

QUADRENNIAL PERFORMANCE REVIEW 2016-17

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

This is a summary of the Knight, Kavanagh and Page independent review of the British Judo Association's (BJ's) high performance Olympic and Paralympic Rio cycle and Tokyo strategy. It encompasses the systems, processes, culture and achievements of BJ in this regard over the last four-year cycle and its plans for the coming four years. Its focus is on:

- ◀ The World Class Performance Programme and Pathways (the Programme).
- ◀ Leadership, culture, coaching and associated disciplines.
- ◀ Athlete support and development.
- ◀ Athlete commitment, experiences and welfare.
- ◀ External relationships.

The views expressed during consultation cut across and through the organisation and reflect both positive and critical perspectives on the Programme. They are by no means anodyne, inevitably reflect the standpoint of the individual making the statement, are often polarised and rarely occupy middle ground. They cannot be categorised neatly by level and/or profession into camps whereby, for example, all coaches say one thing, sports scientists another and athletes something else. Neither are they entirely a case of the centre -v- the rest of the sport; there is not always consensus at the centre itself and equally there are issues upon which those outside the centre hold differing views.

Nevertheless, a key statement which reflects the nub of the issue is that there is a general feeling (although not held by all) that British Judo's (BJ) plans and strategies are a 'work in progress', that they have the potential to be first class but still have some way to go. Within this context, affirmative views about Programme potential are accompanied by commentary about processes and internal tensions which limit the realisation of this potential. External tensions add significantly to the negative feelings which have the potential to stymie its success (even presuming that the centralised model is the best approach).

The fact that, to make this happen a firm stance was needed by BJ and the PD is also recognised and applauded. Centralisation has, undoubtedly, been problematic for some more mature elite athletes in the system who, based on the stage of careers reached, domestic circumstances and allegiances to specific coaches, have chosen to stay where they are.

To a degree, in particular during the semi-centralisation phase of the Programme (2013-16), the PD and staff have faced a relatively insurmountable problem in that the ongoing existence of 'national centres' in Scotland and Wales to take advantage of home country funding and support led some high profile athletes to choose to locate and train elsewhere. It would appear that, in the main, elite athletes on the Tokyo cycle will be predominantly based at Walsall. This will evolve further as the CoE improves and the focus for 'outlying' centres switches to their roles in respect of the talent development pathway.

Some people regard the centralised approach as essential to optimise resources and progress. It was also, in a positive vein, said that while this has been tried in the past that it feels very different this time. Counterbalancing this, arguably, the recommended pragmatism in driving forward a centralised model has engendered the adoption of a hard line approach that was not universally welcomed. It is crucial that work to build the actual and perceived quality and credibility of the CoE builds upon acknowledged strong elements of the Programme and addresses the critical areas that require improvement

Views about the BJ's performance programme and the Centre of Excellence (CoE) are strong because people across the sport are concerned about the sport and the ultimate success of athletes. Thus, while the issues raised are valid and the resulting recommendations outlined below are substantial it is not a case of 'rip it up and start again'. Rather, there is a need to get to the point where even if people may not wish to work within the CoE programme they are prepared (and have a realistic basis upon which) to acknowledge its value.

This necessitates BJ and Programme leadership bringing people together and working collaboratively, offering greater consistency, placing higher value on the views and skills of others and demonstrating a willingness to be open minded and to try new things. Leadership sometimes involves giving a little to gain a lot.

Personalities and capabilities lie at the heart of the tensions, these are further exacerbated by a strongly expressed belief about overall coaching standards and coach development, inconsistent discipline and the manner in which change is introduced. Driving the change needed in judo in what is the right direction will, if it is to be optimally successful, will depend upon substantially more successful relationship management (internally and externally) than is in place at present.

It requires leadership that is seen to respect and encourage rather than be simply dictatorial. This is not to suggest that firmness is not required – it is. There is, however, a need to convince people of a vision and develop a shared understanding as to how this might be realised by working together.

The process can be undermined if people feel that their roles are not valued and the opinions of one person or group have primacy over all others and cannot be challenged without damaging personal standing or career prospects. This, especially if it is felt to be undeserved, can (and already does) breed resentment. An appropriate blend of leadership and teamwork is the key to success.

