



NEWSLETTER

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Introduction – The Year's Gentle Lap

The final touchpad has been pressed. The last award has been held aloft. The community pools, so recently alive with the shrieks and splashes of holiday joy, have settled into a tranquil, sun-dappled calm.

For a moment, we pause. We let the water still.

In this quiet space between the years, we find ourselves reflecting not just on results, but on the journey itself. We see the powerful strokes that propelled us onto the world stage, and the gentle ripples that touched a child's life in a community program. We feel the collective heartbeat of a federation moving forward as one – from the elite athlete on the blocks to the volunteer timing their very first race.

This special double edition is our shared pause. It is a look back at **The Tides of 2025**, the unforgettable waves of achievement, perseverance, and growth that defined our year. And, as we turn our gaze, it becomes the first glimpse of the horizon for 2026, brimming with fresh promise and new lanes to conquer.

So, find your moment of quiet. Join us as we look forward to a brand-new year in South African aquatics.

The water is waiting. **Let's take this reflective lap together.**



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- Website:** www.swimsa.org

Message from the Competitions Manager

by Mrs. Daphne Bird, SSA Competitions Manager

Dear Aquatics Family,

On the Horizon: The First Glimpse of 2026

As we reflect on the powerful tides of 2025, our focus turns with equal energy to the horizon. The 2026 domestic competitive season is shaping up to be our most strategic and exciting yet, designed to build champions at every level.

Our goal is clear: to deepen our talent pool and sharpen our competitive edge on the world stage. To achieve this, we are implementing key enhancements to our competition structure:

- **A Sharper Focus on Foundation:** The maximum age for Age Group Competitions will be **16 years**. This allows coaches to concentrate fully on this critical phase of racing development, building a rock-solid foundation for the future.
- **A Dedicated Pathway:** A stand-alone **Youth Nationals** will be held in **Gqeberha**, creating a tailored environment to accelerate the development of our next wave of talent and provide a crucial qualifying opportunity for the **Bombela SA National Championships**.



Mark Your Calendars: The 2026 Roadmap

The season builds with purpose towards our pinnacle domestic event and major international team selections:

- **Grand Prix #2: 20-22 February, Pretoria (Hillcrest Pool)** – The perfect sharpening opportunity.
- **Bombela SA Open Water Swimming Championships: 6-8 March, Jeffreys Bay (Marina Martinique)** – Returning to a favourite venue.
- **Bombela SA Water Polo Nationals: 13-15 March, Durban**
- **SA National Age Group Championships: 21-25 March, Gqeberha** – Our premier Age Group event.
- **Bombela SA National Aquatic Championships: 14-18 April, Gqeberha** – The Commonwealth Games & Pan Pacific Games Trial Event.
- **Bombela SA National Artistic Swimming Championships: 29 March-1 April, Herzlia School, Cape Town**
- **Bombela SA National Diving Championships: 11-15 April, St Dominics, Boksburg**

Raising the Bar

To build on our recent international success and increase our depth, **qualifying standards for all domestic competitions have been elevated**. This aligns with World Aquatics' stringent timelines and challenges our athletes to commit to the highest level of training and performance.

Our Cornerstones of Thanks

This ambitious season is only possible through vital partnerships and dedicated service:

- We are thrilled to have the **Bombela Concession Company** as title sponsor for our National Aquatic Championships, enabling a world-class event.
- A profound thank you to all our **Technical Officials**. Your volunteered time and expertise are the bedrock of our sport. We look forward to welcoming familiar faces and many new colleagues to the deck.

The blocks are set. The course is mapped. We wish every athlete, coach, and club a focused training period and a successful, breakthrough competitive season.

Here's to a magnificent 2026 in the pool and open water.

Daphne Bird

Franschhoek High Performance Centre: A Strategic Investment in the Future of Aquatics

The Franschhoek High Performance Centre remains a strategically significant project for Swimming South Africa and the broader aquatic sporting community. Despite recent inaccurate public reports concerning the Franschhoek National Aquatic Centre, the federation remains resolute in its commitment to excellence, transparency, and long-term athlete development. The vision behind this initiative has always been clear: to establish a world-class high-performance environment capable of nurturing elite athletes and contributing to podium performances at international and Olympic level.



