

Event Group Lead Appointments in new UK Athletics Coaching Strategy

*I know I seem to just be meddling again but with the new **UKA Coaching Development Strategy** underway it is important that everyone keeps on trying to make a contribution as each new step is taken. The words contained in the strategy are being driven to whatever their reality will be by Mark Munro and Jackie Newton (I am guessing that there are many others behind the scenes as well). I applaud much of what is contained in the document but also know the difficulties that will surround just about every step forward. Some of these difficulties will be physical, some financial others human but most will require a deal of patience, adaptability and open-mindedness. Transforming words into action must always go through a process of 'interpretation' and so it is vital that everyone who is interested make enough contribution to ensure that the 'interpretation' is appropriate. I have already sent these thoughts through to the decision-makers.*

I was interested to read all of the key responsibilities for these appointments but three of them got my immediate attention.

- *To develop the 'What it Takes To Develop' (WiTTD) technical framework - building on existing material*
- *To produce athlete benchmarks/gold standards/'what good looks like' at each level of the Athlete Development Pathway*
- *To produce the content and curriculum for the technical elements of Coaching courses in the new Learning Development Framework*

Now I know perfectly well that trying to write down ALL the key elements for such positions is nearly impossible but I would like to expand on these three just a little.

Item 1 - To develop the 'What it Takes To Develop' (WiTTD) technical framework - building on existing material.

The minute the word 'technical' gets included then some people simply glaze over and solely see the technical model for the event in question. This, unfortunately, could be a catalyst for the retention of some of the current limitations in coaching delivery. I would rather champion the full range of elements that form the components of the journey for all athletes. Once this four-pillared journey for the athletes is clearly understood then the equally vital journey for the coaches can be created. Here I am talking about:

- Technical (Event skills)
- Tactical (Arena / Competition Skills)

- Physical (Mechanical and Metabolic)
- Mental (Behavioural).

Once we understand that all four of these elements generally exist and occur simultaneously within the learning environment (session) of each individual coach-athlete interface, it is likely that an effective and appropriate journey can be created. See them as separate 'silos' and limitations can and will prevail.

Obviously from a curriculum design viewpoint, each component will require its own language, vocabulary, delivery and progression rhythm but the key, always, will be the subtle skills of integration into the training session. This is where some of the most effective steps forward in Coach Development can be presented. The most effective process for the integration of these four pillars is one that is not linear but that is adaptable and flexible enough to match the unique learning and adaptation of the individual athlete. Create Coach Development pathways that offer meaningful instruction and mentoring in this world of pedagogy and things will change for the better. Once we can support every coach to an understanding of how and when to alter the emphasis of each of these components on a minute-to-minute basis inside each training session then everyone wins.

Item 2 - To produce athlete benchmarks/gold standards/'what good looks like' at each level of the Athlete Development Pathway

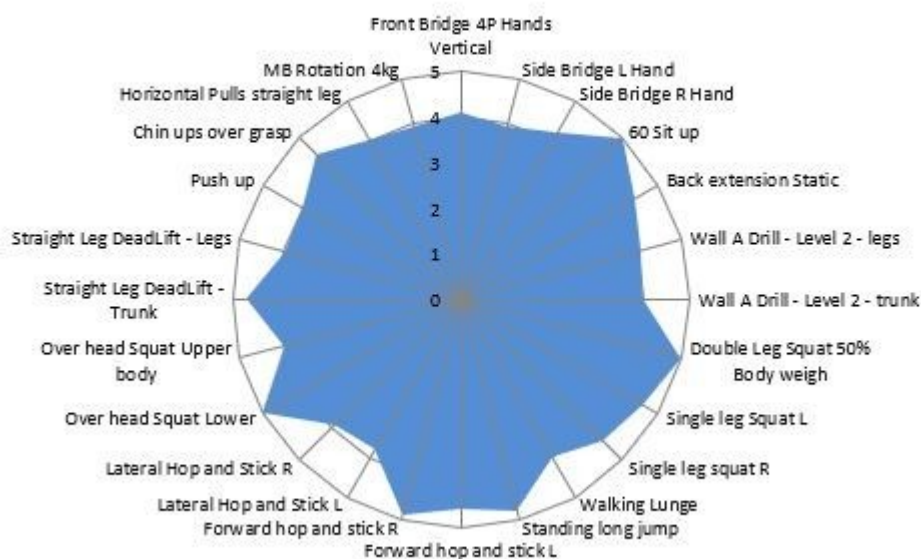
This one triggered all sorts of thoughts which I believe is part of the entire journey this new strategy must traverse. The more assumptions are questioned and ideas shared, the better. I am interested to see what can be created as benchmarks/gold standard/'what good looks like' for each of the four pillars.

