

**3rd International Youth Summer Camp of Pétanque
CAMP SLOVAKIA 2014
28 – 30 August 2014
Manor House Kočovce, Slovakia**



Attended by juniors and espoirs aged 13 to 22 years old + accompanying coaches from Austria, England, Germany, Hungary and Slovakia coaches.

EPA delegation:

- Coach / accompanying adult – Matt Blyton & Claire White
- 6 members of the National Junior Squad – Lewis Fletcher, Jessica Shoesmith, Vicki Amphlett, Annabelle Blyton, Sam Mellen & Connie Bell. These had been selected by the junior coaching team based on their performances over the season at various squad days.

Wednesday 27th August, 2014

- Parents, players and coaches met at Luton Airport, on time and without any problems.
- We were met at Bratislava by Jana, Slovakian Youth / espoirs coach (and the principal organiser of the camp) and Stanni. Stanni gave us an excellent 3 hour walking tour of the city, with a drinks' break – a really good start to our trip, relaxed and a good opportunity to get to know each other since most of the juniors only knew each other superficially.
- Jana and Stanni then drove us the 120km to Kočovce in their cars. (We were billed for petrol, approximately 7 Euros per person, which we hadn't budgeted for but feel this was very reasonable).
- Evening meal (and all meals) was taken at the Manor House altogether and then our rooms were allocated. The juniors were given adequate albeit basic rooms – the girls altogether in two adjacent twin rooms with a shared bathroom, the two boys in a twin apartment. The two coaches had excellent en-suite twin rooms each in the new building opposite the main manor house – Premier Inn standard (less the TV and coffee-making facilities).



- We had a slight unexpected problem in that we were asked to pay for the food and accommodation in cash – about 900 Euros. Whilst the amount was expected, the coaching team had wrongly assumed that this would be invoiced after the event since our hosts hadn't explained it in the pre-camp paperwork. Some phone calls to Matt's wife and then bank in England were needed to increase the amount that he could withdraw and to let the bank know that this figure would be withdrawn. A trip to a cash-point was then organised.
- The day concluded with some evening 'friendly' games to get to know each other and to try out the terrains – driveways and paths around the extensive grounds. These proved to be very challenging to point on and quite different to what the juniors are used to – a hard soil-base with a light chippings covering, with a large number of embedded chippings in the soil to deflect the boules. There was also one area of thick chippings perfect for a full portee shot; a technique that seemed to be quite alien to our players.
- Some of the other delegations had already arrived (Austria); others were to arrive very early morning (Hungary / some of the Slovaks) or in the night (Germany).
- The facilities at the Manor House are very good with masses of space both indoors and outdoors. The porch area of the Manor House provided a focal point for the ceremonies and scoreboards (and an excellent viewing gallery for the final of the tir de precision and triples final on the Saturday night). Although the meals were basic they more than adequate and no-one went hungry. A bar area served cheap drinks and ice-creams and there is a table tennis table on the back porch.
- Bedtime was by midnight – again no issues, with all our juniors' behaviour being excellent (as it was throughout the trip).



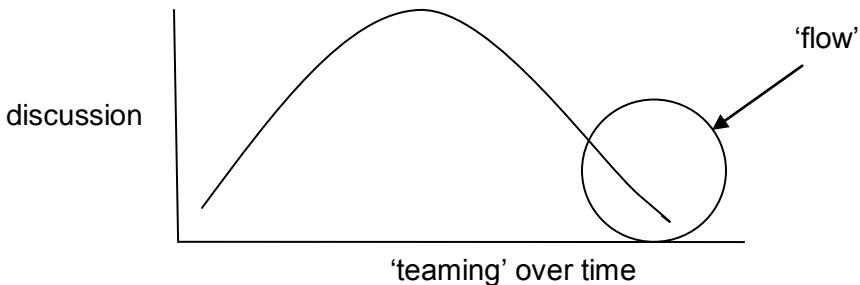
DAY 1 of camp – Thursday 28th August, 2014

- An overcast start but then a warm day with lots of sunshine.
- 0915 start - 30 minutes warming up comprising:
 - 5 minutes jog around the camp (this was an eye-opener to our juniors!)
 - General muscle warm-up including leg and arm stretches / wrists and fingers work
 - Short sprint races against each other (pairs)
- Each of the 38 participating juniors / espoirs then drew a number and their names / number were recorded on a flip chart, partly to allow everyone to learn who was at the camp and partly to be used to draw teams later on.



