Jun 22 Quality Coaches, Quality Sports

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BY **ABBY HILL** | **JUNE 22, 2013,** 3:53 P.M. (ET)

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COLORADO SPRINGS, Colo. – Laughter, heartfelt congratulations and innovative discussions filled the DoubleTree by Hilton Hotel Friday night, as the United States Olympic Committee honored the 2012 [National] Coaches of the Year.

The event concluded the week-long National Coaching Conference, where many speakers brought forth new and inspiring thoughts in coaching. Many participants left feeling ready to implement what they learned. However, the week was not over until the coaching awards were handed out. The emcee of the event was John Register, two-time Paralympian and current associate director for community and military programs for U.S. Paralympics. Register encouraged the coaches by calling them the "sculptors of athletes."

Adam Krikorian, head coach of U.S. Women's National Water Polo Team, embodies that phrase. He was named the National Coach of the Year. The award was established in 1996 and goes to the coach of a national-level team or the coach of an athlete who competes at the highest level in his/her sport. Since being named the U.S. women's coach in 2009, he has led Team USA to a world championship, a world cup, a Pan American Games title and the first women's water polo Olympic gold medal for the U.S. at the London 2012 Games. Despite his great coaching success, he refuses to take the credit. "I am not any better than anyone else," Krikorian said. "I won this award because my team did well. I have great kids who work hard." A video of Krikorian's achievements, which contained messages of praise from many of his athletes, played before he received his award. "Listening to that video and hearing my athletes talk about me, there is not anything better than that," Krikorian said. Before becoming the women's national coach, Krikorian played and later coached water polo at UCLA. In his 17 years at UCLA the program won 15 national titles: 11 while he was head coach, three as an assistant and one while he was a player on the team. In such a short career, Krikorian has reached the pinnacle of success both at the collegiate and international levels. He says that there is no secret to his success. …

Tom Franke was named the Paralympic National Coach of the Year for his work with Paralympic swimming. Franke helped lead the 2012 U.S. Paralympic Swimming Team to 41 medals at the London 2012 Paralympic Games, the most of any sport. In addition to co-coaching the team, he individually coached the three team captains. Specifically, Justin Zook, whom he honored during his acceptance speech. "These athletes makes us look good," he said. In regards to his coaching success, he refused credit himself. "Nothing sets me apart from other coaches." Franke said. "I just happened to be at the right place at the right time." Franke has been at the "right place at the right time" for three Paralympic Games, but does not yet see a fourth in his future. "This is a job for younger people," he laughed. "If my country calls I will answer the call, and if not I am thankful for what I could get."

Michael Nyitray was so thankful for receiving his second Developmental Coach of the Year award. Nyitray, who was also recognized in the developmental category in 2010. "I did not expect this at all. I am very shocked to be receiving this award for the second time." Nyitray was honored for his work with youth bowling, to which he has committed 1,000 hours in the past year. He was a guest coach during the 2012 Tournament of the Americas, where Team USA earned 51 medals, and he helped bowlers receive titles at the 2012 World Youth Championships, Florida Stated United States Bowling Congress Tournament and Florida High School Athletic Association State Championships. He also began four new high school bowling programs and founded the nonprofit U.S. High School Bowling Foundation. "Bowling helped me find my life and now it is important for me to give back to the sport," Nyitray said. Nyitray also has a long-term goal that he is working toward. "The ultimate goal for me through all my work would be to see Paralympic bowling established," he said. He recognizes that this will take some time, but he says it is a realistic goal for him.

The Volunteer Coach of the Year was awarded to **Don Showalter** for his work with the USA Basketball Men's Developmental National Team. In addition to his success at the national level, Showalter is also recognized as one of the most accomplished high school coaches in the nation. Showalter stressed that, for him, the most important part of being a coach is molding players. "Coaches need to build relationships with their players," Showalter said. "Once you earn their trust you can do much more guiding."

Doug Eng, winner of the Doc Counsilman Science Award for adapting a mental training manual for young tennis players, shared in Showalter's sentiments. In his acceptance speech he said, "The older you get, you get more philosophical. We learn that it is more about developing the person rather than the player." Register ended the night by saying, "You coaches are master carvers that have the ability to impact lives. Go and inspire your worlds."