



# SWIMMING SOUTH AFRICA WATER POLO | NEWSLETTER

2026 QUARTELY EDITION

*United by water – One Pass at a Time*

## Foreword



Across national and international competition, our athletes have stepped forward with resilience and composure. Our coaches have led with intent, our managers have ensured stability behind the scenes, and our administrators have continued to hold the structure together, often under pressure.

This progress has been guided by a clear governance and performance framework. Exco has remained focused on oversight and direction, while the Technical Committee and Selection Committee have upheld standards and ensured consistency in decision making. The High Performance Team, under the guidance of the Director of Coaching, has driven the alignment between strategy and performance.

These structures are active and deliberate. They are central to how we build and how we move forward.

This has not been a year of ease. It has been a year of clarity.

We are not a programme standing still.

We are building, deliberately and consistently. Each competition has sharpened our standards. Each challenge has strengthened our resolve. Each performance has contributed to a broader trajectory that is becoming increasingly visible. Along the way, historic milestones have been reached.

## 2026: Tested, Triumphant

The 2026 season has tested water polo in South Africa in meaningful ways. It has challenged our systems, stretched our athletes, and required focus and discipline across every level of the game. In that testing, we have seen exactly what we are made of.

We have responded.



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The green and gold has been worn with pride and with accountability. We are seeing depth develop within our ranks, new talent stepping forward, and a growing alignment between ambition and execution.

To our athletes, your commitment continues to set the standard. To our coaches, managers, administrators, committee members, and Exco, your leadership and consistency provide the foundation on which this programme stands. To our supporters, your presence and belief remain a constant source of strength.

This season has shown that water polo in South Africa is focused, resilient, and moving forward with intent. There is more to come.

As we look ahead to 2027, we do so with a clear understanding of the work required and the opportunity in front of us. The foundation has been laid. The direction is set. We continue, together, with purpose.

Warm regards,

**Alan Fritz**

**President: Swimming South Africa**

# SPONSOR

Want to support or sponsor our National Programme?  
E-mail Mafata Modutoane at [mafata.modutoane@swimsa.org](mailto:mafata.modutoane@swimsa.org)

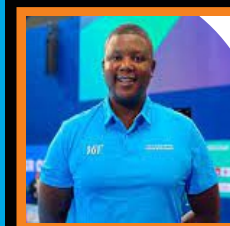
## MEET OUR OFFICE BEARERS

### The Technical Committee



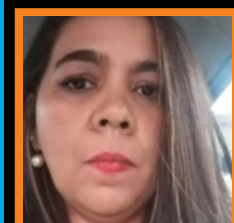
**Dion Willis**

**CHAIRMAN**



**Lucky Letshabo**

**TC MEMBER**



**Galidjah Hendricks**

**TC MEMBER**



**Vaughn Meecham**

**TC MEMBER**

## Water Polo Technical Committee Chairman: **DION WILLIS**



The past few months has been highly productive for our programme.

We successfully hosted a U18 National Selection Camp for both boys and girls, providing a strong platform for talent

identification and development.

This was complemented by a well-supported U16 National Age Group Championship for both genders, reinforcing our commitment to equal opportunity and inclusive participation across all levels and age groups.

On the international stage, both our Senior National Teams represented us with pride at the recent World Aquatics World Cup Division 2 Championship in Malta. The Men's team secured a solid victory over Singapore, while the women's team delivered an outstanding performance with back-to-back wins against Singapore and Slovakia.

In closing, I extend my sincere appreciation to our technical committee members for their continued dedication and support over the past few months. Their contribution remains vital to the ongoing growth and success of our sport.

**Dion Willis**  
**TC Chairman**

### JOIN THE CONVERSATION

Water polo, under the SSA leadership is growing. It's thriving. And it's evolving.



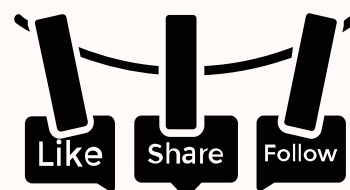
**FEEDBACK?**

Send it to  
[dion.willis@icloud.com]

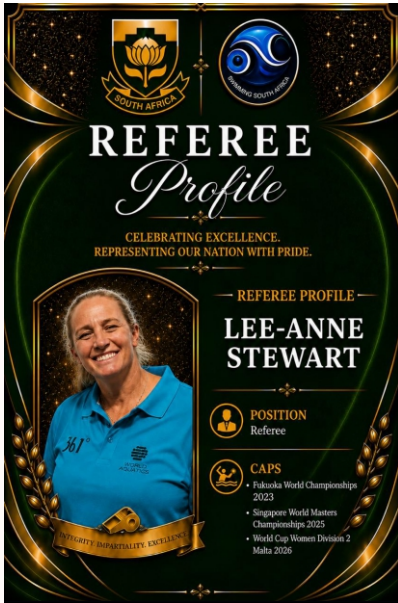
**We're on Facebook and Instagram**  
and we are celebrating **YOU**, the  
community that makes it all possible.