For example, in an operating theatre everyone's primary concern should be for the patient, no one suggests the surgeon is not ultimately in charge, however, if the anaesthetist speaks everyone takes notice (including the surgeon) – primacy thus shifts to reflect circumstance. This analogy relates to the present position of the S&C lead or, perhaps coaches who are committed to optimising athlete development but whose views do not directly align with the PD.

The proposed concept and structure of a centralised programme has much to commend it and should (in principle) be fully supported. Bringing the Olympic and Paralympic programmes together is also, overall, a very positive move and is universally supported. However, as with any new system, the issues arise as much with how the system is introduced and embedded (and how people are handled) as with what the system itself offers; in effect how the process of change management is led. As noted, over the 2012-2016 cycle the system was only semi-centralised and it is still evolving. Comments made in this report should, thus, be read with this in mind.

Relationship management poses internal and external problems for BJ. Existing relationships adversely affect workings within the centre between levels within the hierarchy, within groups and between professions/roles. Externally, problems are similar yet more acute. At times, it has the feeling of opposing camps rather than a team working together. Team building is either lacking or simply has not succeeded.

None of this is to suggest that ultimately people want different outcomes; quite clearly everyone wants athletes to fulfil their development potential, ideally winning competitions and medals. The tensions which can build between (even within) factions are typical of many situations and should not be thought of as unique.

It is far too simplistic to suggest that relationships or particular processes occur simply because BJ or the CoE has a policy that says they will. They have to be forged and are as important as the talent that the athlete brings to the mat; if performance is to improve, the environment has to be right and conducive - not just the plans, the structure and the equipment.

Reputation management is of critical importance; BJ must pay due regard to what all of its staff, athletes, coaches and members (and the wider world) thinks of it. Perception may not be truth but if negative beliefs (rightly or wrongly held) are not addressed by change or better information then concerns will rapidly become actual consequences and impediments to future success and plans.

The core plans, principles and direction of the CoE are good. There are, however, some fundamental flaws; it is at a point in its evolution which means that key 'could do better' areas cannot be ignored. In some respects it is not so much about what is being done, with which most people appear to agree (at least in principle), but it is about the way that it is being done and the wider messages of care, control, consistency and quality that this sends and allows others to foster.

If relationship, leadership and quality of coaching issues are not addressed the CoE will simply not realise its full potential as fundamental cracks which are already there within (and outside) the organisation will widen.

A constant feature and pivotal role in relationship and reputation management – and an essential factor in the success of the Programme - is the importance of the leader behind whom such change is implemented. The *Shadow of the Leader* is referred to in studies of organisational culture (Larry Senn 1970). It refers to the way that the likes, dislikes, treatment of subordinates, language and idioms, personal preferences, beliefs and values of people in leading roles shape the behaviour of people below them - in short, how they act as role models. This shapes the characteristics, culture and ways in which organisations operate.

It is not so much that leaders force their style and values on others, but that employees look upwards for behavioural clues as to what matters (rather than referring to policies, plans IAPs...or even emails). In effect people tend to 'do as I do' not 'do as I say'. It reflects a desire to fit in and conversely a tendency for some managers to (somewhat self-defeatingly) surround themselves with 'yes men' who rarely question but only reinforce the leader's own beliefs.

Leadership, well thought through and consistently, fairly applied, is thus the most important factor in successful change and the key ingredient needed to ensure that the full potential of the CoE is realised. This will need to stem from the BJ Board, the PMG and the CEO as well as, in the specific context of most of the elements covered by this report, the PD.

It is not, however, as simple as having a vision and laying down and enforcing rules. This may work in a militaristic setting but even then depends on a team's total belief in the 'man at the helm'. The ideal leader nurtures belief and agreement, values commitment but also accepts and even relishes challenge and will listen to and act upon others' ideas if they fit with the bigger picture.

Clearly this has to be set within a context of a vision that the leader can 'sell' to all involved and which makes sufficient sense as to leave those who do not agree in the minority OR better yet, gets them to buy in by (within reason) adapting it to incorporate some of their views without compromising this bigger picture.