The original Franschhoek project was initiated by an entity known as Train Camp. Unfortunately, this entity misrepresented its operational and financial capacity and did not have the funding required to successfully commence and complete the development. Swimming South Africa's involvement has consistently been guided by strict governance protocols, compliance standards, and industry best practice. The federation's administrative and financial governance structures remain among the strongest within the national sporting landscape.

In terms of the grant agreement concluded with the National Lotteries Commission (NLC), funding was committed to support the construction and development of the facility. It is important to note that the investigation initiated at the NLC around 2020 is internally focused within the Lotteries structures. Swimming South Africa has not been advised by any



institution that it is subject to investigation in relation to this project. The federation continues to cooperate fully and remains committed to ensuring full transparency and accountability.

A significant challenge currently facing the project is the non-payment of the second and third tranches of the committed grant funding. Despite numerous engagements and formal interactions with the NLC, these outstanding payments have not yet been released. This delay has placed the project under considerable strain and jeopardises the timely completion of the facility. Furthermore, the prolonged pause has resulted in escalated construction costs due to inflation, increased material prices, and broader economic pressures over the past three years. Restarting construction under current market conditions will inevitably require additional financial resources.

In late 2025, Swimming South Africa was granted a lease agreement by the host school, effectively placing the responsibility for the future of the facility in the federation's hands. The organisation has since begun the process of reassessing, refocusing, and repurposing the centre to ensure that the investment made to date is not lost and that the original high-performance objectives can still be realised.

Perhaps the most unfortunate consequence of the project's delays is the impact on the school community. The learners have been deprived of access to quality sporting infrastructure that would have enhanced physical education, community participation, and talent identification. The completion of the facility would not only benefit elite athletes but would also serve as a developmental hub for youth sport in the region.

Swimming South Africa remains steadfast in its belief that the Franschhoek High Performance Centre can and will become a cornerstone of aquatic excellence in the country. Through renewed strategic planning, strengthened partnerships, and responsible financial stewardship, the federation aims to revive the project and restore confidence among stakeholders, athletes, and the broader sporting community.

The long-term vision remains unchanged: to provide a sustainable, high-performance training environment that supports athlete pathways from grassroots to elite level, strengthens South Africa's international competitiveness, and contributes meaningfully to national sporting pride.

SSA President, Mr. Alan A. Fritz



High Performance (HP) – South Africa's Road to Glory

The High-Performance pathway enters 2026 with formidable momentum, having laid a powerful foundation through intense training camps and competitive fire. Under the guidance of High-Performance Manager Dean Price, the focus remains sharply on building the aerobic engine and competitive mind-set required for the global stage.

Building the Base: The December Attitude Camp

In December, the Tuks Swim Centre hosted an intensive **Attitude Training Camp** for 70 swimmers, including most of our



Tokyo 2024 Olympians. The focus was uncompromising: a blend of heavy aerobic base work with specific speed and strength sessions.

"The camp was a resounding success," notes Price. "The buy-in from the athletes was exceptional, and the feedback was clear, they want this to become a permanent fixture in our calendar." This demand underscores the commitment of our elite group to doing the hard yards together.



International Heat: The Nelspruit Camp & Grand Prix

The momentum surged into the new year with a combined **Training Camp and Grand Prix** in Nelspruit (5-9 January). It drew 40 SSA swimmers and 100 athletes total, including competitors from Zimbabwe, Botswana, and Eswatini, creating a vibrant international training environment.

Amidst challenging 38°C heat, swimmers thrived on two demanding two-hour sessions per day. The camp was elevated by inspiring guest talks from coaching giants **Graham Hill (NZL)** and **Rocco Meiring (RSA)**.

The work culminated in the Grand Prix meet, where the future of South African swimming shone brightly:

- **Jayden Williams** delivered outstanding performances across all three breaststroke events.
- **Miele Banza** excelled in women's breaststroke.
- Siblings **Bandile and Siyanda** showcased their class in sprint and butterfly events.

Read the full press release: [Future stars emerge at Swimming SA High Performance camp and Grand Prix in Mpumalanga](#)



On the Blocks: Immediate & Future Focus

The HP machine doesn't stop. **This very weekend**, an **Olympic Camp** sponsored by the Regional Government kicks off at the Tuks High-Performance Centre. The program includes expert talks, sports science testing, and pool sessions led by Olympic coaches, fine-tuning our contenders for the year ahead.

