

Lydia Scharff, Coach Rep - 2025 USA Swimming Summit Report

September 24 – 27, 2025

Wednesday, September 24

Women Swim Coaches in Governance

Welcome

The session was opened by Beth Winkowski and Jane Grosser, who shared the vision statement: *“To strengthen women’s voices and leadership in swimming governance, ensuring inclusive decision-making, equitable opportunities, and sustainable growth in the sport.”*

Session 1: Shape Exercise

Presented by Shelly Rawding and Olga Espinosa, this personality and communication workshop explored the “science of behavior” and the “art of communication.” Participants identified with personality “shapes” (square, triangle, circle, or squiggle) and discussed how communication styles vary when working with people of similar or different shapes.

Guest Speakers

Brendan Hansen and newly appointed USA Swimming CEO Kevin Ring addressed the group, emphasizing the importance of women’s leadership in swimming.

Session 2: How a Board Meeting Should Run

Led by Jane Grosser, this interactive workshop broke down the three key phases of a board meeting: *before, during, and after*. Emphasized that true participation requires involvement in all three stages, showing up is only one-third of the work.

Thursday, September 25

Session 1: Robert’s Rules with Beth Winkowski

A concise breakdown of Robert’s Rules, including guiding principles and practical application for board operations.

Session 2: Board Positions

Participants explored the responsibilities of various board positions and compared how LSCs manage these roles. This exchange of ideas highlighted both similarities and differences across LSCs.

Guest Speaker: Paris Jacobs of Machine Aquatics, Potomac Valley Swimming

Paris Jacobs presented an overview of the 2024 USA Swimming Legislative Review and answered questions regarding the upcoming House of Delegates meeting.

Session 3: Planning to Be Involved with Amy Faulk, NC Swimming

This workshop included a personal SWOT analysis (Strengths, Weaknesses, Opportunities, Threats), followed by group discussion on barriers and strategies for action. Participants considered how their individual strengths could benefit their LSCs.

- The Women Swim Coaches in Governance group will continue meeting weekly via Zoom through October 28. Looking forward to learning more!

Summit Opening Session

Keynote: Steve Shenbaum (GameOn Nation)

Shenbaum set a positive and engaging tone with humor and interaction. His “Three Rules” for building community were:

1. Laugh *with*, not *at*.
2. Have each other’s backs.
3. Celebrate small wins.

The session reinforced the idea that supporting one another is key to success. A lot of laughter was included as he brought on different people from the audience, but overall lesson learned: we are all human and should support one another.

Interview: Cullen Jones with Kevin Ring

Jones interviewed new CEO Kevin Ring, who emphasized action, transparency, and his commitment to the future of USA Swimming.

Friday, September 26 - Coaches Track

Session 1: Exploring the Role of a Coaches’ Rep

The Coaches Advisory Council (CAC), established in 2023, shared updates including:

- An upcoming open water safety course for coaches and officials (launching April 2026).
- Ongoing commitment to “keeping athletes first.”

Michael Lawrence of the CAC shared insights on the CEO search process:

- A 371-day process, conducted by a 9-person committee.
- Unlike in 2017, this search focused on candidates with proven experience rather than career ladder progression.
- Transparency was noted as a challenge, with missed opportunities for regular public reporting. Future improvements may include post-process transparency reports.

LSC Performance Services

Mission: to empower clubs through growth, retention, performance, and stronger connections. Coaches are encouraged to serve as connectors, advocates, and leaders.

Session 2: Get Real with Coaching – Panel Discussion

Panelists shared challenges of coaching under pressure:

- *Emily Alrier* (Colorado Athletic Club): Working under a corporation with limited support.
- *Jennifer Gibson* (Swim Fort Lauderdale): Sacrifices and resilience after relocation and financial struggles. *“Failures don’t beat you; passion, love, and tenacity are stronger.”*
- *Stephen Henderson* (Annapolis Swim Club): Lessons from COVID, efficiency is key, less can be more. Never estimate your reach as a coach.
- *Ben Sutton* (Fort Wayne Swim Team): The complexities of managing a multi-site club.
- *Terry Jones* (USAS/Magnolia Aquatic Club): Navigating negative publicity.

The underlying theme is the human side of coaching - the passion & support.

Session 3: Breaking Barriers Together – Coaches & General Chairs Collaborate

Small groups discussed challenges related to sanctions, multi-sport participation, facilities, costs, and internal conflicts. At the end each LSC gathered and were prompted to discuss an issue within their LSC. We had a good discussion on communication as a whole and the roles our board members play in communication.

Session 4: Cultivating a Positive Culture via Safe Sport

(Alternate track attended) This session reinforced that *“culture beats strategy every time.”* Trust, transparency, and engagement are critical in creating a safe, positive environment for athletes.

Saturday, September 27

Southern Zone Meeting

During the Southern Zone Meeting, several key items of business were addressed.

- The Zone budget was approved.
- A presentation was given regarding the 2026 Athlete Summit, which will be held jointly with the Eastern Zone at Emory University in Atlanta.
- Tristan Formon of North Carolina was elected as Zone Coach Director
- Updates on upcoming Age Group Zone Meets: the 2026 meet will return to Orlando, and the 2027 meet was awarded to Morgantown, West Virginia.
- Senior Zones, discussion about the need to reassess the format/meet given the lower participation.

House of Delegates

Attending was a valuable first-time experience. Though I did not have a vote, it was enlightening to observe elections, financial discussions, and proposed amendments across the LSCs.

Newly elected to the USA Swimming Board of Directors: Jack Bauerle, Kate Lungsen, and Brett Lang.

Closing Reflections

The WSCIG course and broader Summit experience were invaluable. As a young coach, I greatly appreciated the opportunity to learn from leaders across the sport, engage in meaningful discussions, and connect with others dedicated to building a stronger swimming community. The sessions reinforced the importance of communication, collaboration, and leadership in creating a better future for the sport of swimming.