

# U.S. Olympic Team Trials - Swimming

Friday, June 11, 2021  
Omaha, Nebraska, USA  
CHI Health Center

## Tim Hinchey III Media Conference

THE MODERATOR: Welcome, everyone. A little bit of a different setting but absolutely great to see everybody. It's my pleasure to welcome y'all today to Wave II, to kick off Wave II of the U.S. Olympic Team Trials for swimming. We completed Wave I on June 7th and we had 42 athletes who will be moving on to Wave II, which starts Sunday on June 13th.

And to kick us off today, I would like to introduce our USA Swimming President and CEO, Tim Hinchey. If everybody could wait for the microphone because we are streaming this and just so folks can understand the question as it comes through the mic, that would be greatly appreciated. But I will open it up to the floor. So if there is a first question just let me know and we'll get a mic over to you.

**Q. Tim, couple questions for you just about the situation we're in this year with the trials. First of all, what is your worst fear here over the next 10 days or so? And do you know the percentage of athletes who have been vaccinated?**

TIM HINCHEY III: Great. Thanks for coming. Nice to see you. Gosh, biggest fear? It's just the loss of an opportunity for somebody that's trained so hard to be part of our Olympic team based on a positive test. And I think that everything that we have done over the past 14 or 15 months since we first started this journey, all of us, has been how do we pull trials off. This is going back a year ago. Literally after we had sent the letter about postponement, it was, okay, how are we going to pull off the trials next year. We need to make this happen. We want to select the team the way it needs to be selected, which is in the water. So that was our focus. So if for some unfortunate circumstance someone had the multiple positive tests and lost their opportunity, that would be my worst fear because these athletes deserve a chance to go and that's why we're all here, which is great.

Percentage of athletes vaccinated. It's, last time I talked to Lindsay, I think we were somewhere around 90 percent of, kind of our national team, was in that, had been



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vaccinated, at least from what she told me. So I think that's a great number. I think that most had intended to do it and I think those that want to be part of Tokyo knew that this was important to them.

**Q. With the different format this year, I'm wondering what the feedback has been from the Wave I, and if it might be the sort of thing you might look to incorporate in future trials?**

TIM HINCHEY III: I tell you, credit to the staff, the national team staff, our operations staff, for coming up with a concept where we could keep our promise because that was a big part of this too. It wasn't just about the elite athletes. It wasn't just about the team that's going to get selected. But what's important in USA Swimming is every kid gets a chance and has the opportunity to make Olympic Trials when they're that fast, right? So to keep that promise it was really, really a key objective for us. Not knowing what was going to happen, I got here last week. This is my first time at trials, obviously in either wave. I think we were blown away by just the immense amount of positive energy that we saw from the athletes and the coaches, our volunteers. Everyone did their part. Everyone went through the testing protocols. Everyone wanted to get a chance to swim. And I think that all of us will ask for more feedback from our coaches, especially our club coaches around the country. But I can just tell you my first night, watching that young woman from the nation's capital in the 100 free and seeing the emotion was tremendous. And knowing that had she come to just the traditional trials, it still would have been great, she would have raced and had a great time. But a chance for her to come back, get a second swim, go under the lights, and then get faster again is just unbelievable.

So, yeah, I think we have kind of the small talk in the back room is, like, maybe we keep this going, maybe there's a way to do this successfully for everybody, because, again, watching these kids enjoy the spotlight that they have earned is tremendous and very authentic, which is great.

**Q. I wanted to ask you. Obviously, Michael Phelps kind of loomed over this for, since 19, I guess last time he wasn't here was 1996. Obviously, in any sport you have to deal with greats leaving and the impact it has when they're gone. What do you think has been,**

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**obviously y'all have plenty of top swimmers and shouldn't be any lack of success in Tokyo, but just what has it been like dealing with that transition from a guy who sort of loomed a little larger than everybody within the sport?**

TIM HINCHEY III: Well, I think it's a great problem to have when you have a legend like Michael Phelps, who has done so much for our sport and for our organization. So thank you, MP. He's amazing. He's the GOAT.

At the same time, I kind of go back to some of my experiences in the NBA and other places where when I was working in the NBA obviously MJ was still there, and then people asked what's going to happen and then obviously LeBron shows up and then Stephen Curry and then you name it. There's just an immense amount of talent and I think we're very blessed in swimming that men and women, especially the women's team right now, the young stars continue to come, and I think certainly Michael and Katie and Simone and Caeleb, the stars that we have are, speak for themselves. I think, thanks to NBC, they have become household names during the last couple months. But I just think what's unique about swimming is just the ability for our coaches around the country to continue to develop the talent, continue to make swimming a sport of choice for so many people, and I think that, right now, as I look at our card going into Tokyo, but also thinking about Paris, thinking about Los Angeles 2028 and the opportunities for domestic games, I think we're fortunate to be in a position where we have so much talent across the country we're going to be okay and we tip our hat to Michael for putting us in this spotlight.

