

Brian Volpenhein on Technology

Periodically, Bryan Volpenhein, three-time Olympian and second year coach of the Pocock High Performance Program, will write about science and technology from the perspective of a coach trying to manage a program, continually learn, and make athletes faster.

I was recently invited to attend the Kossev Consortium's first symposium where I had the tremendous opportunity (especially for a new coach) to listen to a variety of speakers from all over the country. Topics ranged from 3-D motion capture technology to sport psychology to the female athlete triad, all of which I knew nothing about. As an athlete, I have to admit, I was always skeptical of using technology. Obviously, I did use some; the nice carbon boats and oars, stroke coaches, hi-tech gear (although, I still have my favorite cotton t-shirt), and GPS machines to name a few. I think I developed that attitude in large part because no one ever really sat me down and showed me anything that was directly related to boat speed. None of the feedback was immediate, or none of it seemed relevant to whatever current issue I was trying to resolve. For example, I like the stroke coach or GPS watches because you can see instant change in boat speed with adjustments in technique or power application. This is instant feedback. This is exactly why I was excited about the Kossev Symposium. Their mission is exactly that: find science and applied technology that is useful and practical to coaches and athletes. As a coach, I'm looking to things I can do that will improve athletic performance without confusing or distracting the athletes with too much information, as well as not taking up too much of my time from the launch. I'm sure this is what most coaches are looking for and we have an ally with the Kossev Consortium.

The Kossev Consortium has already been a huge help to our program at Pocock. The video camera we had was old and missing some pieces. We had Dartfish, a video analysis software, but it was on a computer operated by MS-DOS (no way was I going to figure that out). When they asked how they could help, I went right to the beginning. They gave me a grant for a camera and within days I was taking video and showing my athletes footage immediately after practice. I was also able to meet the Dartfish reps at the symposium and now have the opportunity to learn all the benefits of that program soon. These are now considered basic technologies, but what they give my athletes is immediate feedback.

You can do so many amazing things with technology these days. Going to the symposium opened my eyes to how to find and use people who know how to use these technologies. A perfect example of this is the physiological testing we do at Pocock. I met the PotentRx team through the founders of the Consortium and I'm able to go to them and say, "this is what I want to know about my athletes" and they can design a test that gives me that information as well as how to improve those numbers so I can adjust the training program.

The question I ask when it comes to technology is: does it simplify the complicated? There are so many issues that we need to concern ourselves with and they are all complicated. I want technology that will narrow things down and make it easier to focus on specific items that can make an impact. The things I'm excited about in the future are how products like the iPhone are going to change the way athletes receive feedback. Wouldn't it be great to see force curves in front of you when you row, or have each person in an eight strap a phone to their seat and in the launch be able to see differences in drive

acceleration? I am learning more about nutrition and finding ways to streamline those issues for athletes as well as new ways to understand sports psychology and what concepts benefit athletes and which ones don't. Through organizations like the Kossev Consortium coaches and athletes can help influence the direction in which applied sports technology goes. We just have to be vocal and participate.