



UNIT 34:

**DEVELOPING TOP LEVEL
ATHLETES**

- A. Essential Requirements
- B. Athlete's Rights



UNIT 34 - DEVELOPING TOP LEVEL ATHLETES

All of us have watched world-class athletes, and have marvelled at their ability. We have also watched the results of Olympic and other world-class competitions and are aware that the majority of medals and records are obtained by the athletes from a small number of countries - those countries (or sports) that have developed systematic, comprehensive programmes for assisting athletes.

A. Essential Requirements

A survey was undertaken by a NOC from a highly developed country, asking 15 medallist athletes and 7 coaches to comment on their preparation for the Atlanta Olympic Games, and the conditions they faced there. These responses should have meaning for all NOCs.

1. The athletes require much more comprehensive personal financial support just to meet basic needs. There remains considerable stress on athletes to find the necessary basic support. Those that can not do this are at a disadvantage.
2. Athletes desire individual and/or corporate support in addition to that provided by their national sport federation, partly to have some independence from their federation, partly to have more funding than can be provided otherwise.
3. The athletes desire assistance and opportunity to plan for or to establish their careers, during their training years, and certainly would like some support immediately after they retire from competition. Making successful progress in this area might encourage some to continue training for successive Games.
4. Training for world competition requires at least 25 - 35 hours per week for several years in advance of the Games for those with aspirations for medals. Time and commitment are both absolutely essential for achieving medals. Most athletes in this study undertook between 12-18 training sessions per week, involving more than 30 hours.
5. There are minimal numbers of quality national team athletes in the system, partly as a result of weak developmental programmes, the time and sacrifice required to excel, and the lack of support or encouragement to remain involved for a long time.
6. The system does not provide special incentives and encouragement for the best athletes to remain as competitors for another Games, nor to remain in sport in some capacity (e.g. as coaches) after their careers.
7. Almost all the athletes interviewed were not motivated by the possibility of a financial reward for any success, and instead, were grateful and honoured to have the opportunity to be on an Olympic Team.



What are the essential requirements of a top level training programme to develop high quality athletes?

1. Coaching

Without question, the quality of coaching and the athlete-coach relationship, are the essential features in developing athletes. No other single factor is as important.

- ◆ The quality of coaching determines the quality of the training environment. Athletes will not develop far without quality coaches creating and directing an intelligent training plan.
- ◆ The commitment of the coach to top achievement or realistic goals sets the tone of training.
- ◆ The time a coach has available is important to establishing adequate training. Often, the time a coach has available depends on the degree he can be paid for his coaching responsibilities.
- ◆ The number of athletes a coach must train influences the quality of the training.
- ◆ The number of responsibilities, other than coaching, a coach must undertake (i.e. fund raising, administration), detracts from his/her ability to coach successfully.

2. Athletes

Having special talent, strong motivation, and a willingness to work extremely hard, are all characteristics of the successful athlete.

Finding such individuals and encouraging them to pursue their talents to the fullest are often major challenges. Sometimes, for a sport to succeed in developing athletes to a reasonably high level, a talent identification programme must be implemented.

It is obvious that in countries where there are limited human resources, facilities, competition opportunities and financing, there may be little opportunity for youngsters to be able to find a sport where they can excel. By necessity, sports administrators may need to concentrate limited resources on only a few sports in order to achieve some improvement.



It is important for sport administrators to understand what the goals are for a particular sports programme (whether Olympic competition or only regional competition) in order that they can provide the right environment for athlete development.

3. Facilities and Equipment

Frequently, the lack of facilities (or access to existing facilities) and equipment is a limiting factor to sport development. Unless this problem is resolved, it will be difficult to develop athletes to the highest levels.

However, many Olympic athletes have been successful despite sub-standard training facilities and equipment, because of their high motivation, their commitment to hard work and their ability to improvise in order to create an adequate training environment. Sometimes overcoming difficult training conditions strengthens the athlete's resolve and provides an advantage to him/her during tough competition.

However, it is important for sports administrators to try to improve training facilities and to create a positive environment which encourages proper training.

Below are listed some suggestions which may be of help in improving facilities and equipment:

- ◆ Clearly identify your facility or equipment needs. You need to know exactly what you need and its priority.
- ◆ Try to make your sport's needs known to school officials, to community officials or politicians, to the military, to business, to service groups or to government. See if they can help or provide advice.
- ◆ Join with other sports or community groups to develop a plan or strategy to achieve your needs.
- ◆ Consider whether corporate support may be available to provide equipment or clothing under conditions that are reasonable.
- ◆ Consider entering sponsorship or licensing agreements for goods or cash, in return for corporations using your Olympic symbols or "official sponsor" statements.
- ◆ Approach specific International Sports Federations to determine if they can assist in providing assistance in designing sports facilities or providing equipment.
- ◆ Consider training for periods of the year in existing facilities in other locations in order to improve the quality of training.
- ◆ Be sure you know all available training facilities or possibilities in your community. It may be that your problem is in getting access to existing facilities and if this is the case, you must consider what kind of approach to the manager of those facilities could be successful.
- ◆ Often, staging major games or competitions creates an opportunity for governments to provide facilities and equipment.