- Mixed-nation doubles games then followed for about 1 hour to help the juniors to mix and train. During this, the coaches met to share their aims for the camp and to listen to the trainer's plans and objectives.
- What **we** hoped to gain from the camp was:
 - For our juniors to get to know each other's games better
 - For them to gain in confidence when exposed to players from different nations – to be taken out of their comfort zones a little
 - For each player to improve his or her skills and identify aspects of their game to work on back home
 - For the coaches to gain further ideas that we can build into our own training programmes next year
 - To develop and renew international friendships, and most critically
 - To support our selection for the 2014 Junior European Championships in November. (Slovakia had similar aims, including a long term vision of helping the juniors and the wider membership to view petanque more as a sport than a game, and to help select their Euros squad. The Germans had brought 6 girls since they want to strengthen them and build their confidence, away from the 'boys' in Germany who tend to rule the roost! The Austrian's main aim was to provide training and specialist coaching for their Euros team + 2 prospective players for the future – very similar to Hungary's hopes.)

- The coaches' discussion led to the trainer sharing his views on the importance of 'teaming' through player discussion during games and how successful teams need to develop the 'flow' firstly individually and then as a team. This takes time (ideally 2 years):



- Personalities and characters are key to whether three players can reach this stage, irrespective of how strong they are individually – and of course we can all think of beatable teams of prima-donnas!
- Short break – apple and tea / health and safety instructions and 'camp 'rules' followed. At this stage, activities were a little slow to be organised, not helped by the fact that different countries arrived at staggered times. But it was all very relaxed and unthreatening helping to disperse any junior nerves.
- 30 mins – setting up and explaining 10 'ateliers' (stations) – the players were then organised into ten groups of 3 or 4 players per station (mixed nations but similar age-groups). The stations were a mixture of technical (e.g. *'can you promote the front boule?'*) and tactical (e.g. *'the score is 11-12 and you have 1 boule left, what do you do in the situation on the ground?'*). Two stations also represented almost lost causes e.g. *'the score is 3-12 and you have two boules left so must try and shoot the coche'* – described as 'hero' stations)
- 1230 – 1330 60 minutes lunch-break.
- 1330 – 1800 Groups rotated through the 10 stations being scored and advised by the coaches (with a 30 minutes tea and cake break mid-afternoon).
- 1800 – 1845 Dinner-break
- Communal game of petanque 'tug of war' invented by our educator, Alexander Bauer. This required all players to dump their three boules into the big pile then for all players to be split into two teams which formed two straight lines with the boules in between them. On the command, the first players of each team picked up a boule and passed it to the next player who passed it to the next player again, **all** down the line. As soon as s/he passed the first boule on, then the next was picked up, and so on. When the last boule was picked up from the central pile, the game stopped – no-one else being allowed to move. The two teams' piles were then counted to determine the winner. **This was a fun, competitive game suitable as an ice-breaker creating much laughter and rivalry.**
- 1915 – 2030 Evening matches in national teams + coaches, with some ends videoed for later analysis. The coaches 'scored' the players and advised on tactics etc.
- 2030** – 2130 Debrief by coaches and overall debrief by Alex / sharing of plan for day 2.
- 2130 – 2300 Coaches met to discuss players whilst the players relaxed over a drink.
- 0000 all lights out and no-one allowed to leave their rooms.



