

TALENT IDENTIFICATION & DEVELOPMENT (TID): IMPLICATIONS FOR COACHING IN CANADA

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The Canadian Sport Institute's 21st annual International Coaching School (2012) hosted its second ever High Performance Coach Advance to examine the topics of Talent Identification and Development. Over thirty national, provincial and university level coaches attended the Advance and engaged in two themes; 1. Right of Passage: Recruiting and Retaining Athletic Potential in Sport and 2. Moneyball™ Metrics: Maximizing High Performance Sport Success and Succession. The former theme examined the athlete transition pathway in high performance sport, which is based on solid recruitment and retention processes that range from fully centralized to primarily decentralized programming. The latter theme examined how to develop the right indicators (smart metrics) for future athletic success to help coaches implement talent ID and development metrics and strategies that are better than world class. The attached [Powerpoint slide show](#) provides additional information on talent development definitions.

Below are the five main outcomes (learnings) from the 2012 International Coaching School Talent Identification and Development workshop;

PRACTICE EARLY, SPECIALIZE LATER

Perhaps the key component identified during the Advance is the need for accumulated practice to develop expertise. Ensuring a foundational base of practice which focuses on determinants of potential, transferable physical or motor abilities - and not performance or sport-specific abilities - is a key to continued progress towards expertise. In team sports in particular, foundational practice requires a broad sampling of sport experience at younger ages to help set instinctual skills and "invoke optimal fear response strategies" necessary for many sports. Even in traditionally early specialization sports it is important to create foundational "FUNDamental" practice in which a broad spectrum of skills can be developed rather than pigeon-holing the athlete into one skill set. Finally, the ability to specialize later may be validated with emerging research into neurological plasticity in the brain post-puberty, where "neural pruning" begins and neural pathways/structures are enhanced via myelination as a result of deliberate practice. Hence, the farming and nurturing of talent is critical post puberty as opposed to during early sport-specific success, which is almost the "kiss of death" for ongoing development.



¹ The discussion around neural plasticity was identified by Paula Jardine, Canadian Sport Institute Calgary, who has begun a series of investigations into the critical development milestones that foster elite performance.

REWARD EFFORT, NOT PERFORMANCE

Sport success must be earned rather than endowed upon the athlete. The struggle to achieve excellence must include obstacles and barriers that inform failure prior to the podium. If the path to success is too easy the athlete will never commit the mental and physical effort necessary to achieve potential. One way of ensuring the drive to persevere is by rewarding the athlete's efforts rather than rewarding the performance itself. How can this be done? Provide coaching interventions that help the athlete deliberate over performance rather than simply focusing on the achievement of a particular event or skill. Kristina Groves' story about how she blamed her coach for her poor performance was instrumental in driving her to sustain success. When showing up late and rushed for one of her races, she questioned her coach for not having the right plan for the competition. A day later, after having taken better accountability for her pre-race preparation, she made the podium. Two weeks after the competition came the point of realization, wherein her coach reminded her that she blamed him for her poor performance rather than her own poor pre-race preparation. Kristina's lesson: never question the coach's plan, and do not simply expect that podium performance; be accountable for your own performances.



IDENTIFY THE SMART SPORT METRICS

Understanding your sport, your athletes and your competition is key to future success. Randy Bennett shared examples of how the Victoria Academy of Swimming (VAS) coaching and Canadian Sport Institute sport science/medicine team have developed and refined the indicators that best define future athletic success in the sport of swimming. This requires the coach to identify the performance envelope at each stage of development. The envelope provides the range of metrics that informs athlete progression to higher levels of performance and is critical for maximizing the training plan. Only through long-term disciplined accumulation and analysis of targeted athlete data - such as key test sets in training, in

competition results (lap splits and final results), anthropometry, and medical monitoring - can a very high level of program effectiveness be demonstrated. In his presentation Randy reinforced the need for honesty and integrity of athletes and coaches while data mining the various sport metrics to ensure each performance gap uncovered is accurately compared to international best practise (or national standard if working within a developmental context). The success of VAS athletes during international competition from 2008 – 2012 is a testament to deliberate and accurate application of sport metrics. In short, coaches should strive to find the smart metrics in their sport and “know what you’re looking for, track it relentlessly, and don’t shy away from the facts.”