4. Athlete Support

If an athlete wishes to achieve reasonably high goals, an adequate support system must be created to provide that opportunity.

Besides the obvious requirements of good coaching and adequate facilities, the national calibre athlete may require the following:

- ◆ enough time away from school or work to train - top level athletes may have to spend more than three hours a day in serious training, seven days a week
- ◆ adequate rest and diet
- ◆ access to medical and physiotherapy support when needed
- ◆ continual stimulation and encouragement which creates a positive training environment and shows support for the aspirations of the athlete

5. Financial Support

All sports administrators learn that raising money for training and competition purposes is a major need and responsibility.

Most often, it is necessary for governments to provide the bulk of finances required.

Funds may be needed to:

- ◆ pay for travel and competition expenses
- ◆ defray athlete training and living expenses
- ◆ defray athlete educational expenses
- ◆ compensate for time off from work
- ◆ provide adequate coaching or access to facilities

6. Administrative Support

In order to develop a well organised training and competition programme, there must be good planning and a fair degree of administrative support.

Ideally, the coach should coach, the athlete train, and the administrators do all the rest.

Administrative support could include handling correspondence, travel arrangements, fund raising, arranging training facilities, contact with the media, promotion, meetings and so on.

It is extremely important that administrators realise that the important focal point for their activities is the athlete and the coach.

7. Competition

Competition, at the right level and frequency, is essential for the development of athletes.

Competition provides a focal point for training and an important motivation for daily training.

Competition provides the ultimate test where all the factors such as skill, physical conditioning, knowledge, motivation and strategy are tested together. Careful evaluation of the results of competition can allow a coach to pinpoint weaknesses or strengths, and to adjust training if necessary.



For your sport, or your national system, rank the level of development of each factor listed below. A score of zero means there is no development or opportunity. A score of 10 means there is excellent development.

	0	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10
Coaching											
Athletes											
Facilities and Equipment											
Athlete Support											
Financial Support											
Administrative Support											
Competition											

B. Athlete's Rights

Athletes are universally seen as having the responsibility to act as a role model and ambassador, being ethical and drug-free, submitting to drug testing, striving for excellence, adhering to training programmes and being available for promotional purposes.

Some sports require athletes to sign extensive liability waivers and be prepared to participate in research.

The primary rights of athletes include the right to fairness and due process, the right to good coaches, clear rules, fair competition, health, privacy, safety, confidentiality and education.

Athletes feel that they are under-represented in decision making processes.

Overall the picture is of athletes who, while being the focus of the sports system, have little say in the decisions that most affect them. Athletes often feel they are not being accorded the status they should receive.

While athletes accept what they see as the necessary burdens of elite level competition, they also feel a need for a stronger voice and more control over their own lives.

Athlete-Centered Values

1. Athlete's rights should be clear.
2. They should not be pressured by ethical dilemmas (e.g. doping).
3. Their health and safety should be protected.
4. They should have meaningful involvement in decision-making.
5. They have a right to a quality sport experience and good, ethical coaching.
6. They should experience fair play and fair officiating.
7. They should have access to a neutral and effective arbitration system.
8. There should be equitable opportunities for girls, women and the disabled, and they should be portrayed by all, including the media, with appropriate words and images.
9. There should be no sexual harassment of athletes.

Ethical Behaviour by Athletes

Athletes carry their share of responsibility for the ethical conduct of the system and for their own personal conduct and approach to their sport.

1. Athlete involvement
 - ◆ athlete representation (both male and female) on their NF, IF, NOC, IOC
 - ◆ an active IOC and NOC athlete's commission
 - ◆ active NOC Olympians clubs
2. Anti-doping

Strong athlete support and leadership in discouraging and preventing doping; in unifying doping sanctions; in increasing out of competition testing; in promoting anti-doping education.
3. Non-discriminatory behaviour
 - ◆ events and sports for women should be encouraged
 - ◆ all athletes should stay in a single Olympic Village to encourage interaction
4. Social conscience
 - ◆ participation in Olympic Games should not be linked to the payment of bonuses
 - ◆ the interests and welfare of athletes should be the most important criterion for the choice of host cities
 - ◆ the careers of athletes after their athletic careers must be assisted
 - ◆ athletes must contribute toward IOC initiatives such as the Olympic Truce, and the betterment of conditions for children and the disadvantaged
 - ◆ Athletes must set the highest standards for ethical behaviour and fair play



UNIT 35:

SPORT SCIENCE

- A. Introduction
- B. Sport Science and Medicine
- C. How Important are Sport Medicine and Science to Olympic Athletes?
- D. Internet Sites for Sport Medicine and Science