

China was learning experience

By Tim Switzer, The Leader-Post - April 18, 2009

Sam Valentine and Cole Miller have seen how the other half trains ... and trains and trains.

Valentine and Miller, both Saskatchewan-based members of the national junior diving team, returned Sunday from a week-long training camp in China where, to put it mildly, they had their eyes opened.

"Some of the 10-year-olds are doing 3 1/2 (somersaults) off the 10-metre (platform) -- it was insane," Valentine, a 14-year-old Saskatoon product, said incredulously.

"Compared to the Chinese, we probably looked bad. We tried to learn from what they were doing and how they can make the dives when they are that young. All the little kids still looked up to us though because they're so young."

And their Canadian coaches probably don't have to worry about Valentine or Miller ever complaining about practising too much, either.

"They train twice a day, every day -- it would be pretty hard," said the 16-year-old Miller, who hails from Regina. "It was very different to see how much different they train their kids than we do. They're more strict and we're a little more loose on some things."

"It would be nice to get a little more water time," added Valentine, "but I think they dive two times a day every day and their coaches work them to death. I don't think I would want to do it as much as them, but it would definitely be something to learn from a Chinese coach."

The two divers certainly picked something up during the week. Miller is already incorporating dives he learned in China ("It's nothing too difficult," he said) into his repertoire during this weekend's Western Canadian championships at the Lawson Aquatic Centre.

Miller and Valentine won their age-group three-metre springboard competitions Friday and were first and second, respectively, in the three-metre open event. The competition continues today and wraps up on Sunday.

"When you come here it seems a little more laid back (than in China)," Valentine said. "Everybody here is doing what they need to do. But in China, they'd be doing front jump tucks for an hour on the trampoline."

That might not be in the future for Valentine or Miller, but each is hoping for a good showing the rest of the weekend and down the road at the junior national championships in Victoria in July. Though both are in their first years in their age groups (Valentine in the 14- and 15-year-old class and Miller with 16- to 18-year-old divers) they could have good showings when it comes to nationals.

At the recent John Dickinson Invitational in Toronto, Valentine was first on the three-metre springboard, second on the platform and eighth on the one-metre. Miller finished sixth on the one-metre, 11th on the platform and 14th on the three-metre.

"I don't have really high hopes for nationals," said Miller. "It would be nice just to get a good placing."

With seven age-group medals in the last three years, Valentine now lives for nationals.

"I know you'll always have good days and bad days," he said. "When I go (to practice) and feel like I'm having a crappy day and want to quit diving, I know winning a national gold medal is far beyond the training for years and years."

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