<https://www.facebook.com/SwimmingSouthAfrica>



## MEET OUR INTERNATIONAL REFEREES



**REFEREE Profile**  
CELEBRATING EXCELLENCE. REPRESENTING OUR NATION WITH PRIDE.

**LEE-ANNE STEWART**

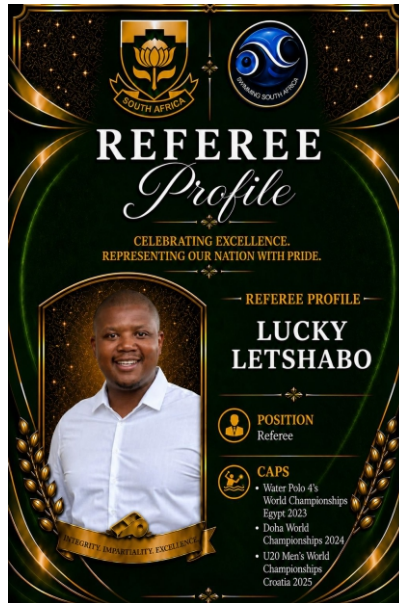
— REFEREE PROFILE —

**POSITION**  
Referee

**CAPS**

- Fukuoka World Championships 2023
- Singapore World Masters Championships 2025
- World Cup Women Division 2 Malta 2025

EXPERIENCED. FOCUSED. PROFESSIONAL.



**REFEREE Profile**  
CELEBRATING EXCELLENCE. REPRESENTING OUR NATION WITH PRIDE.

**LUCKY LETSHABO**

— REFEREE PROFILE —

**POSITION**  
Referee

**CAPS**

- Water Polo 4's World Championships Egypt 2023
- Doha World Championships 2024
- U20 Men's World Championships Croatia 2025

EXPERIENCED. FOCUSED. PROFESSIONAL.



**REFEREE PROFILE Profile**

**WARREN BEUSTER**

- U20 Men's World Championships Fota Romania 2023
- World Cup Men Division 2 Turkeje 2024

EXPERIENCED. FOCUSED. PROFESSIONAL.



**REFEREE PROFILE Profile**

**MIKE BATY**

Singapore World Masters Championships  
Singapore, 2025

EXPERIENCED. FOCUSED. PROFESSIONAL.



**REFEREE PROFILE Profile**

**MATTHEW STRINGER**

- U20 Women's World Championships Portugal, 2023
- World Cup Women Division 2 Turkeje, 2024
- U20 Women's World Championships Brazil, 2025

EXPERIENCED. FOCUSED. PROFESSIONAL.

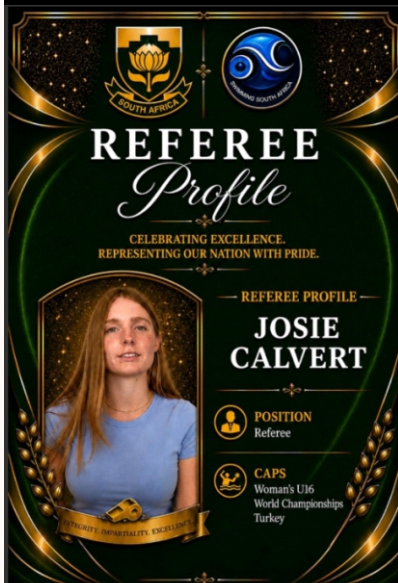


**REFEREE PROFILE Profile**

**DASCH BARBER**

- World Cup Men Division 2 Germany, 2023
- Singapore World Aquatics Championships, 2025
- World Cup Men Division 2 Malta, 2026

EXPERIENCED. FOCUSED. PROFESSIONAL.



**REFEREE Profile**  
CELEBRATING EXCELLENCE. REPRESENTING OUR NATION WITH PRIDE.

**JOSIE CALVERT**

— REFEREE PROFILE —

**POSITION**  
Referee

**CAPS**

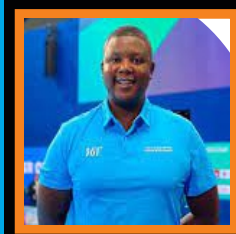
- Woman's U16 World Championships Turkey

EXPERIENCED. FOCUSED. PROFESSIONAL.