**Q. When you have an Olympian on the 2016 team opt out of this because feeling the pressure from having placed only fifth, what does that do for you as an organization? Does it cause you to step back and sort of re-evaluate what the bottom line is in this?**

TIM HINCHEY III: Just from the trials perspective?

**Q. No. More like if you have a national team athlete who has such a narrow view of success, you know, is that something that USA sports can do a better job of preventing other athletes from feeling that way?**

TIM HINCHEY III: Yeah, I would give credit, again, to Michael in this case as well because over the last couple years what he's done post his career and having the courage to come out and talk about his challenges, I think has really given us an opportunity. And credit to Lindsay Mintenko in particular, obviously another former Olympian, that a couple years ago we have offered and partnered with two different organizations to provide mental health

support to all of our national team athletes and we have since done that to our national team coaches as well because coaches, obviously this a tremendously difficult job and swimming and the hours and the work that they have done. So I think we're very proud of the fact that we have listened to our national team, our current national team in particular, and we have a tremendous amount of athletes that are using these services right now, which again, I think is a good thing because they're looking for help. They're asking for help. And I'm very proud of the organization, that we have been able to find ways to partner with people and provide those services. So hopefully that's something that we can continue to lead in and be cognizant of those challenges. So we'll do the best we can and we care deeply about all of our athletes at every level.

**Q. A question about just the world anti-doping situation in a year when there was basically a blackout on what everybody was doing. How good do you feel about where the world stands from that standpoint from swimming?**

TIM HINCHEY III: It's a great question. I think there's no doubt there's concerns, just to be very honest with you. I think you talk to our athletes and talk to our coaches, talk to our staff, there's no doubt there's been a bit of a blackout I think. So that's a concern. I think what gives me some confidence going forward in particular is the recent changes at FINA. I think Husain has made this an important part of his new agenda as the incoming new president for FINA. And then you look at the new executive director from CAS. Brent has experience obviously working on anti-doping.

So I think from a swimming perspective that's really good news and I think it's something that needs to happen and go forward. At the same time, I think that what's also, again, as a swim fan prior to me taking over the four years ago, the American team, our team, our athletes, and Lilly's been great with her outspokenness about it, but they still compete and they still find ways to win. And so I think our team's going to race against whomever no matter what happens regardless of what may or may not be happening that is out of our control, but I think our team will be ready to compete. But I do have confidence in the future of FINA.

**Q. Obviously looking ahead to the Olympics, many of us have written or tried to kind of guess what this is going to look like and how difficult it may well be for the athletes and how of course different the experience will be compared to previous Olympic games. Can you kind of line out for us or guess with us or give us any insight into how you believe it's going to go, especially**

**because we know that if you're vaccinated here you can't be contact traced, but as we understand it, with one more playbook yet to come, if you're vaccinated in Tokyo you still could be contact traced and what that means for your team for this that, what, nine days that they will be competing together and obviously near each other as they go about their business in the pool and outside the pool.**

TIM HINCHEY III: Yeah, that's another great question. I have yet to obviously experience it myself, so this will be my first experience going to Tokyo, and I am currently planning on leaving on the 21st. So plan to be there and I can tell you that the different, you know, rules and regulations and protocols and such that we have to go for, just as an accredited staff member, is pretty substantial. Obviously, and to your point of vaccination, vaccinations aren't really being taken into consideration at this point unless they change that again to the next playbook. Again, not speaking for Lindsay Mintenko, but I can tell you that this has been her number one, if not number one, the number one thing that she's been concerned about, which is, again, getting all the way over there and being in a position where, out of our control in the village contact tracing, somehow they lose their opportunity to compete. That's our worst case scenario.

So I think credit to Lindsay and the team for us. Coming out of here, the testing protocols, our partnerships with Becton Dickinson. All have you gone through this today and I went through it today. Credit to the athletes that even back in our TYR Pro series, not one positive test. Everyone's taken this very seriously. So, I'm very, very confident with our team and the leadership of our team and our staff. They're going to leave here, the team that's selected, go to Hawaii, be put in a bubble in Hawaii, and they're going to do the best to compete and get ready. We have decided to charter to Tokyo to keep the team in the bubble and the staff in a bubble. And they're going to get there and go right through the protocols per the Tokyo government and obviously the organizing community there.

