

Talent Programme Feedback

At the culmination of the 2018 international season, the Talent and Performance Steering Group asked Talent Athlete Representative, Alastair Thomas, to provide feedback from the squad members. The athletes submitted that feedback in themes and this document aims to address them.

Something about specific concerns and personal issues removed and will be addressed directly.

The Talent Squad Year

Training Camps

Feedback

There should be more training for relevant disciplines, especially in Sprint and Relay, these are two disciplines where we are consistently good, and it would be good to put more emphasis on these.

Response

We agree, although we do train the forest relay discipline as often as is practical (eg. Feb competition, Summer development and Pre-JWOC camps). We will look to incorporate more sprint training into this year's programme. However, we are conscious of our duty of care and athlete workload, so this will need balancing across the same time frame.

Feedback

If it is cheaper, we don't mind self-catering, and it would be good to have clarity on what food will be available on arrival.

Response

We continuously review the programme in order to identify cheapest options, whilst not compromising the quality of the athlete experience. Where self-catering is an option, we will explore it. It should be recognised, however, that diet and nutrition are an important component of athlete performance and this will not be an avenue to cut corners. On some training camps, we have utilised self-catering options with a volunteer cook attending the camps, but this does add cost, so this option is unlikely to reduce the financial burden of overseas camps and competitions. Where this is known, we will inform you of what food is available on arrival, but sometimes this is not possible to identify precisely.

Feedback

The talent squad weekends should be open to any senior as well, since I think we'd learn a lot from them and also it could give them more opportunities to train.

Response

We agree that this has potential to be extremely valuable for all concerned and, to this end, Talent Squad weekends will be communicated to all senior squad members for the upcoming season.

Training/Athlete Support

Feedback

The Tier 1 / Tier 2 system worked very well. The option for Tier 2 athletes to not stay with the squad, but still train, was also very useful and saved a lot of money, which made us make more of an effort to come along to the other weekends. However, people in Tier 2 shouldn't feel pressurised/made to feel bad about not going to the Talent Squad weekends.

Response

There is no requirement for Tier 2 athletes to attend the training camps, however it should be noted that they are put on for the benefit of all of those in the talent squad and are an integral part of assisting the athletes to continue to develop as orienteers and help them achieve their personal targets for the season. Whilst we obviously encourage Tier 2 athletes to make the most of these opportunities, we certainly do not pressurise these members to attend these and wish to allay concerns here in this regard.

Feedback

Make the physiological testing optional. The data collected is useful, however the gains made are very marginal, so people shouldn't be forced into it, especially if injured/ ill. In addition, we don't know how to use the data collected properly, so a session about this maybe on the first camp or a document about it would be very useful.

Response

No athletes have been or will be forced into training or testing when ill or injured, as this is clearly contrary to our philosophy around athlete welfare. However, testing and training monitoring are important to demonstrate development and improvement, as well as enabling us to set specific zones and paces for effective training on an individual level. Testing enables coaches to review performance data against both the individual athlete on a long-term basis, but also against 'benchmark' historical data linked to those who have performed well at a junior and senior level. We will look at building in better education for all athletes on the benefits and how best to use the data from testing.

Feedback

Sportlyzer should not be used. Almost all of the athletes never use it anyway and are using Attackpoint instead. Attackpoint is much more useful in the data it can provide you with, is more likely to become a long-term training log and most people use it anyways. If it doesn't have the features that the coaches require then Ken (the founder of AP) always takes suggestions on how to improve it and would probably implement anything if paid.

Response

We agree that Sportlyser has not been as effective a tool as we would have liked for athlete monitoring nor as a diary mechanism, so will be looking to use Attackpoint for these purposes in the forthcoming year. Those who are part of the Edinburgh Performance group will also be looking to use this more proactively in 2018/19 and it, therefore, makes sense for us to apply this consistently across the two tiers of the squad.

Competitions and Summer Camps

Selections

Feedback

With competitions being mostly athlete funded we should take a full team, so the maximum number of people can gain experience. We all agree that this is what we would like to see happening. M/W18 at EYOC and JEC should always be filled.