## INTERNATIONAL COMPETITION CALENDAR: 2026

 <p><b>WORLD AQUATICS</b> MEN'S U18 WATER POLO CHAMPIONSHIPS RIO MAIOR 2026</p> <p>27th – 4th July</p>	 <p><b>WORLD AQUATICS</b> WOMEN'S U16 WATER POLO CHAMPIONSHIPS ZAGREB 2026</p> <p>25th – 31st July</p>	 <p><b>WORLD AQUATICS</b> MEN'S U16 WATER POLO CHAMPIONSHIPS ZAGREB 2026</p> <p>3rd – 9th August</p>	 <p><b>WORLD AQUATICS</b> WOMEN'S U18 WATER POLO CHAMPIONSHIPS TENERIFE 2026</p> <p>16th – 23rd August</p>
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## MEET OUR SELECTION COMMITTEE



Lucky Letshabo

CONVENOR



Darren Stone

SELECTOR

## MEET OUR INTERNATIONAL COACHES

**COACHING Profile**  
CELEBRATING EXCELLENCE.  
REPRESENTING OUR NATION WITH PRIDE.

**COACH PROFILE**  
**KHANYISA MPUMLWANA**

POSITION: Snr Men's Head Coach  
NATIONAL CAPS: 4

**COACH PROFILE**  
**DEAN WHYTE**

POSITION: Senior Ladies Head Coach  
NATIONAL CAPS: 4

**COACH PROFILE**  
**ROB AMBLER**

POSITION: Head Coach U18 Men  
NATIONAL CAPS: 6

**COACHING Profile**  
CELEBRATING EXCELLENCE.  
REPRESENTING OUR NATION WITH PRIDE.

**COACH PROFILE**  
**SIYA GUZANA**

POSITION: Head Coach U18 Girls  
NATIONAL CAPS: 6

**COACH PROFILE**  
**MASI NAMBA**

POSITION: Head Coach U16 Girls  
NATIONAL CAPS: 6

**COACH PROFILE**  
**JARRYD APPELGRYN**

POSITION: Head Coach U16 Boy's  
NATIONAL CAPS: 0



## Director of Coaching: **STEVE LA MARQUE**



As youth teams prepare for upcoming World Championship events, athletes are encouraged to embrace the discipline and responsibility required for an elite sport, with a strong focus on teamwork, preparation, and injury prevention.

The appointment of Kacie Aikman to the national programme strengthens the sports science and conditioning component, with increased emphasis on athlete monitoring, load management, and performance readiness.

A key milestone this quarter will be the National Water Polo Camp, which will bring together athletes and coaches across all age groups while also launching the SA 4x4 Water Polo Tournament in line with evolving international trends in the sport.

South African Water Polo is entering a new phase focused on alignment, accountability, and high-performance standards across the national programme.

A modern coaching approach is being implemented to create consistent expectations, stronger collaboration, and clear athlete development pathways at every level.

Recent Division 2 Tournament performances have been highly encouraging, and the 2008 and 2010 age-group teams are hard at work in preparation for their respective World Championships and we wish them everything of the best.

**Steven La Marque**



## WOMEN'S WATER POLO WORLD CUP (DIVISION 2) Malta (Gzira), 21-26 April 2026



The South African Women's Water Polo Team returned from Malta after competing in the World Aquatics Women's Division 2 World Cup, and they did the country proud.

Across six matches played over six consecutive days at the Tal-Qroqq Aquatic Centre, our ladies came up against nations with far greater international experience, deeper player pools, and significantly more resources. Despite that, they competed with unity, resilience, and a growing belief in what this programme is building. For me, that is the real headline.

Malta itself gave us plenty of memories beyond the pool. The island traffic is something else entirely, and our police-escorted convoy to every game quickly became part of the daily routine. The ladies, as always, brought incredible spirit throughout the tour, turning almost every bus ride into an acapella concert. Safe to say, the energy in this group never goes unnoticed.

In the water, South Africa faced Kazakhstan, Croatia, and Russia during the league phase three well-established and physically dominant sides. It is worth noting that Russia went on to

win the tournament, while Croatia finished third, which speaks volumes about the level of opposition our ladies faced early on.

Against Kazakhstan and Malta, we were involved in tightly contested matches that could easily have gone either way, and unfortunately we found ourselves on the wrong side of those results. Against Croatia and Russia, there were genuine stretches in both games where our ladies showed they belong at this level. Those moments are important, and they will become the foundation we continue to build on moving forward.

