

## The Power of Ten

This report details a meeting on the subject at UKA offices on 8 December 2005 together with associated topics.

Those attending the meeting:

Rob Whittingham (presenting)  
Rob Borthwick UKA Special Projects  
Andy Paul UKA Athletics Development  
Angela Littlewood UKA Teacher Ed.  
John Trower- SPM Speed  
Adam Walker - UKA Deputy CE  
Cherry Alexander UKA Events  
Hannah Hore UKA Media  
Simon Nathan UKA Performance Mngr  
Dave Jeals UKA Performance Logistics  
Lord Sebastian Coe

Tim Grose - BMC website  
Jack Buckner - Foster Review Project  
Derek Redmond - UKA Speed Event Group  
Maggie Still UKA Coach Ed.  
David Moorcroft UKA Chief Exec.  
Julie (Rob's assistant)  
Vicky McPherson UK Sport Performance Services  
Piers O'Callaghan Scottish Athletics  
Vicky Kennedy NI Athletics  
Steve Brace Welsh Athletics  
Chris Bowman England Athletics

Rob Whittingham made a detailed presentation linked with what he felt would be the performance and development advantages of adopting the Power of Ten. His starting point was that in World Rankings we have our minimum number of top ten ranked ever (6). What is the Power of Ten? At its simplest it is a website of athletics ranking lists. When you look closer it is a map of what the sport of athletics (except XC, Hill/Fell and Tug of War) should look like in 2012 together with some implications for how the sport could / should(?) develop. Rob predicted that half of the UK 2012 team are currently in the junior age groups and that we would have a team of about 100.

### Technical

Rob demonstrated a live website from a laptop connected to the Internet via the UKA network. The website domain [www.ukathletics.info](http://www.ukathletics.info) is registered to Umbra Software who are registered at Companies House as No. 01244236, incorporated 1976. The website is currently secured by a password. Rob Whittingham and Umbra Software publish a book of athletics statistical review annually. The website has the "look and feel" of the rankings section of [www.britishathletics.info](http://www.britishathletics.info) which is not a surprise as Rob runs that website. For those interested in such things the website is based on Active Server Pages technology.

### Data

The demonstration was based on 25,000 results and Rob stated that this represented 10% of the system required to provide the correct level of depth in the final system. After the meeting I discussed with Rob his estimate of the number of participants in athletics in the UK. He puts this at 80,000. This would not include those who only do XC or recreational road (IE below the ranking list standard). He spoke of up to 500,000 performances per year needing to be logged.

### The Power of Ten

David Moorcroft was a passionate promoter of the system during the meeting. He feels that the project could transform the breadth and depth of the sport. Further he felt that whereas in the past trying to initiate a change of culture from the top had not been entirely successful, this could be a driving force in initiating a culture change from the bottom up (clubs and regions).

Through collecting results for all events (inc 10km, Half and Mar Road) the website provides a ranking list for all of these events and in all age groups. The rankings can be "filtered" to three levels National, Regional and Club. (This is determined by 1<sup>st</sup> claim club affiliation). The website superimposes a gold bar that indicates the target for that year, for that event, for that age group, for that level, for the tenth best performer. IE if ten men

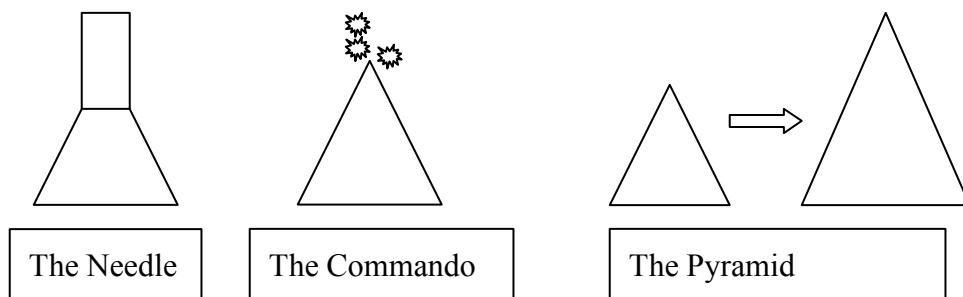
have achieved the target for 100m Senior Men 2005 then they all appear in the list above the bar. If 12 etc have achieved it then they all appear above the bar. Equally if the target has not been met then those above the bar are shown in the list with all other performances appearing in the list below the bar.

