussion and communication.

Also in January, the FINA Technical Swimming Committee will meet in Miami and will review the USA-Swimming proposal on the suits. We can hope for their support.

In February, 2009, FINA will meet with the swimsuit manufacturers...and hopefully will have a broad imperative to change the existing rules. We shall see, post that meeting, where things stand.

This is a battle for the soul of our sport. Shall it continue to be about hard work, attention to detail and athleticism, or shall it deteriorate into a soul-less contest of engineering expertise. Is it sport, or is it commerce?

Let FINA know where you stand. Cornel Marculescu – office@fina.org, President
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