Looking further forward, planning is intensely strategic:

- **Grand Prix 2** is confirmed for **20-22 February in Pretoria**.
- **Major Competitions for 2026** are under review, with all criteria being sharpened to ensure optimal preparation for the **Los Angeles 2028 Olympic Games**.

"The goal is continuous elevation," says Price. "From the attitude in training camp to the precision of our qualifying standards, every step is a calculated move towards lasting success on the world's biggest stages."



Competitions – Thrills in the Pool & Open Water

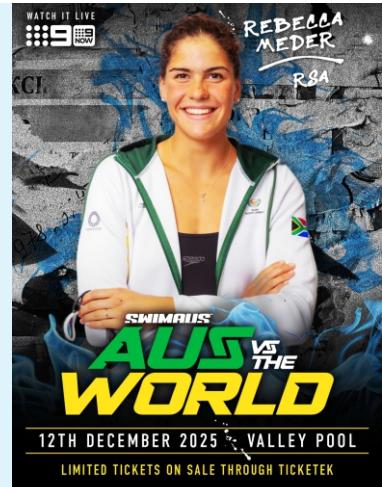
From the world stage to the continental proving grounds and the opening splash of the domestic season, South African swimmers have been in relentless motion, showcasing the depth and talent surging through our ranks.



Global Spotlight: Gold in Texas & Brisbane Battle

The year ended with a statement on the global stage. **Michael Houlie** dominated the men's 50m Breaststroke to claim **GOLD** at the prestigious **Toyota US Open** in Austin, Texas. "It's a feeling of relief and pride," Houlie said post-race. "This is a step on the path, and it shows the work is paying off." [Watch his post-race interview.](#)

Meanwhile, in Brisbane, **Becky Meder** represented Africa with distinction at the 'Aus vs The World' meet, gaining invaluable racing experience against some of the planet's best. [Watch Beckys race.](#)



Continental Dominance: A Golden Tide at the African Youth Games

In Luanda, Angola, Team SA's youth swimmers didn't just compete – they authored a masterpiece. The swimming squad was a cornerstone of the team's historic **69-medal haul**, delivering a clinic in speed, endurance, and relay brilliance.

The pool witnessed a parade of champions: **Abigail Kotze** (multiple Gold), **Nicholas Pretorius** (butterfly supremacy), **Cole Martin** (undisputed breaststroke king), **Jayden Williams** (200m Breaststroke dominator), **Leah Markgraaff**, **Matthew Goller**, **Chanel Veldsman**, **Bailey Lambert**, and so many more. The relay teams, from the mixed 4x100m free to the girls' 4x200m free, showcased the formidable teamwork at the heart of our success.



ATHLETE SPOTLIGHT: Abigail Kotze – Writing Her Own Story

“Are you going to let someone else be your writer? My life is my story to write.” This is the philosophy of **Abigail Kotze**, who transformed past setbacks into multiple African Youth Games gold medals. After missing team cuts in 2023, she asked herself, “What do I change to get better?” Her answer was resilience. “Drown out the rest of the world and those who doubt you. You are capable of anything,” she says. [Read her full inspiring story.](#)

Northern Exposure: Gaining Ground at the Salnikov Cup

At the **Salnikov Cup** in St. Petersburg, a young South African team embraced the challenge of a world-class short-course meet. The focus was on growth, and they delivered with personal bests and gritty finals performances.

Kris Mihaylov led the charge, topping the 200m Freestyle heats and making multiple finals. **Jessica Thompson** and **Georgia Nel** consistently fought their way into night sessions, while **Matthew Caldwell**, **Cassidy Burgess**, and **Myra Viduya** gained priceless international racing experience. Every swim was a step forward.



Domestic Launch: The Grand Prix Series Ignites in Nelspruit

The 2026 domestic season ignited at **Grand Prix #1 in Mbombela**, following the high-performance camp. The meet was a showcase of emerging talent, with several swimmers from the African Youth Games carrying their momentum forward.

The future shone especially bright, with standout performances from swimmers of colour highlighting the growing depth in our system: **Jayden Williams** was outstanding across all breaststroke events, **Miele Banza** excelled in women's breaststroke, and siblings **Bandile** and **Siyanda** impressed in sprint and butterfly events.