TRAIN YOUR SELECTORS

Don't assume the people identifying your talent actually know what they are looking for. It is absolutely essential to 1. Clearly identify performance criteria, and 2. Train people in how to evaluate it. Chuck McDiarmid, Rowing Canada Avron (RCA) High Performance Development Coordinator and RCA's Talent Identification and Development team identified how RCA coaches have worked very diligently over the past two years to understand the key performance factors (indicators) required for long-term international success in rowing. It is critical to define the TID tests when determining these key performance factors. RCA provided their TID coaches with specific education such as targeted physiology workshops and monthly facilitated coach meetings to ensure the coaches fully understand the RCA TID tests that are being utilized, and how to best interpret the new data received. “The ultimate goal of our Row to Podium program, and why we placed such a high premium on training our coaches (selectors), is to effectively identify athletes who stand at a high probability of reaching the Olympic podium”, said McDiarmid.

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In team sports it is often assumed that scouts and coaches know what to look for when in reality the selection process is based on loosely defined criteria and poor perceptual judgements. Mike Chu, General Manager, Rugby Operations and Performance at Rugby Canada identified how bias comes into the selection process and how systematic program to selectors and coaches is critical. Chu identified that video databases are best utilized among top rugby playing nations where coaches' and selectors' eyes are honed to specifically pick out key elements in the athlete's performance. Further, the databank of information on one athlete can be enhanced by mining information not only from the player, but also his or her teammates or parents. The bottom line is that selection decision can be better informed by spending the time up front to train coaches and selectors on choosing and accurately perceiving the right metrics included in the yearly training plan.

FOSTER PROGRESSION OVER POACHING



For Canada to reach our goal of achieving a top eight ranking at the 2020 Olympic Games while maintaining our standing as a top three nation at the 2014 and 2018 Olympic Winter Games, partnerships between key NSOs must be forged to ensure maximal efficiency of financial and human resources. Canadian Sport Institutes support this objective by promoting greater sport system coordination and a more efficient use of existing resources so that athletes who, once identified, are provided a clear and direct pathway to future success in a sport and program that best suits their abilities. A prime example of how these partnerships can benefit the above goal is talent transfer. A number of sports offer excellent examples of talent transfer opportunities. The most recent Canadian example of talent transfer is rower Jerry Brown, silver medallist in the men's eight at

the London 2012 Olympic Games. Jerry was identified as a potential rowing athlete following a successful collegiate football career with McGill University. In less than three seasons, Jerry transferred the athletic skills he developed in football into success as a high performance rower.

Progression over poaching is a concept where a coach understands the long-term athletic potential and recognizes whether the athlete will progress to the highest level in the sport, or whether the talent can be transferred to another sport or discipline within the sport. All coaches at this year's Advance indicated a need for coaches to work across sports to consider whether their athlete may have better opportunities in other sports. This way, sports can work together to ensure optimal athlete progression, rather than one sport poaching the talent and ultimately extinguishing any potential that could be realized. This paradigm shift requires the trust of the coach to "release control", and the desire of the athlete to invest in the sport which may lead to favourable success.

BEST PRACTICES

In order to foster optimal talent development it is necessary to change the sport paradigm to help promote pathways for athlete performance. As one of the facilitators at the HP Coach Advance, Dr. Andy Van Neutegem, High Performance Director of Wheelchair Rugby, identified two innovative programs used in the wheelchair sport which have helped to drive optimal pathways:

- Bridging the Gap ([click here](#)) is a program which encourages individuals to adopt a healthy, active lifestyle through wheelchair sport by getting involved and staying involved.
- Podium Club ([click here](#)) program, which provide funding to clubs based on their success in the targeted areas including systematic planning and development strategies.



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Both initiatives identify a willingness of the sports to work together to foster recruitment and awareness, and a mechanism to identify standards for the quality of programming offered in clubs. These are good practices that could be applied across all sports.

Finally, Canadian Sport Institute's PODIUM SEARCH initiative is another best practice which supports a more efficient use of Canadian sport system resources by offering NSOs and PSOs the opportunity to screen multiple athletes against NSO talent identification protocols. In addition to the basic testing protocols from our IGNITE Athlete Development Program, each PODIUM SEARCH camp is an opportunity for one or two NSOs to apply talent ID protocols within their sports to identify and recruit existing athletes from regional sport programs into national programs, and also to identify new talent who the NSO (and sport) may not have yet discovered.

Our Canadian Sport Institute PODIUM SEARCH pilot event was held in Victoria on May 27, 2012. 55 athletes participated in the event, many of whom received their first exposure to basic testing protocols within a Canadian Sport Institute high performance environment. As an outcome of their participation in our PODIUM SEARCH pilot event, three athletes were identified and targeted to participate in Rowing Canada's Row to Podium program – a program designed to fast track athletes onto the Olympic rowing podium in 2016/2020.

This performance point and accompanying [PowerPoint presentation](#) is aimed at maximizing a coach's role in developing and recruiting talent within the Canadian sport system and is a summary of the proceedings from the 2012 International Coaching School.