We were both really impressed by our trainer, Alex. One of just three German Sports Association 'B' trainers in Germany, and a top 100 player in addition, he was extremely knowledgeable about the sport and had a very agreeable manner with the juniors – a mixture of meticulous Germanic planning coupled with a relaxed and unassuming personality which commanded respect. He gave wise words to all and quickly developed a perceptive view of our juniors, helpful to us with our selection dilemmas. We all grew to enjoy his company very much. He also speaks excellent English and has worked with some exceptional players in his training role, including Daniel Voisin and currently Didier Choupay. It would be very good to get him to come to England next year to work with a greater number of our juniors and espoirs – something he has said he would love to do (and which would only cost the Association travel and accommodation costs).

Equally impressive was our wonderful host Jana, ably supported by her club member Andrea. It was Jana's vision that created the training camp two years ago, and her energy and organisation that helped this one run so smoothly.

DAY 2 of camp – Friday 29th August, 2014

- Glorious weather all day, it felt as if we were in the South of France.
- 0800 – 0900 Breakfast. Good night's sleep had by all. No overnight issues.
- 0915 Warm up as per yesterday, this time led by Lukash, one of the Slovakian espoirs.
- 0945 – 1030 Friendly matches (with the English and Germans choosing to play with each other in mixed teams which was good to see).
- 1030 to the end of the day the players were placed into 4 groups covering the following:
 - International friendly matches with coach input and some filming for later analysis (although sadly we didn't get a chance to watch any of the material filmed)
 - Tir de precision exercise: all players did this in a head to head situation, with the quarter-finals, semi-finals and then a final (at 11pm). This was won by Mat, one of the Slovakian espoirs. The top score in this was 38 points.

- A pointing station, with Alex working on technique with 6-8 youths at a time, especially lobbing (portee) and how to hold the boules correctly to allow for a controlled release
- Those not involved in one of the above were asked to be 'spectators' to the games to add an atmosphere of competitive play. However, this wasn't such an effective use of time as it meant that 3 of our juniors didn't really get going until 1145.
- 1730 – 1830 Dinner break
- 2030 – 0000 Time to relax, play friendlies and watch the closing rounds of the tir de precision.
- In terms of our friendly games, these did not go so well although we used these to try out different combinations of players which probably didn't aid team development. Of the seven games we played, we only won one – against Austria 2. However, all games were highly competitive and all were lengthy in duration. Overall stats clearly showed how difficult some of the players found pointing on this surface (as did many of the players from other countries too), as well as our limited shooting ability:

'Effective' points (P1 + P2) ranged from 32% to 68%, with main shooting figures being 21%, 23% and 38%. With some a low hit rate, our teams became quite defensive.

<i>Player</i>	<i>Tir de precision score</i>	<i>Pointing scores</i>
Annabelle	14	6
Connie	12	9
Sam	10	5
Vikki	10	6
Jess	9	8
Lewis	8	4

DAY 3 of camp – Saturday 30th August, 2014

- Another good day's weather although not as hot as the previous two. Today was the International tournament.
- 0800 – 0900 Breakfast
- 0915 – 1000 The draw, training and preparation (including the physical warm-up, this time led by the oldest Germans).
- 1000 through to about 1800 all teams played 6 games, with two leagues of 6 and then a final play-off game for all (e.g. top two played the final, second placed teams played for 3rd/ 4th positions etc).
- Our two teams were selected based on our observations from the previous two days, influenced by the views of each player who spent time with Matt on a one to one at the end of day 2 discussing this. As coaches, we swapped teams after 3 games to allow us both to have time with all players. All games were 'scored' for later analysis (see Appendix to this report for a summary). Apart from the final game, which was played to 13 under usual International rules, all league games were **timed** to take 50 minutes + a final end (with 10 minutes break between games to allow for coaches to debrief).