Response

The strategic approach of British Orienteering is to ensure that athletes who are selected to represent Great Britain at international competitions are ready to perform at that level and have demonstrated, through their results at the nominated selection races, that they are deserving of what is the pinnacle of this sport. This achievement should not be given away lightly, and especially not on the basis that they have the financial means to do so. This will mean that, in some years, we will take a full complement of athletes and, in other years, we will not, but this decision will continue to be based on the standard of the athlete and their readiness to compete at that level.

Feedback

We want a more transparent selection policy. One that lets us know exactly what is needed to make a team rather than the currently subjective method that can cause confusion and athletes feeling disheartened. If people are consistently overlooked, or narrowly missing out on opportunities, then they are likely to drop out of the sport or become demotivated.

Response

The current selection policy has evolved over the past few years to be as clear and objective as possible and to reduce the subjective element as much as is realistically possible. We would therefore strongly disagree with the sentiment that it is a 'subjective method' and it lacks 'transparency'. If athletes are unsure as to what they need to do, then we are happy to have an open and honest discussion with them to clarify what is required, and we are always happy to provide them with feedback, if they have missed out on selection, to enable them to understand what they need to do in the future to be in the frame for selection and to help maintain their levels of motivation.

Logistics

Feedback

We feel that in general costs and other options could be considered more, as well as involving the athletes more with decisions. Transparency with costs. For example, a cost breakdown instead of just 'pay this much money'.

Examples include:

- *Self-catering options*
- *Sharing double beds*
- *Hiring cars rather than minibuses*

Response

British Orienteering is committed to keeping costs low for athletes and the squad in general. There are, however, a number of areas that need to be balanced against this, such as athlete welfare, safeguarding and team cohesion. We consider a range of options when preparing the logistics for camps and competitions and always attempt to balance convenience with cost. Self-catering was discussed earlier, and we will look at whether the hiring of cars works out cheaper than minibuses and take this option where feasible. The policy of UK sport, in general, is not to share beds, as this has obvious ramifications for athlete welfare and safeguarding.

Feedback

Kit should be paid for depending on what items you get, not just a lump sum on top of the athlete contribution. This is because we often aren't receiving any kit since we already have it. Also, we should have a database of some sort which keeps track of who has what kit so that people can't physically order new kit which they already have without giving a (good) reason for it.

Response

No athletes in Talent or Senior squads currently pay for any British Orienteering kit, the athlete contribution does not pay for kit and no athletes are charged for any kit they receive. However, we are considering changing this policy, to allow athletes to purchase the kit that they require, along with giving a greater range of options for competitions and giving athlete ownership of this kit. This would also enable British Orienteering to reduce costs in what is becoming an increasingly difficult financial climate for the governing body.

Feedback

Flights. The best way to do this we feel is to meet at the airport in the country, which we are travelling to, and to then let the athletes book all of their own transport there, such as at JWOC and JEC. Why it didn't happen at EYOC and Pre-JWOC, I do not know. I personally have had two flights booked for me this summer which I did not use or want to be booked for me but still had to pay for. Would like the logic behind booking flights so late in the day after JWOC (after 18:00). It made some people's journeys home very difficult and expensive. We'd like more flexibility in flight times or a reason if the time is later than expected. JWOC worked well booking own flights to help minimise costs for athletes in the UK side.

Response

This year, where possible, we offered the opportunity for athletes to get themselves to certain airports within a timeslot allowing them to select their own flights. This was done after research into a number of options, and where arrival airports had a variety of flights coming in at suitable times. This wasn't offered where it wasn't deemed logistically feasible for the team to do this. Inevitably, there may still need to be compromises here, in order to get the team to an airport at the same time, so that onward or return travel is logistically possible, which was the case when returning from JWOC this year. We will continue to offer this opportunity where it is seen as a viable alternative, however, with many eastern European countries hosting competitions, the number of flights in and out of the airports is very limited. There is also a duty of care element to this planning process, as often there are some very young members going out to competitions, such as at EYOC, and it may be their first time abroad, so in this instance, athlete welfare will remain an overriding concern.