And talking to Lindsay and talking to those that have been part of this process, you're right, it's going to be venue -- or village to venue and back. That's pretty much it. And for those of us that aren't around athletes, it's going to be hotel, private transportation to venue and back twice a day, and that's it. So there is, this is not going to be, from what I understand, kind of the opportunity to get out and be part of a special culture in a country. This is going to be about business.

At the same time, in my opinion, if that's where we're at, I'm glad it's happening. And I'm really excited for our athletes to get to go there and compete. Those that have a

livelihood now that are with swimming, this is incredibly important. Those that are, they all obviously are representing their country and they want to do that to the best of their abilities and I'm just glad we get to do it. Just like we are here today. I'm just really proud of everybody that we are here today and we can give them a chance to be selected the way they want to be selected, which is in the water.

But I think overall we're probably not done with playbooks. We're probably not done with what's going to happen and what they're going to ask us to do. But I can tell you that our team is a hundred percent prepared to do whatever it takes to compete in Tokyo.

**Q. Building off of that, I know that one of the biggest concerns also is the time zones, the heat, the other aspects of being in Tokyo aside from this pandemic that we're dealing with. And I'm curious, if the team is going to be in Hawaii for awhile, is there plans to get them to Tokyo in advance to acclimatize or is that something that's being addressed?**

TIM HINCHEY III: I apologize, I'm not sure I caught everything with the mask, but I think it's about the travel and where they're going to be. Yeah, we took a choice, and with the support of our board and our foundation board, obviously a charter. That's going to especially us keep us a little bit safer on the way in. We're going to be at the Marriott for I think three or four days.

THE MODERATOR: Five days.

TIM HINCHEY III: Five days. Again, keeping the team together using the high performance center that is set up from the USOPC. And then literally we will all go to the village together. They will stay in the village together. They do get to stay together the entire swim pool competition. So if you were a 400 IMer on the first day, you no longer have to leave the country. They get to stay with the team, which is good. From what we understand right now, there'll be able to at least go into the stands and support their teammates and watch their teammates, which is a great thing. And then the pool team will leave, and then those of us will stay to support the open water team because obviously we have three Olympians that have already been selected and they will stay together separately. They will not be with the pool team unless, again, they swim. There's a couple athletes that have an ability to swim in the 1500 or some other distance events.

It's going to be pretty regimented. It's going to be carefully controlled. We have some terrific staff members, in partnership with the USOPC, to make sure the team stays together and they do the right things. And I would just add

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that again over the course of the last six to nine months I could not be more pleased or proud of our athletes because they have taken care of themselves. They have traveled to meets that we have put on. They have traveled to other places. And, again, they have been safe and they have done right thing to put themselves in a position to have the opportunity to compete for their country, which is, all the athletes and coaches, so I credit all of them.

THE MODERATOR: To clarify the point. Those five days that we are going in, we'll be in Tokyo for 10 days before start of competition to acclimate.

**Q. A big picture non-pandemic question for you. Over the last year obviously there's been a lot of attention in this country on racial issues and a lot of ills of the past that we maybe have pushed aside for way too long. Swimming is a sport obviously that doesn't have great, necessarily, diversity to it and that's just a lot of that predates everybody here, but I'm just wondering what you, what are y'all doing to encourage more people of color to into the sport, we have seen Simone and Collin and obviously there's a handful of people who have made great success, but the steps y'all are taking to diversify the sport, are you happy with where it is right now and anything you might see going forward into the future to address that issue?**

TIM HINCHEY III: Thanks for asking. I think first and foremost we are very blessed to have some phenomenal athletes, diverse athletes that have been very, very successful for USA Swimming. And when really some of the topics that touched all of us in the country took place a little over a year ago, they came to us right away, asking for ways to participate and really in partnership with us to find ways to -- because it's their sport, they want this sport to be more diverse, they want the sport to be a sport of choice.

So it's been really, really rewarding to work with a Simone and Collin and Leah and Reece and Shane and just a list of others that I know I'm missing right now, but just have been phenomenal advisors to us in how do we do things. So that's number one. So they put together a group called Team Black, The Black Leadership Aquatics Coalition, to help us with many of our other diverse populations that we work with in swimming to find ways to do that and the thing that I'm most proud of and feel so fortunate is that they also raised their hands to say, We want to help, let's go do this together. So that's been one thing.

I think from a practical perspective for us, our foundation, we have found a way that -- we have always been kind of saving lives and building champions and I think that through COVID and through this process of -- especially

from a social perspective -- we've realized that we're missing a piece and that is the investment in our outreach communities and finding ways to go and make swimming, not just a something that's saves your life and something that's a sport for life, which is important to all of us, but a way to convince young kids of any place any color, any shape, any size, any ethnicity to know that swimming can be your sport.