- Both teams generally performed well over the day and did well to cope with the disappointment of a number of very close games which in the last end went the opposition's way. Both won 2 of their 5 league games (so 4 games altogether), with improved pointing overall (although shooting remained an overall weakness). A play-off between the two teams in game 6 saw England 1 (Connie, Vikki and Sam) finishing in 7th place and England 2 (Jess, Annie and Lewis) placed 8th (of 12 teams). Overall results::

England 1 (Connie, Vikki, Sam)		England 2 (Jess, Annie, Lewis)	
Austria 2	Lost 8-9	Austria 1	Lost 9-10
Germany 1	Lost 4-8	Germany 2	Won 8-4
Slovakia 3	Lost 3-5	Slovakia 2	Lost 4-12
Slovakia 1	Won 11-9	Slovakia 4	Lost 7-8
Hungary	Won 11-9	Hungary / Slovakia	Won 10-4

Two wins -3 (4th place)

Two wins -1 (4th place)



Eng 1 v Eng 2

7th / 8th play-off 13-4

- The final was played between Germany 1 (the favourites) who narrowly lost to Austria 1 – both of our teams came close to beating these two teams, with England 2's game against the Austrians ending in a little controversy: the players heard a 'two minutes' call, then played the coche when 'time' was called. Having lost the end to take the score to 9-

10 (having led throughout the game), we expected the +1 final end. However, the Austrians were adamant that the 'two minutes' call was in fact the end of the game and that the end just played was therefore the additional one. After a steward's enquiry, it was concluded that time was up. All our players felt very hard done to, but nevertheless accepted the decision gracefully.



- 1830 presentation of prizes, thank-yous and farewells after a final evening meal.



Our proud juniors who were a credit to our Association – from left to right, Connie Bell, Jess Shoesmith, Vikki Amphlett, Lewis Fletcher, Annabelle Blyton & Sam Mellen

Sunday 31st August, 2014

Despite no play today and afternoon flights, alarms were set even earlier than the previous days (0615) for an earlier breakfast since the catering staff had been asked to feed the Hungarians who had an early departure to play in a Slovakian tournament. With a very late night the evening before, chatter this morning (even from Connie) was almost absent!

Jana and Leana, another member of the Univerzum petanque club, kindly took us all, with Alex, on a sight-seeing excursion to a traditional Slovakian 16th century castle and then to the town of Pezinok where the competition was being played for lunch (both vaguely en route to the airport). After some souvenir shopping we were then taken to the airport for our afternoon flights.



Overall reflections on the trip

We didn't really know what to expect on this trip, not having attended the two previous camps organised by the Slovakian hosts. However, having now experienced it this year I have no reservations in recommending that the EPA support it in future years for a number of reasons:

- the accommodation and facilities are excellent, with lots of space and friendly staff and challenging terrains on site
- the organisation was excellent
- the cost is very affordable, with each person's costs being just 22 Euros per day for accommodation and 3 meals – excellent value for money
- the opportunity to play with and against some strong opposition, as well as some of similar standards (as opposed to being over-exposed to the top petanque nations which could be quite demoralising for this age-group)
- the timing, being at the end of the school summer holidays, is good – it doesn't clash with other events and has really helped the coaching team in their selection for the European championships. (In future years, especially when the World Championships are earlier in the year, this event would be excellent preparation for our representative team. It would also be highly suitable for some of our espoirs.)

Our aims were certainly met, and all the juniors reported that they both really enjoyed the camp and learnt lots from it. They certainly bonded well as a group and got to find out more about each other's games and their own abilities (and the specific areas requiring further focus). Many of them also learnt new techniques, such as how to execute a high lob technically (the portee shot). They experienced situations requiring different tactics, some of which challenged their thinking, and they each reflected on their own style and techniques and how these could be improved (e.g. slower motion / 'soft' hands play etc). **I strongly recommend future EPA participation.**

If these juniors put into practice what they have learnt and continue developing with the same good attitudes, then we will have a crop of very talented adult players in a few years' time.



Matt Blyton