Preparations

Feedback

Technical coaching/analysis sessions are generally very useful and using 3DReRun is a good way to learn.

Response

We are glad to hear that the technical coaching and analysis, driven primarily by Mark Nixon, has been well received this year and we will continue to review and develop this process on an ongoing basis. Tools such as 3DReRun are indeed very valuable in this respect and we will look to keep up to date with other developments in the sport wherever possible.

Feedback

There is a Pre – Camp before EYOC/ JWOC and a lot of preparation for those competitions which is very good. All the work which is done beforehand, primarily using the Facebook group is useful and helps athletes to prepare for the competitions. Team booklets are good especially for people that didn't go to pre - JWOC camps.

Response

We will continue to support this preparation and provide suitable information for all athletes.

Feedback

There is not much preparation/talking to athletes before JEC. For those who it is their first international competition, it can feel like being thrown straight into the deep end without much support beforehand.

Response

JEC comes at a difficult time of the year for us and it would be challenging to arrange a camp at the end of a busy summer and during a period when many of the selected athletes are returning/starting University. Currently, we discuss JEC with athletes at the summer camps (primarily at the Pre-JWOC camp), when we perform the individual athlete reviews, and discuss their tactical approach and preparation for this competition. We will look at how we continue to improve the support offered to JEC athletes in future years.

At Competitions

Feedback

Decisions to run races at JWOC (including middle finals) should ultimately be the athlete's decision. Their decision shouldn't reflect badly upon them for future races. Coaches should advise but not enforce their opinions.

Response

Results at JWOC are the key target for the programme, being linked into our Sport England funding, and, as such, careful consideration is given as to athlete workload and impact on other races in terms of medal, podium and top 20 places. As best practice, coaches will always advise athletes about their workload and races, and team management will always make decisions that are in the best short and long-term interests of the athlete and the team. A strategic approach for JWOC is discussed and agreed with each individual athlete at the Pre-JWOC camp in May. There

is no impact of these decisions on future selection and, as expressed elsewhere in the document, the selection process is clearly outlined and adhered to by the Selection Panel.

Feedback

We shouldn't be encouraged to specialise into sprint or forest as juniors, even with the split WOC, as you miss out on opportunities. Prepare to race the full range of events that are in the programme.

Response

We agree with this sentiment and the coaching team do not encourage specialisation at this stage of an athlete's development.

Feedback

Relay teams and order shouldn't be set in stone after the selection races, a lot can change from then until JWOC. They should be up for discussion with athletes.

Response

Relay teams are not finalized at selection, though the selection panel will select provisional relay teams and running order, so that athletes can prepare physically, mentally and tactically for their specific leg. However, in both senior and talent competitions, the final relay teams are subject to change, in consultation with athletes, up to the final submission of team names, if there is evidence arising from the competition that indicates that this is the best course of action to take. The selection panel delegates this responsibility to the Team Manager at each competition.

Feedback

Race preparation the evening before races should be more individual. We understand the need for covering logistics for the coming day, however, we think that should be it. Any 'geeking' race preparation should be optional following these meetings. Athletes should be free to prepare as they would normally for any race.

Response

Following the group briefing, the night before each international race, it is then up to the individual to decide what is the best course of action for them and there is no pressure placed on an athlete if they wish to opt out of any further race preparation led by the lead technical coach. We will endeavour to make this clearer to the team whilst at competitions.

Feedback

A bigger emphasis on the enjoyment aspect of competitions, we feel, would increase performance and the overall athlete experience. This is especially true for first-time athletes who will be finding the whole experience very nerve-wracking already, without the whole thing being hyped up and all about performance.

Response

We agree that there should be a strong element of enjoyment around running in international competition and try to develop an environment that encourages this. We certainly do not look to 'hype up' any particular race, as we are fully aware that athletes already know what the importance of this is. Whilst we hope that the team perform well at the competition, we do not focus on producing results in our discussions, but on ensuring that each individual concentrates on the fundamental process of orienteering and reproducing what they do on the national stage.