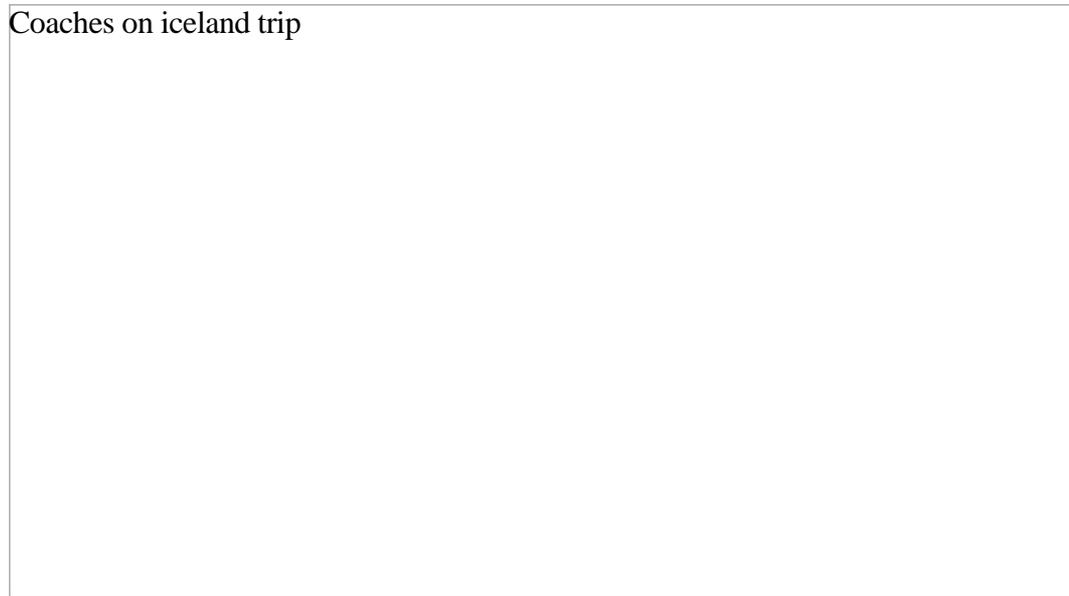


British TeamGym coaches enjoy development trip to Iceland

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Coaches on iceland trip



I was recently invited by British Gymnastics to assume the role of head of delegation for a coach development trip to Iceland. My gymnastics discipline speciality is TeamGym, an exciting discipline which sees teams of gymnasts perform a choreographed floor routine as well as perform runs of skills on tumble and trampet. It is huge in Scandinavia and the bi-annual European Championships are dominated by the likes of Denmark, Norway and Sweden. Six young TeamGym coaches from across Great Britain were specially selected by the British Gymnastics TeamGym technical committee chair and performance manager and invited to travel to Iceland. The aim was to expand the coaches' horizons, expose them to new ideas and provide them with a motivational trip in the early years of their coaching career.

The trip was organised in partnership with the Icelandic Gymnastics Federation and the group's host in Reykjavik, Iceland was Henrik Pilgaard who coaches at the impressive Stjarnan club and is responsible for Iceland's senior men's national team. I visited Stjarnan a couple of years ago and remain friendly with the head coach. Having a few connections over there already made me feel confident in leading the group of coaches. My role was to mentor the coaches, make sure they got to all their appointments on their timetable, chaperone them when sightseeing, support them in the gym with questioning to really make sure they got the most out of every session and to document the trip via social media and video diary updates. For me, the trip combined many of my interests and strengths and so it was something I was really looking forward to.

Across the five day trip the coaches, who were selected from a number of applicants, spent time with Henrik and his gymnasts looking at many aspects of TeamGym development such as trampet take off approaches, twisting techniques, choreography warm ups for young gymnasts and how the club organises and prepares foundation skills in a gymnast's early years to enable them to develop high level skills later in their career. Domestically, TeamGym is a small discipline under the British Gymnastics umbrella and coaches across the country get to know each other as they move up the performance ladder. Through casual networking as well as formal events such as training camps and national coaching clinics coaches get to swap ideas and techniques. Taking these young coaches completely out of their setting and into a working gym at one of the top European countries for our discipline drastically expanded the walls of the coaches' vision. **Suddenly, they were exposed to completely new ideas and ideologies about the sport.**

They were taken into a completely different club culture and, indeed, a different national culture. In Iceland, gymnastics is the third most popular sport in the country. TeamGym is one of the main disciplines practiced and events are sponsored by Under Armour and Subway. We stopped off for a bite to eat on the way to the gym for the first time and we stopped at Subway and saw a poster promoting gymnastics in the shop. Their national events are broadcast live on TV. It's a different game over there and gymnastics has a huge profile. It's growing all the time in Great Britain and in fact, the BBC recently broadcast part of the artistic gymnastics British Championships live for the first time ever just a few weeks ago. To spend a few days in a country that embraces and promotes gymnastics as much as we do football was very inspiring.

The coaches were also treated to the opportunity to watch two top teams prepare for competition in their final training sessions before the Icelandic TeamGym national championships and then watch them compete. They sat in the audience during the live TV broadcast of the competition and I got to put my national judges hat on and was invited to sit on one of the judging panels. Our coaches were greeted by the Icelandic Gymnastics Federation Executive Director and Vice President who had enjoyed watching their daily video diaries.

Coaches watching session

After each training session and competition I would support the coaches in reflection through discussion with each other. Between them as a group they had video clips, notes, many different thoughts and observations I really felt that discussing each day's content was an important part of digesting it all and getting it all straight in their minds.

Outside of the gym the group also had some downtime to take in the sights and visited impressive waterfalls, geysers and the world famous blue lagoon. It was nice to be able to get some time out of the gym too and strike a balance.

Coaches visit waterfalls

It was a great trip and a terrific partnership between the two national governing bodies. It allowed the coaches to gain some very valuable experience they can take back to their clubs and share. I hope they get to implement much of what they learned. The coaches seemed very engaged and reflective throughout the trip and they made some strong professional connections that I hope will serve them well as they progress through their coaching career.

Feedback from some of the delegates:

“Sharing ideas throughout the trip and learning from the atmosphere created in the gymnastic centre and competition hall has inspired me to attempt to recreate this back home. We will be soon to host a TeamGym training day alongside another club where i am keen to recreate the supportive team atmosphere seen at Stjarnan.”

Stacey Godden (Majestic

Gymnastics)

“Thank you for the amazing opportunity. I thoroughly enjoyed the trip and learnt a lot. It was very interesting to see the standard of the gymnastics in Iceland and how they work to be so good.”

Katie Potts (Reddam

Gymnastics)

“I have come back home from Iceland feeling really motivated and I can't wait to get back in to the gym to try out everything I have learnt. I feel really motivated to use the techniques we learnt to help progress our gymnasts. I am also excited to make up some new dance warm ups.”

Aimee Walker (Leeds Esprit

Gymnastics Club)

“The trip has really inspired me to be a better coach and progress with my coaching career. Spending time in and out of the gym while in Iceland has really helped me build a positive relationship with my coaching peers from up and down the country.”

Abbie Rutter (City of Newcastle Gymnastics Academy)

Have you ever had the opportunity to learn from coaches abroad? What lessons did you learn? I would love to hear them. Share them by leaving a comment below.

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