It would be overly simplistic to lay all of the faults at the door of any individual. Any structural change made on such a premise could have wider ramifications for BJ's credibility as it would yet again be seen as an organisation that lacks carry through from concept to conclusion.

Recommendations made thus propose significant although not wholesale reconsideration of and change to the way in which directives are delivered and interpreted and things are done; in effect how the elite performance culture in GB judo is managed and implemented.

This would see a substantive shift from what some leaders regard as a 'tight/loose' grip on the organisation (tight on key things, loose on less critical factors thereby involving everyone). As the overall processes already in place at BJ are generally supported, this should result in increased faith and respect between professional staff and athletes, the CoE and the rest of the sport, plus greater emphasis on the people management and engagement with the sport.'

Recommendations

(All recommendations apply to the whole Programme and encompass provision for both Olympic and Paralympic athletes). It is recommended that BJ should:

1. Immediately, and certainly prior to the proposed restructure, allocate time to, collectively and honestly address the question of what a high performance culture in judo should look like; a process that extends beyond the plans and that evaluates and considers the outcomes needed in relation to every facet of the organisation; processes, perceptions, staffing skills and knowledge and front and centre, athlete development outcomes..
2. In this context, continue with the proposed Centralisation model retaining the approach which allows existing senior athletes some latitude in the way they work with the Centre, thereby avoiding the credibility risks associated with their rejection of the CoE and its coaches. This will also allow BJ time to address the issues raised within the study.
3. The role of the PD in the programme is crucial and is recognised by BJ to be so. This is an area that needs improvement. Building on the first stages of CoE development, BJ should continue with, substantially increase/strengthen and implement the personal development plan for the PD focusing upon leadership characteristics and best practice – related to the performance culture identified. This should be with a specialist leadership/culture shaping company (in our view some of the external support presently being obtained is too unquestioning) and identify key goals. It should be overseen, supported and evaluated by the CEO. It is our understanding that BJ is, or intend to, work with the UK Sport Performance Directors Development Programme to support this.
4. Ensure that the impending restructure is based upon an intent to create (and results in) a leadership and management structure underpinned by trust in and which reinforces empowerment of key managers, (the right) coaches and other staff.
5. As the primary element of this restructure, introduce a head coach to translate and implement directives and the main elements of the CoE programme and set/drive high standards of coaching excellence. In so doing s/he should provide a positive buffer between the PD and existing coaches, address (as a matter of some urgency) issues of consistency and discipline. (It seems unlikely to KKP that, on the basis of our evaluation and for reasons associated with both working relationships and credibility, this will be any of the existing members of the Centre coaching staff).

