

# PanAm Aquatics Athletes Committee

## Serving PAQ Athletes: Our Strategy and Commitment

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### **A Message from the Chair**

**Valerie Gruet (GUA, SW)**

As Chair of the PanAm Aquatics Athletes Committee, I am deeply honored to serve alongside a team of passionate athlete representatives dedicated to ensuring that the voice of the athlete is at the heart of every decision in PanAm Aquatics. Our athletes are not just competitors; they are leaders, innovators, and ambassadors of our sports. The future of aquatics depends on recognizing that athletes are central to shaping policies, programs, and the culture of our community.

I believe that true growth and meaningful change come when athletes are empowered through education, mentorship, and opportunities to develop both on and off the field of play. Knowledge is power, and access to resources, whether in leadership, advocacy, mental and physical health, or life skills, is essential for athletes to thrive, advocate for themselves, and contribute to the evolution of our sports.

Our committee is entirely volunteer-driven, fueled by a shared commitment to serve our fellow athletes. We are driven by the belief that athlete perspectives, when amplified, respected, and empowered, create stronger, safer, and more inclusive aquatic communities. We work tirelessly to provide platforms for dialogue, programs for development, and opportunities for collaboration—not only between athletes, but also with coaches, technical officials, and National Federations.

Ultimately, our mission is simple: to empower athletes to be active participants in shaping their sports, to create opportunities for education and growth, and to champion environments where fairness, integrity, and respect are non-negotiable. Every initiative we undertake is guided by these principles, and every decision we make is informed by the experiences and insights of athletes across the Americas.

It is my honor and privilege to lead this committee, and I invite every athlete to engage with us, share their perspectives, and join us in shaping the future of aquatics

in the Americas. Together, we can ensure that our aquatic sports are not only competitive and exciting but also empowering, inclusive, and built on the foundation of athlete leadership.

## Who We Are

The PAQ Athletes Committee consists of 19 dedicated athlete representatives from across the region and aquatic disciplines. We are a diverse group committed to listening to athletes' perspectives, providing guidance, and representing your interests at every level of governance.

### Committee Members:

- Valerie Gruest, Chair (GUA, SW)
- Percy Escobar Coppa, Vice Chair (BOL, OW)
- Bill May, Secretary (USA, AS)
- Ana Marcela Cunha, Member (BRA, OW)
- Aranza Vazquez Montano, Member (MEX, DV)
- Dakota Luther, Member (USA, SW)
- David Heron, Member (USA, OW)
- Dylan Carter, Member (TTO, SW)
- Dylan Woodhead, Member (USA, WP)
- Edgar Crespo, Member (PAN, SW)
- Estefania Alvarez, Member (COL, AS)
- Jack Dahlgren, Member (USA, SW)
- Kyra Christmas, Member (CAN, WP)
- Maggie Steffens, Member (USA, WP)
- Mel Goldstein, Member (USA, MA|SW)
- Natalia Vega, Member (USA, AS)
- Yona Knight-Wisdom, Member (JAM, DV)
- Maddy Sims, Member (USA, SW)
- Javier Ruisanchez, Member (PUR, AS)

## Our Strategy for Success

Our approach is anchored in three interconnected pillars:

1. **Representation:** Ensure athlete voices influence PAQ policies, governance, and competitions.
2. **Education & Development:** Provide resources, workshops, and guidance for athletes to grow in leadership, performance, and life beyond sport.
3. **Community & Collaboration:** Build strong connections among athletes, coaches, officials, and national federations to support mutual understanding, guidance, and shared progress.

We focus on proactive engagement and creating opportunities for athletes to be empowered decision-makers rather than passive participants.

## Our Role with Athletes

We are advocates, mentors, and connectors. The committee's responsibilities include:

- Listening to athletes' concerns and bringing them to PAQ leadership.
- Promoting fairness, transparency, and safe environments in training and competition.
- Encouraging athlete leadership at national and regional levels.
- Supporting athletes' personal and professional growth through educational initiatives and mentorship.

## Our Role with the Athlete Entourage

Athletes thrive within networks of support. We work closely with coaches, technical officials, and National Federations to:

- Ensure everyone surrounding the athlete contributes positively to their growth.
- Provide insights and guidance on athlete welfare and best practices.

- Foster collaborative programs that align athlete needs with performance, safety, and development objectives.

## How We Work

The PAQ Athletes Committee operates with transparency, inclusivity, and responsiveness. Our methods include:

- Direct communication with athletes through webinars, forums, surveys, and meetings.
- Collaboration with PAQ leadership to advocate for athlete-centered policies and programs.
- Maintaining an active presence across digital platforms and social media to keep athletes informed and engaged.

## Our Initiatives

To turn our strategy into tangible action, we run programs designed to connect, educate, and inspire:

- **Underwater Chats:** Interactive conversations on key topics affecting athlete development, wellbeing, and competition.
- **Athlete Core:** A network connecting athletes across countries and disciplines to share knowledge, guidance, and support.
- **Athlete Forum:** Online discussions gathering feedback, ideas, and perspectives from the athlete community.
- **Mentorship Program:** Pairing emerging athletes with experienced peers for advice, leadership development, and encouragement.
- **Social Media Educational Posts:** Sharing insights, tips, and resources to help athletes navigate performance, governance, and life skills.

## Measuring Our Progress

We share our reports and progress with the PAQ community through:

- Tracking athlete engagement in initiatives and forums.
- Collecting direct feedback from athletes and the broader PAQ community.
- Evaluating the impact of advocacy on policies, programs, and athlete welfare.
- Reporting achievements and updates regularly to the PAQ community.

## Contact Us

We are here to serve you.

Please reach out anytime: [athletes@panamaquatics.com](mailto:athletes@panamaquatics.com)