We closed out the tournament with back-to-back victories against Singapore and Slovakia, playing some of our most composed and purposeful water polo of the week. Finishing 13th is a result we accept honestly, and it gives us clear direction as we prepare for what lies ahead.

This programme is growing. The direction is right. And with next year being a World Championship year, the work starts now.

To any player who believes they have what it takes to compete at international level and wants to learn more about our upcoming camps and selection processes, I encourage you to reach out directly. South African talent belongs on the world stage, and we are actively building a programme capable of taking it there.

To the ladies, the support staff, and everybody who backed us from home and in the stands, thank you! South Africa was proudly represented in Malta.

**Dean Whyte**

**Head Coach: SA Women's Team**





## MEN'S WATER POLO WORLD CUP (DIVISION 2)

### Malta (Gzira), 7-13 April 2026



The South African Men's Water Polo Team returned from Malta after competing in the World Aquatics Division 2 Men's World Cup in Gzira, and while the results may not have reflected the full story, the value of the experience certainly did.

Over the course of the tournament, our team was exposed to the intensity and tactical discipline of European-style water polo, facing high-level international opposition across a demanding week of competition.

Malta once again delivered its own unique atmosphere. Between the narrow streets, busy traffic, and the daily build-up around the pool environment in Gzira, there was a real sense that this was international water polo at its core. The group embraced every part of the experience, and the camaraderie within the squad remained strong throughout the week.

The tournament provided valuable benchmarks for where we are as a nation and where we need to continue improving. Our defensive transition speed and set-play execution were tested constantly under international refereeing standards, and the players responded with a willingness to learn and adapt match by match.

What stood out most was the steady improvement shown across the tournament. The team committed to measurable goals on both attack and defence, and there were encouraging signs in key areas of performance. Our 40% conversion rate in 6-on-5 extra-man situations was particularly pleasing and showed that, when given opportunities, this group can execute effectively against international opposition.

Competing in Division 2 allowed us to measure ourselves against nations at a similar stage of development, while also reinforcing that the investment being made into South African water polo is moving in the right direction. These opportunities matter. Exposure to tournaments of this level is essential if we want to close the gap internationally and continue building depth within the programme.

Most importantly, the team represented South Africa with commitment and pride.

***Khanyisa Mpumlwana***  
***Head Coach: SA Men's Team***





## Special Feature: **DION WILLIS** ~ A LEADER, A MENTOR, A CONTINENTAL PIONEER ~



### **A Leader Who Redefined the Standard**

Across the global water polo community, Dion Willis stands as one of the sport's most influential officiating figures. His rise from South African referee to Chairperson of the World Aquatics Water Polo Referees and Officials Committee marks a historic moment not only for him, but for the entire African continent.

Willis's appointment signals a shift in global aquatic governance: African expertise is no longer emerging; it is leading.

### **The Most Experienced International Referee in Africa**

Willis has long been recognised as the most experienced international referee on the African continent. His calm authority, deep rule knowledge, and consistency under pressure earned him appointments at major world events and the respect of athletes, coaches, and technical officials worldwide.

His officiating presence is defined by clarity, fairness, and an unmistakable command of the game.

### **Driving Training and Development in South Africa**

As the national leader of referee training and development, Willis has transformed the officiating landscape in South Africa.

#### **Under his guidance:**

- Referee pathways became structured and aligned with global standards.
- Development clinics expanded across provinces, raising national competency.
- Young officials gain mentorship and access to international opportunities.
- Evaluation systems became more transparent and performance-driven.

His work has produced a new generation of South African referees now appearing on global appointment lists; a legacy that will shape the sport for years.



### **Philosophy Built on Integrity**

*"Integrity and consistency are the lifeblood of officiating."*

This principle defines Willis's leadership.

Whether he is evaluating referees, shaping policy, or representing Africa on the world stage, his decisions are grounded in fairness, professionalism, and respect for the game.



### Global Influence, African Excellence

As Chairperson of the ROC, Willis now plays a central role in:

- Setting global officiating standards
- Overseeing referee appointments
- Ensuring integrity at major events
- Leading evaluation and development frameworks

His promotion represents a milestone for African representation in world sport; a moment of pride for South Africa and a powerful signal that African leadership belongs at the highest levels of aquatic governance.



## INTRODUCING OUR INTERNATIONAL TEAM MANAGERS



## OUR SOCIAL MEDIA PAGES



@SwimmingSouthAfrica



@swimsouthafrica



## U18 MEN'S NATIONAL TEAM

### Preparation Update

Our U18 Men's programme is officially underway, and while the build-up to the World Championships in Portugal has looked slightly different this year, the intent and direction remain clear.