6. Allow an incoming head coach (in tandem with the PD) time to review the CoE coaching team (Olympic and Paralympic) and then actively consider the extent to which each coach presently employed has the ability, the work ethic, the capacity to learn and, most importantly, the positive impact on athletes that validates his/her retention on the CoE programme. This is time critical and must be done as a priority given the period already elapsed in the Tokyo cycle and what, in our view, will be the need to make some key changes to current coaching personnel. (This process should, in our view, take account of the confidentially appraised view of athletes).
7. A key driver of this restructure should be to free up time to enable the PD to operate at the right level and make full use of his key skills designing the systems, processes and programmes that will deliver success. He should set the parameters of the desired culture and then enable and support others to implement, supervise, assess and report back on its implementation and evolution.
8. Develop measurable performance targets which ensure WITTW becomes lived rather than the rhetoric which many claim it is at present.
9. Improve and expand the CoE to include, new high quality male and female changing rooms, toilets, extended strength and conditioning provision, improved physiotherapy/ rehab spaces and equipment plus an improved range of offices and meeting rooms with appropriate levels of technology to facilitate meetings, performance analysis etc.
(Financial support for the proposals should be sought from UK Sport and possibly, in the context of its role in talent development, Sport England).
10. Plan and implement to a much greater degree (and certainly evidenced level of impact than existing programmes/support are generating) a comprehensive process of coach education and personal development for CoE and progressively, moving forward, other elite performance coaches.
(It is essential that Centre of Excellence coaches do not resist/ignore existing CPD opportunity, and that they work to improve understanding of reflective techniques. They must be enabled and required to take on other forms of essential personal development).
(This may be an opportunity to make more use of and set more challenges for BJ's Technical Department in respect of this and to utilise financial resource currently allocated to pay for external support to strengthen internal capacity).
11. In keeping with the above, produce and closely supervise individual coach development plans which also contain annual outcome (as opposed to just input) targets for coaches set within an annual assessment framework.
12. In parallel, seek to develop a more team-orientated attitude to the way that CofE coaches approach athlete development and give thought to how well (or not) coaches collaborate and use each other's expertise to help produce the highest level of elite judoka. Coach willingness to do this should form part of the assessment process applied.
13. This should encompass dropping the 'coach is king' mantra; it is divisive and either already does, or risks encouraging, an over-inflated (and arguably undeserved) self-image among certain coaches. Perhaps a '*coach is conductor*' would be preferable?
14. Review the effectiveness of the translation and implementation of prescribed current athlete assessment practices and associated communication. In so doing evaluate the present quality and consistency of interpretation of existing PD set plans/instructions and the extent to which they are proving to be fully athlete centred. As part of this, athlete clarity in respect of short medium and long term targets in relation to conditioning, athlete weight (*per se* and at specific time related to competition requirements), training load, competition outcomes etc., should be scrutinised. Any new processes installed should be geared to making this substantially clearer than it is at present.
15. Develop clearer guidelines on 'duty of care' and ensure much greater understanding of, and more consistent adherence to, them among coaches and all other staff members. In keeping with this, extend and expand coach education to cover duty of care in relation to

overall athlete welfare. Concurrently clearly outline what is expected and what is not acceptable in relationships and behaviour around athletes; this to apply in the context of mat-based and training behaviours, consistent application of discipline (by individual coaches and across the whole coaching team) and coach input to and supervision of athlete lifestyles and (off-mat) domestic living arrangements.

16. Create a new athlete welfare position linked to but reporting independently of the CoE. This should provide an alternative for athletes with concerns they wish to air, particularly in relation to welfare related issues, which means that they do not necessarily need to approach their coach with any such concerns. On the basis of consultation with younger athletes, this is considered to be a particularly important recommendation and one that should be actioned immediately.
17. Develop a reputation management strategy and action plan to address widespread image issues which may otherwise continue to undermine the CoE. This could/should, within reason, embrace two-way communication and extend from the need to resolve issues such as the existence/quality of aspects of the Walsall facility to quality of coaching, consistency of athlete development, treatment and discipline.
18. Linked to this, consider whether and how the CoE could/should position itself as the optimum source of advice / guidance on training practices, diet/nutrition, rehydration, S&C, injury management etc., for the whole sport and in particular the talent pathway.
19. Develop an improved process for engaging with the rest of the sport which encompasses clubs, senior coaches and athletes coming through. The CoE has all the attributes to become an 'excellence hub' which incorporates all the best that BJ has to offer for the whole of British judo as opposed to just those working/training at it. Openness and transparency would be enhanced by, for example, holding open days and clinics at Walsall and by proactively taking the CoE out to the sport.
20. Better recognise individual athlete progress in relation to lifestyle management: reflecting this, assess them individually rather than imposing 'one size fits all' processes which are unnecessary for some and may need to be bolstered for others.
21. Without compromising on athlete quality, adopt a longer term objective of retaining senior professionals /players at the centre. If required, particularly for the next cycle, seek to work with key senior athletes to create some form of appropriately presented compromise which enables them to be part of, and thus positively advocate, the centralised model, further highlighting its beneficial impact.
22. Set targets (in relation, for example, to technical competence, conditioning, values, behaviours) for Pathway Centres to develop 'N' future athletes per annum/biennially – this will require improved relationship development between the CoE and external coaches but will also help avoid a potential schism which could otherwise emerge.
23. While acknowledging the criticism of some of the skills and approaches taken by a number of the coaches at the CoE, BJ should, without diluting the work ethic of the best, or pandering to those whose effort levels may not match up, in tandem with some of the CPD inputs cited above, consider how best to support coaches to achieve improved work/life balance ratios.