ATHLETE PROFILE FOLLOW-UP: Jayden Williams –From Near-Drowning to African Champion

The 16-year-old breaststroke sensation who stunned the continent in Luanda continues his remarkable journey. After a childhood incident that could have ended his aquatic story, Jayden's raw talent was nurtured by dedicated coaches and the immense sacrifice of his parents. Now, with African gold around his neck and an Olympic dream in his heart, he balances matric with a gruelling training schedule. "None of this would be possible without my parents," Jayden insists. His sights are set on Stellenbosch University and, ultimately, the 2028 Los Angeles Olympics. The chapter he's writing is one of pure inspiration.

On Your Marks...

The race is on. With the Grand Prix series underway, all roads now lead to **Grand Prix #2 in Pretoria (20-22 Feb)** and the ultimate domestic showdown at the **Bombela SA National Aquatic Championships in Gqeberha (14-18 Apr)**.

*Event Information for Grand Prix #2, as well as all upcoming competitions: swimsa.org/events-results/all-events

SA National Water Polo Championships 2026
~ Registration ~

BOMBELA
Concession Company

Bombela SA National Water Polo Championships – Important Update

Great news for water polo athletes across the country! Swimming South Africa has received an overwhelming number of enquiries from players eager to compete at the upcoming Bombela Concession Company SA National Water Polo Championships but who have not yet secured a team.

In response to this strong interest, **the deadline for athletes to indicate their availability has been extended**.

If you are a player seeking to be part of this process, please stay tuned to our official website and social media channels for further information on how to submit your interest.

We are thrilled by the enthusiasm and cannot wait to welcome athletes, teams, and supporters to Durban for what promises to be an unforgettable event.

~SSA Water Polo TC~



INTERTOLL



Southern Sun



Mass Participation Programme (MPP) – Community Currents

If the elite competitions are the powerful strokes of our sport, then the Mass Participation Programme is its joyful, life-giving heartbeat. This festive season, that heartbeat grew stronger and reached further, echoing in pools and beaches across the nation as our Holiday Program created ripples of confidence, safety, and pure fun.



More Than Just Swimming Lessons

These programs are a foundational investment. They are about:

- **Building Confidence & Muscles:** Transforming uncertainty into proud achievement.
- **Creating Quality Time:** Fostering bonds between children, instructors, and community.
- **Instilling Lifelong Safety:** Providing the knowledge that can prevent tragedy.
- **Cultivating a Love for Aquatics:** Planting the seed for future competitive swimmers, coaches, or lifelong fans.

A Nationwide Wave of First Splashes

From the lush beauty of KwaZulu-Natal to the vibrant communities of the North West, the MPP Holiday Program was a resounding success, touching hundreds of young lives.

- In **KwaZulu-Natal**, the program made a stunning splash at **Jabula Beach in St Lucia**, a partnership with KZNDSAC, iSimangaliso, KZNA, and the Mtubatuba Municipality. Here, against a breathtaking coastal backdrop, children learned vital swim skills and water safety, ensuring safer seas for all.
- In **Rustenburg**, the joy was palpable in **Monakato Village** and **Karlien Park**, where community pools transformed into classrooms of confidence. The program continued into the new year at the **Rustenburg Town Pool**, where tentative first dips quickly became confident glides.
- In **Verulam**, a powerful partnership with the **Moses Kotane Research Institute** saw the **Verulam Swimming Pool** buzz with energy, perfectly blending fun, fitness, and essential water safety education.





The Ripple Continues

The smiles captured in these communities tell the true story: every splash is a step towards a safer, more active, and more connected South Africa. The holiday program may have wrapped, but the MPP's mission is year-round. We are committed to ensuring that **every child, in every community, has the opportunity to experience the joy and safety of the water.**

A huge thank you to all our partners, municipal collaborators, dedicated instructors, and, most of all, the brave children who took their first leap into the pool. You are the true champions of our aquatic future.

#SSA #MassParticipationProgramme #LearnToSwim #WaterSafety

Education & Training (E&T) – Building Future Leaders

The foundation of every champion in the water is built by a dedicated coach or instructor on the deck. The Swimming South Africa Education and Training unit is committed to being your partner in that vital work. We recognise the immense demands of your schedules and salute your dedication. Our mission is to support your continuous professional development with flexible, relevant, and impactful opportunities.

