



Category: Identification and Nurturing the Talent



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UNDERSTANDING TALENT IN SPORTS

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ABSTRACT

Take a moment to think about what you are good at. What do you do really well? Now think about some of the things you would like to be good at. Why is it we're good at some things and not others? People often put this down to talent... But what is talent and where does it come from? sportscotland institute of sport Talent Manager Tony Stanger explain.

The issue of where talent 'comes from' is a fundamental question for a small country like Scotland. That's because we must carefully nurture talent if we want more athletes like Andy Murray, Katherine Grainger and Sir Chris Hoy to reach the very top of the sporting world. The sportscotland institute of sport have been working to understand more about talent and what we need to do to build a world class talent system for Scotland. Everyone working in and connected to sport can play a role in nurturing talent and this includes parents, teachers and coaches. It begins with a shared understanding of the ingredients of the talent development process. If we make sure these influences are consistent and helpful, its potential is powerful. The good news is it's simple - getting really good at sport, or developing talent is really about understanding three key areas:

THE RIGHT SPORT:

Encourage young people to do a sport they love and that suits them. Every individual's physical abilities will suit some sports better than others and with so many different sports there is something to suit everyone.

There is also much we can do to develop physical skills as young people grow and develop. Advances in sport science really help us understand the demands of different sports and the kind of training needed to make improvements.

FUTURE FOCUSED: Advantages can be gained or lost over time. One thing we know for sure is that current ability is not a good predictor of how good an athlete could be in the future. It's really important we move away from looking at talent as being about what an athlete can do now and think more about what is needed to keep improving. Sometimes young athletes are better than others because they have grown faster or have been doing a sport longer. This doesn't mean others can't catch up – it just might take a bit longer. We know that the most successful athletes take time to learn about the ups and downs they will face and are very clear about the important areas they need to develop to achieve their goals.

BELIEF: The person who believes they can and the person who believes they can't... are both right! We know that beliefs about ability will have a big influence over what can be achieved. Helpfully, the behaviours of young athletes can provide strong clues as to their current level of self-belief. The evidence shows us that people who are successful in sport work very hard and take on tough challenges when inevitable setbacks happen. They overcome, they listen to and use key feedback even if they don't

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always like what they hear, and they know it's important to take ownership of getting back on track. Not only do we know these behaviours are really important, we also know they can all be developed if they are practiced.

Here's the big opportunity - so much about being 'talented' is within every individual's control. We can help athletes choose to be good! It won't just happen automatically, so it's important that we all understand the crucial role played by parents, teachers and coaches. So keep in mind the three key areas. And remember, whatever your role in helping to develop young athletes – their success is your choice as well.

Physiotherapy: The goal of our performance focused physiotherapy team is to provide the best environment in which to optimise physical potential in order to achieve results. Central to this is preparing athletes to perform their way onto the podium. The SIS utilises a network of first class physiotherapists with a vast experience in working with high performance athletes and sports. We provide a fast and efficient response following injury and work closely with our team of expert service providers to ensure that injury prevention protocols are implemented in athletes' day to day training programme.

Dynamic profiling: Institute supported athletes are offered dynamic profiling on an annual basis. This method of individual assessment is unique to the SIS. In order to optimise potential athletes' individual needs are assessed in relation to the specific demands of their sport. This is not always about injury but more often relates to identifying weak areas, improving movement patterns to allow enhanced skill development. We regularly meet with coach and athlete to discuss where physical imperfections could result in a wide range of issues contributing to recurrent injuries, inconsistency in form and under achievement.

Addressing issues in this manner optimises performance and helps prevent injuries. This integrated approach provides a solid platform and the tools to help springboard athletes to success.

Integrated approach to training: Physiotherapists work closely with Strength & Conditioning coaches to target athletes requiring more input, for example - newly inducted athletes, those returning following injury and athletes prone to injury. Together with the coach and athlete we agree the areas which could benefit from an intense period of training and this is monitored over time to ensure the athlete's improvement in the gym is in line with performance in their sport.

Massage Therapy: Is a separate, but integrated, strand of the Physiotherapy Team. We have several massage therapists in the network and their work complements the physiotherapy aspect of institute support.

Programme Design & Periodisation is a process of rigorous, comprehensive and continuous planning for sporting success. Together with our sporting partners, we work to target key events in training and competition and we match training programmes with performance objectives. Our philosophy is one of continuous improvement. Having identified key events and their relevant performance targets with the Coach and the Sports Governing Body (SGB), we analyse what needs to happen physically, tactically and psychologically to meet these goals.

We can then plan the processes and support to be put in place for each athlete and sports programme.

We also formulate the monitoring needs required to measure impact and build a team of experts around the athletes, led by the coach, to achieve this.

At the end of each cycle, we review the performance of each athlete and sports programme to determine what has worked, what we could enhance and also what hasn't worked, so we can discard it.

And so the cycle of continuous performance improvement continues.

Sports Science:

The goal of Sports Science is to make a difference where it counts - athlete performance.

The Sports Science process begins with a clear understanding of priority needs that relate to competition goals.

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Working as integral part of expert teams, our sports scientists define clear projects with set objectives to meet identified needs within agreed timescales.

To meet athlete and programme needs, expert solutions are provided which may include individualised support across:

- **Biomechanics**
- **Exercise Physiology**
- **Performance Analysis**
- **Skill Acquisition**
- **Sports Psychology**
- **Performance Nutrition**

Performance measures are identified and recorded across these various disciplines. These measures then act as a benchmark for ensuring performance impact.

Strength and Conditioning

Our Strength & Conditioning experts deliver individualised physical development support to our athletes. Strength & Conditioning programmes are coach led and integrate the other elements of institute support. Based on needs analysis and guided by technical, medical and scientific input, tailored programmes are developed to meet the performance goals of athletes and their sport.

Key to the success of the programme is quality instruction and a commitment to deliver fully coached and supervised sessions. To ensure performance transfer, our Strength & Conditioning Coaches are rigorous in evaluating and monitoring improvement.

Sports Medicine

Athletes can't win gold medals if they can't make the start line.

The goal of our Sports Medicine team is to have healthy athletes perform their way onto the podium.

The sports medicine team understand that if athletes are to perform they need to train effectively, and to train effectively they must be free from injury and illness - this is why we have a strong focus on preventative medicine and work very closely with the physiotherapy team on preventative measures for athletes.

Our experts provide advice and education on travel, recovery and doping. They also work with Sports Scientists as part of integrated teams influencing nutrition and physiology projects.

In the event of injury or illness our network of specialists moves promptly to support athletes back to training and competition.