So we have some small examples that have started. We have a club in Chicago through the Chicago Parks and Rec District, which is now our largest club, it was pre-COVID, of over four thousand athletes and that club looks like America and it's not just, again, a teaching a swim lesson to save you life, it's a competitive club. They have had a competitive camps, they have had competitive racing and these are kids that are going to be hopefully our next stars at all the different levels of swimming.

So we have challenged ourselves to basically by 2028 invest the same amount we do in learn-to-swim grants into community outreach grants through our local clubs, because they're the ones that are part of our network and part of our membership and I think that they are very willing to find ways to build their own clubs.

And again, if we can open this up to more people, we're a sport that would love to have more people in it. So that's kind of our focus going forward.

**Q. Getting to the experience of the Olympians when they're in Tokyo, I mean, the collegiality and the camaraderie, after they race, is such an important part of it. So is there any plans or any ideas to kind of foster the fun after they're done swimming, since so much has to be regimented?**

TIM HINCHEY III: Good question. I think right now I haven't been part of those discussion probably, so I'm sure there's something going on with the national team and Lindsay might be able to have a better answer for you. I think right now it's about the business of getting there and giving them the opportunity to compete at the Olympics. I think people are, again, very, very focused on being safe and smart and doing everything they can to make sure that they can do this. Again, going back to kind of our worst case scenario, we want these kids and these athletes to have the opportunity to swim at the highest level possible on the biggest stage of their lives and so that's been the focus.

So I take your point and I think we would all like it to be a little bit more fun, but hopefully the swimming, hopefully in their accomplishments -- and I think they're going to be great in Tokyo -- that will be pretty fun, hopefully.

**Q. Curious, why does Omaha work for you, why do you continue to come back?**

TIM HINCHEY III: I can't hear you.

THE MODERATOR: Why does Omaha work for you.

TIM HINCHEY III: Oh, I'm sorry. Well, listen, I think right now Omaha is synonymous with swimming at the highest levels, right? What my predecessor, Chuck Wielgus, Mike Unger and the group, having the vision to bring the trials to a great city and a great venue and to build pools and bring our partners is second to none, in my opinion, when it comes to the NGBs and the Olympic movement, so that's number one.

Number two is because Omaha's been great. You guys have been phenomenal hosts, just great partners. I know Josh Todd's in the room here, it's an easy choice, it's easy choice to make, the partnership, the ability -- and even this year with the challenges that we have had since day one, the phone calls have been every day about how can we do it, not like what are we going to miss, what are we going to lose, what can't we do, it's what can we do. And if you look around this venue -- and again this is my first time -- I'm blown away. And I'm a swim nerd, so I got to swim in the warm-up pool three days last week it was amazing, the aqua lounge, the ability to again put on something when so many other places haven't had the opportunity to conduct their events at a high level still.

And so I think it's just been a rewarding partnership, mutually beneficial partnership, and something that I think swimming will, swimming is at a level with NBC because of the partnership here at Omaha.

**Q. You were speaking a little bit about Michael Phelps briefly before, but I'm wondering if you could expand on that, what Michael Phelps has meant to this sport. I mean, when you think about him, the last time a trials occurred without him Bill Clinton was president, we were getting ready for the Atlanta Olympics and at least a couple of us in this room that, we were there, but in general, that's a long time, so what did he mean to the sport of swimming?**

TIM HINCHEY III: Again, for me and, albeit, much, much older, being around swimming my entire life, I'm not sure I ever dreamed of having an icon like Michael Phelps lead the sport that's meant so much to me personally. So to be sitting here today, to be part of this organization, I'm not sure that we would be who we are, I'm not sure we would have a room of top journalists in the country here to focus on our trials without Michael Phelps.

I mean, I think what's really exciting is he's inspired -- and I think many of you have probably written about it, especially from a DC perspective -- but the pictures of him with Katie Ledecky when she was little, right? And look what she's done. And the fact that she, at least in my generation being around the NGB side of sport, Katie's name is the name to me that's on the same level to some degree that Michael is these days when it comes to sport. And to have a woman have that kind of -- I think is really awesome for our sport in particular and she's been just an unbelievable class, legend for USA Swimming as well.

So I can't put a finger on it, right? I mean, he's the GOAT, he's a Hall of Famer, but ultimately for us, I don't think we would have -- I wouldn't be sitting here today in front of all of you if Michael Phelps didn't do what he did for swimming in our country.

THE MODERATOR: I think that's all. Thank you very much and so timing wise if you sit tight we will be back in about 20 minutes or so with our first athlete and coach press conference.

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