Flexible Learning for Busy Professionals

Understanding your time constraints, we continue to offer a curated selection of **online workshops**. Designed for participation from the comfort of your home, these sessions focus on three core pillars essential for modern aquatic educators:

- Innovative Coaching & Teaching Techniques:** Enhance your toolkit to better motivate, engage, and develop athletes at every stage.
- Effective Communication Strategies:** Learn to convey complex technical ideas with clarity and inspire your swimmers to new heights.
- Diversity in Training Approaches:** Discover methods to adapt your coaching style to meet the unique needs of every swimmer, fostering an inclusive and productive environment.

Expanding Horizons: Thriving Online Courses & New Initiatives

The response to our online courses has been tremendous, directly contributing to a growing number of accredited coaches across South Africa. This success fuels our expansion:

- Learn to Swim (LTS) Course (Coming Soon):** We are particularly excited to announce our upcoming LTS course, designed to be our most



accessible initiative yet. It aims to reach aspiring instructors even in outlying areas, spreading essential swimming knowledge and skills nationwide.

- Pilot Program: Level 2 Swimming Coaching Course:** We are preparing to launch a pilot for our **Level 2 Swimming Coaching Course**. This advanced programme will build on foundational knowledge, exploring sophisticated coaching techniques to further elevate your expertise. Investing in your growth is an investment in every swimmer you guide.

Ready to take the plunge and unlock your coaching potential?

Register now and embark on an exciting journey.



Your Growth, Our Collective Goal

Elevating the standard of swimming education in South Africa is a shared journey. We encourage every instructor and coach to explore these opportunities. Your development is the catalyst for raising performance, safety, and joy in pools across the country.

Stay tuned for detailed announcements on course dates and registration. We also welcome your input – please reach out with ideas for future workshop topics you'd like us to cover.

Together, let's continue to build a stronger, more knowledgeable, and inspired coaching community.

General Updates – Poolside Chat

Catch up on all the latest news, accolades, and digital developments from across the South African aquatic community.

In the News

- A New Wave Rises:** The next generation of South African swimmers is making its mark on the international stage. Dive into the analysis of our landmark season and the fresh talent leading the charge. [Read the full story here.](#)

Water Polo Wave

- Successful National Camps:** Over 100 athletes and a dedicated coaching team came together for the recent SSA Water Polo Selection Camps, showcasing the sport's vibrant future.
- Insights from the Deck:** Hear from SSA Water Polo Technical Committee member **Lucky Letshabo** as he breaks down the camp's success and looks ahead. [Watch the interview.](#)
- U18 Women's Squad Announced:** Congratulations to the talented athletes selected to represent South Africa! Meet the future of women's water polo. [Watch the announcement.](#)

Upcoming Events

"Mark Your Calendars!"

February/March 2026 Preview

- SA Swimming Grand Prix #2** – Hillcrest Swimming Pool (Pretoria), 20-22 February 2026
- SA Level 1 Championships** – Provincial, 28 February 2026
- Bombela SA National Open Water Swimming Championships** – Marina Martinique (Jeffreys Bay), 6-8 March 2026
- SA Regional Level 2 Championships** – NA Smit Pool (Oudtshoorn), 6-8 March 2026

Stay tuned for details on upcoming events on our official website and social media channels.



Athlete Spotlight

- Aaron Putz: Golden Start:** Our reigning 'Aquatics Personality of the Year', para-athlete **Aaron Putz**, won gold at his first Pentathlon World Championships. His eyes are now firmly set on the Paralympic Games. [Hear about his journey.](#)

Digital Dive

- New Website Launched:** Explore the brand-new digital home of South African aquatics! Find all the latest news, photos, videos, and updates in one sleek, modern hub. Visit [swimsa.org](#)
- SHARE THE SSA LOVE:** Want to see yourself or your club featured? It's easy! **Don't forget to tag us** in your posts and stories. That's how you get featured in our official channels, so take advantage and share your aquatic pride!





Your Feedback is
IMPORTANT to US!



Contact Us

We value your feedback and inquiries. Please reach out to us through the following channels:

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