With many players involved in school sporting commitments, our time training together is limited. We have four national training camps which is a key phase in our preparation.

### National Training Camp Schedule

- Camp 1: Johannesburg – 30<sup>th</sup> April to 3<sup>rd</sup>

May

- Camp 2: Durban – 22<sup>nd</sup> May to 24<sup>th</sup> May
- Camp 3: Durban – 12<sup>th</sup> June to 16<sup>th</sup> June
- Camp 4: Johannesburg – 20<sup>th</sup> June to 23<sup>rd</sup> June
- Departure for Portugal – 24<sup>th</sup> June

The group has stayed connected through weekly strength & conditioning check-ins and online team meetings. These sessions have allowed us to establish standards, outline expectations, and begin building a shared culture and understanding of what will be required at international level.

Our preparation is centred around an aligned

high-performance approach between pool and gym work. A structured testing programme has been implemented in collaboration with the coaching staff, Dean Price, Head of High Performance, and the team's sports scientist. This ensures all players are following a programme, regardless of location, and are physically prepared for the demands of international water polo.

The four national camps will form the backbone of our preparation as we focus on building team identity and culture, developing cohesion and connection within the group and progressing tactical understanding and intensity.

Online meetings will continue between camps

to maintain alignment, accountability, and continuity throughout the programme.

As preparations continue, the focus will shift towards execution, detail, and building combinations within the team. The goal is to create a group that is physically prepared, mentally resilient, and tactically aligned heading into Portugal.

This is an exciting group of young men with tremendous potential. The task now is to bring that talent together, build a united identity, and ensure we are ready to represent South Africa with purpose and pride.

**Rob Ambler**  
**Head Coach: U18 SA Men's Team**

## MEDICAL SUPPORT TEAM



## U18 WOMEN'S NATIONAL TEAM

### Preparation Update

The U18 Ladies national programme is now underway as preparations begin for the upcoming international season. This squad brings together a talented and motivated group of athletes, all eager to challenge themselves at the highest level and represent South Africa

with pride.

While players come from different schools, regions, and training environments, the objective from the outset has been to create a connected team culture built on commitment, accountability, and growth. The focus throughout this process is not only on preparing for competition, but on developing confident, resilient young athletes who can thrive in a high-

performance environment.

**National Training Camp Schedule**

- Camp 1: 30<sup>th</sup> April to 2<sup>nd</sup> May
- Camp 2: 12<sup>th</sup> June to 14<sup>th</sup> June
- Camp 3: 17<sup>th</sup> July to 19<sup>th</sup> July
- Camp 4: 10<sup>th</sup> August to 12<sup>th</sup> August

**Departure: 13<sup>th</sup> August**

To ensure continuity throughout the programme, preparation has been carefully planned around both in-person camps and ongoing remote engagement. Between camps, players will continue following structured Strength & Conditioning programmes, supported by regular communication, online meetings, and individual monitoring.

This approach allows the coaching staff to maintain alignment across all areas of preparation while ensuring players continue progressing physically, technically, and mentally in their own environments.

A strong emphasis has also been placed on creating clarity around standards, expectations, and the style of play the team aims to develop. As the programme progresses, each camp will build on the previous one, allowing the group to strengthen combinations, improve tactical awareness, and

continue raising the intensity required for international competition.

**The national camps will focus on:**

- Building a strong and positive team culture
- Developing trust and cohesion within the squad
- Improving tactical understanding and decision-making
- Increasing physical conditioning and match readiness
- Establishing consistency, accountability, and team standards

An important part of this programme is ensuring players feel supported throughout the process while also being challenged to grow. Creating an environment where athletes can compete, learn, and push one another will be central to the team's development over the coming months.

There is a great deal of potential within this group, and the priority now is to bring those individual strengths together into a unified team. Through structured preparation, hard work, and shared commitment, the goal is to ensure this U18 Ladies team arrives ready to compete with confidence, discipline, and pride on the international stage.

**REGISTRATION**

Registration with **SSA** for the new season is due

**1<sup>st</sup> May 2026**



**THE FINAL WORD**


Water Polo is bigger than opinions, agendas, or divisions. It's about growing South African water polo with respect, kindness and dignity.

For the **PLAYERS** chasing opportunity.

For the **COACHES** and **VETERANS** shaping the future.

For the **COMMUNITIES** who continue to invest in the game.

*Progress happens when we move forward together.  
Let's keep building. Together.*



**Senior Nationals**

14<sup>th</sup> - 16<sup>th</sup> June (Durban)