

Roadblock To Elite Coach Pathways

Earlier in 2020, BA advertised for a Pathways coach based in Victoria as part of the national HP coaching structure.

Good initiative, like it!

Great to read, but it caused me to ponder; where does a prospective coach go before an elite level appointment (such as this BA Pathway coach) to gain the skills and experience to confidently put their hand up as an applicant for such a position?

Where is the professional development (PD) for coaches found in our sport?

Isn't part of the HP system a pathway development program for coaches too?

Pity the recruitment firm that gets to write the extensive job advert, but that's life!

However when I read the applicant responsibilities and criteria, I wonder where we find sufficient coaches with the stated skills and experience to meet what was in the advert.

When all is said and done we might, might, have 50 advanced accredited coaches in the country, maybe, however they are accredited not necessarily experienced for the role despite the fact the course, and assessment to qualify, is quite exhaustive and informative. Too few opportunities are available prior to a vacancy occurring at national level.

And too often with those few roles ex-players, lacking elite coach experience, get the gig.

Are we walking the talk in this instance in our bowls' support for coach pathways?

Coaching and playing are two entirely different skills (set). Especially at elite level.

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The amount of planning, time and intensity that goes into elite level coaching is extraneous. Only those with the experience of the elite level role know and would concur that to be at the forefront your own PD at this level is a necessity for survival, for team success.

Importantly, where can prospective candidate coaches for such positions, and our advanced coaches are the first to consider, gain the skills and training to prepare them in readiness for when they next apply.

In professions - law, accounting, medicine, teaching etc. etc. - the formal governing body provides professional development (PD) to members, in this case of bowls members being relevant coaches, to ensure those members are being provided with the training to cater for their inexperience which, experience, you get once acquiring the advertised position.

In the BA job advert, some of the descriptions seen below were vague in my view and I wonder if other coaches reading same felt likewise:

- Engage with the National HP and Pathways Manager to monitor and influence the daily performance environment for identified athletes
- Understanding of performance analysis programs and tools.
- Demonstrated networking skills to develop, maintain and improve partnerships, networks and client relationships.

The coaches considering a future as an elite coach need to have guidance, PD, in what each of these three statements mean in practical bowls settings.

And a pet hate of mine featured as part of the advert. in this below

- Outstanding communication skills (both verbal and written) to liaise with a wide range of people including athletes, service providers, management etc.

Can anyone describe or define what outstanding communication skills mean?

In my infrequent dealings with certain HP management people around the globe so many of them would not rate anywhere near the idea of 'outstanding' yet they seek it in others!

The BA advert is timely as a premier league club here in Melbourne advertised for a head coach and this elite level club had different objectives

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to what is sought by BA. Remember, here in Australia a premier level club is the natural feeder system for elite bowlers to both state and national levels. The correlation of objectives between a premier club and a BA coach role should be reasonably close.

And premier league coaching also should be a similar feeder system for coaches. A pathway as such. A natural flow on from one elite skill level to the other, the top tier of elite.

And just as I was tidying up this article I was advised about the job vacancy from the Australian Blind Bowlers Association (ABBA) and again reading their content on purpose and responsibilities I looked in amazement at these few points.

Lead and manage high quality training and tactical development.

Manage players as individuals and as a squad.

Lead, facilitate, create and deliver the HP development plan.

Plan and execute high quality training camps for national squad members.

Don't dispute the points, but question where any aspiring elite coach gets to develop those skills prior to submitting an application.

The BA Advanced Coaches workshop manual concludes after 30 pages with 3 points on coaches, one of which stated, coaches should...have access to self developing opportunities. (I would call it PD). There in black & white from BA.

I wonder when, or if, BA or the STA's or NCAG, will take on the role of providing PD programs to either identified coaches a la advanced coaches or even others keen and capable coaches wanting to move along the pathway for elite coaching.

Australia is seen as the leading light in bowls internationally given our resources, our sheer weight of numbers, our favourable weather conditions, sports culture and funds.

Australia should deliver on this perception by implementing PD for the coaches interested in the pathway to elite coaching.

We have a HP structure.

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We have a national committee for coaching NCAG who could institute such PD for coaches.

In this country we have premier league clubs in many states, five at least to my knowledge. That is about 50 clubs with the scope to have a coach at elite level.

On the eastern seaboard of Australia those three states have about 16 male and female representative sides, which at 32 per state, is 96 teams in all and thus a chance for 96 coaches to practice at elite level.

Add together to the premier league number that is 146 immediate candidates to do PD.

Of course most of those coach positions are vacant as the management and selectors at this Zone / region tier level in bowls don't recognize the need for coaches, they don't even understand it as evidenced by two experiences I am privy to from 2019 and again 2020. Yet these management people all barrack for a national football team where coaches abound.

What don't they (Regional management) get?

What is BA, through either its HP program or NCAG to do?

For example, one principle to activate would be that all representative regional sides within each state must have a coach; if that principle became reality, as I say, 96 coaches now operate at elite level; all in need of PD to do justice to their role; to be confident that if a BA Pathways coach position became available in future they had the confidence and competence to take on the job if successful in their application.

The implementation of that principle, all Region representative teams to have a coach, would also force regional management committees to reappraise their approach to HP and in so doing give STA an opportunity to train and educate such regional committees about HP, their role and how it fits into the state, fits into the national system.

All of this principle – a coach for every Regional Representative team - needs to be sold to committees and coaches as the feeder system for elite

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coaches. That requires BA, our STAs, the NCAG within BA, to have a role to provide PD for this group of coaches in their elite feeder system.

An aside, in scribbling this article I checked the websites of all eight STA and was horrified that some STAs don't even have a state coaching committee. WA certainly led the way with a coach committee, a HP committee and would you believe a state bowls academy. Well done WA.

Anyway, back to my idea of a coach for every representative team in the country.

All of this being done for the good of our sport of bowls using the coaches and having them in PD programs to start on their journey.

In case you are wondering those of you housed in head office(s) about the need, or demand, by coaches for PD, let me cite our home grown example.

Having attended BA's national coaches conference in 2018, I hosted a two-day workshop that same year. Day one was a panel discussion on bowls and coaching chaired by me with nine premier league players, seven of whom were club head coaches. Day two was a practical session on the green involving the same players providing practice drill ideas.

Then in 2019, three of us coaches conducted a workshop series of practical programs for coaches attracting 160 attendees.

Both the 2018 and 2019 programs were filmed and now appear on YouTube. At time of writing this article there have been 330,000 viewings.

That is proof of demand!

That demonstrates a need!

That is what PD can do for those coaches craving to gain the added skill to be able to service the elite level bowler.

Time BA, time STA, time NCAG, to set us on a path of modernity and raise the level of elite coaching by the introduction of PD programs aimed at those coaches willing to go into the pathway for elite coaching.

Other countries fostering bowls need our national leadership in this domain: PD for coaches with aspirations of being an elite level coach.

Let's get going PLEASE !!!

Lachlan Tighe, 2020