The Physical pillar (mechanical and metabolic) will probably be a little easier to put together in terms of benchmarking. One element already in use in a variety of schools, institutes and academies worldwide is the Physical Competence Assessment (PCA) process that links directly to the foundation movements that start every journey. I wrote this description a while ago that might illustrate this element a little better:

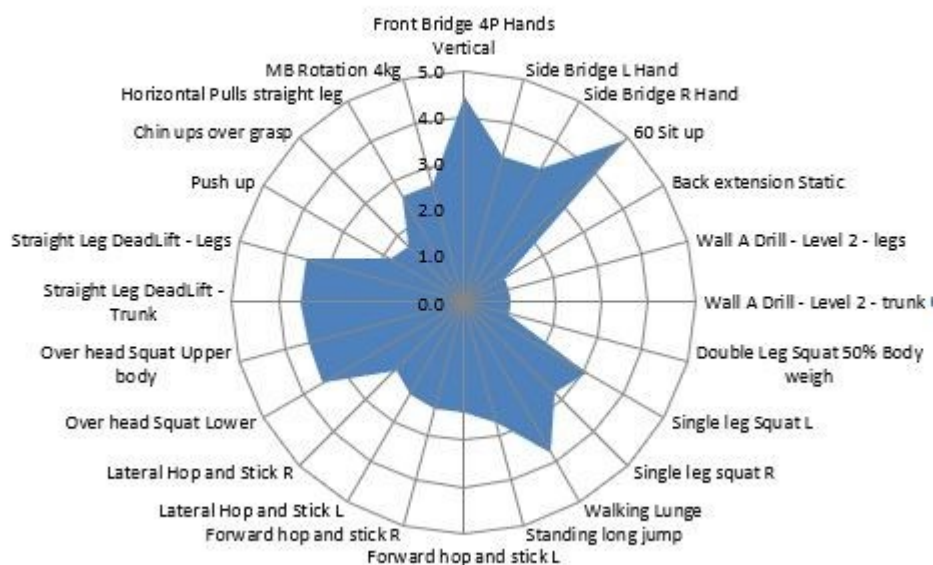
*"Running parallel to this content would be the formal / informal challenge of achieving appropriate Physical Competence standards in the Foundation Movements. This is being seen as something like the old 5-Star Award scheme where the **Physical Competence** journey is seen as a unique opportunity to reach progressive standards.*

Example PCA Result (note that 5/5 is normal - not world class - just normal)

Physical Competence Assessment Group Average



Physical Competence Assessment Group Average



Here are some results from a PCA assessment done at the late Primary School / early High School level. The top chart shows some expected scores of between 4 and 5 out of 5 for these basic movements. The bottom chart shows the reality of the 21st century with the actual scores. Scoring higher on each foundation movement, while being a notable and expected quality, is not as important as maintaining the efficiency, consistency and resilience of the core qualities of the pattern as the complexity changes from general right through to event-specific.

This is where a deep commitment to understanding how each foundation movement is initially taught and then progressed along a pathway that takes it deep inside the specific actions and postures of the event. With the majority of

young athletes being far less physically prepared for movement efficiency, consistency and resilience we should encourage all coaches to build these physical qualities from the ground up.

It will take huge amounts of work to create a progressive curriculum that really sets the foundations in place and then progresses then from general to related to specific. To help all coaches with this there would need to be an investment in the creation of hand-held Apps that contain scores of example movements and their progressions for the coaches to use as they navigate this relatively new ground.”

Another observation about this ‘benchmark, gold standard’ element of the plan is that across all four pillars each coach will need to decide on what is ‘wrong’ and what is just ‘different’ in terms of the athlete’s interpretation of the movement puzzle they have been asked to solve. To create a workforce with this ability would be a huge bonus. Too often a movement pattern is sought that is perfectly based upon the accepted parameters of the movement as displayed by the typical, average competitor. Once we realise that there is no such thing as an average or typical athlete but a unique individual, whose response is different yet optimal, then perhaps we will create a more appropriate journey. This is where the modern terminology of ‘bandwidth’ comes into play. If what you see is different but still efficient, consistent and resilient then know when to leave well alone and invest in other progressions.

While this philosophy needs to be inculcated into the psyche of every coach so must the means of ‘mending a broken movement’. It is likely that some athletes will present with a movement pattern fraught with limitations. This often occurs when a foundation movement pattern has been incorrectly taught or not taught at all. In some cases, the athlete has only ever been exposed to the sports-specific actions and postures at sports-specific speeds, amplitudes and force levels. Part of the new coaching curriculum should contain the means with which every coach can rebuild the athlete from the ground up.

Item 3 - To produce the content and curriculum for the technical elements of Coaching courses in the new Learning Development Framework.

Again I would suggest that all four pillars are amalgamated within this curriculum design so that there is a fully integrated pedagogical approach.

If an approach was chosen that saw a broad movement vocabulary forming the foundation of the journey that progressed to the intricacies of the event-specific movement patterns then the content and progression of the curriculum would be a far different one to that of building learning solely around an event-specific technical model. The suggestion is that the curriculum works forward from movement efficiency, consistency and resilience to the event-specific model as opposed to attempting to reverse engineer an event-specific technical model.

“The first goal is to become a better all-round mover. The all-round mover can then become an athlete. Only then does the athlete specialise. The end result is that you have a specialist in their sport who – first and foremost – is a genuine athlete.” Tracy Fober

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