Rob has proposed standards for 10<sup>th</sup> best for all ages (no standards for U13 but still rankings) in all events for National and Regional. There is also a standard for 100<sup>th</sup> but I did not verify if this also applies to Regional lists. In the club lists the National and Regional bars are superimposed so you can see where your club performers rate. The standards have been derived from a statistical analysis of the past 6 years performances together with a view of 10 and 15 years ago. Of significance is that the targets increase each year until 2012. The analysis shows that there are events within A, B and C categories. (Doing Well, Could Do Better, Poor). This gives targets that are relevant to current standards but it also impacts on performance and development in each event. IE certain events even if they met the target standard each year to 2012 would still have no people of a standard to qualify for the Olympics. (This is from a statistical average viewpoint, there is of course still the opportunity for an exceptional individual to arrive but the overall improvement in the standard of the event will not have led to this achievement).

The site also has “athlete profiles” with their PBs and year achieved.

Rob and David both strongly supported the idea that having the Power of Ten lists (which would be updated weekly) and targets would provide a motivation for ALL athletes in the country. Further the lists and targets could form the basis of analysis and policy within the regions to tie in with development targets for each region. IE decisions on whether to improve women’s shot or U17 men’s 100m. David was of the view that one of the past weaknesses of the sport was trying to improve everything and failing to improve anything.

At this point a debate ensued with predominantly the attendees from performance in one camp and those from development in another. This is probably best summarised by taking the comments of two people from the performance side and balancing that against the view David and Rob were proposing. John Trower stated that Olympic medal winners have two things: 1) the ability to do it and 2) the mental make up to achieve it. John proposed that the existence of the Power of Ten lists would make no difference to that person on whether they achieved their goals or not. Simon Nathan commented on Talent ID / Elite Athlete Development models which are probably best explained using a picture.



Simon was of the view that the previous UKA Performance strategy was an attempt at a form of needle. In this you select from many events and try to raise the standard of all the selected performers in each event. He was of the view that the current UKA Performance strategy was the Commando. In this you take groups of selected athletes and put them together to work to rise to the required standard. This can be balanced against the view

of David and Rob who are probably proposing a pyramid. In this you raise the breadth and depth of the sport and from this the standard of your top people rises as a consequence. After debate the following was agreed:

| Agenda         | Olympic Medals | Olympic Finalists | Health of the Sport |
|----------------|----------------|-------------------|---------------------|
| Power of Ten = | X              | √?                | √                   |

Post meeting thought. Views on the best method of elite performance and its relationship to development of the sport are probably as many as there are participants in the debate! I have included an article by Peter Thompson that proposes that needle (and commando?) will lead to a final failure in the supply of potential members to those programmes. The article provides further support for pyramid which is more closely aligned to the thoughts behind Power of Ten.

David sought the views of the attendees and these were noted as:

Lord Sebastian Coe.

Commented that the most important thing was for the sport to be realistic on what could be achieved. He commented that things may have been made difficult for governing bodies of sport by the BOA target of 4<sup>th</sup> in the medals table which many observers feel is unrealistic. He commented on the relationship of competitions such as ESAA to the 7 yr pathway of himself and many of our other past elite athletes.

John Trower

Raised the idea that incentives could be based on the Power of Ten. He suggested the incentive should go to the athletes coach. John suggested that for U17s the school could be listed. Rob countered that unlike 15 years ago virtually no competitors were school only.

Simon Nathan

Warned that incentives could skew things the wrong way. IE if you trained all your athletes in pole vault you could “easily” get lots of ranked athletes but you may not have helped improve the sport.

Rob Whittingham

Pointed out that by 22yrs most of our best athletes had already reached World Class. Highlighted that immediacy was needed to motivate (IE site updated Monday after new results).

Jack Buckner

Felt that this would provide a complete picture and that Regions may need to target.

Scottish and Welsh Athletics

Supported this as they were already doing similar things in their organisations.

David Moorcroft

Added that he felt an advantage of the site would be clubs could see their contribution to athletes as a whole and not just their league participation.

### **After the Meeting**

I asked Rob if he was willing to reveal the financial extent of his proposal to David. He was not but we did discuss his view that it would only take 8 people to enter all the data as long as they were statisticians.

One of the original aims of my attendance was to discuss how this overlapped with the England Athletics participation and performance project and membership and data schemes. Jack Buckner confirmed that Dr Paul Gastin was still the person to liaise with on membership and data but following the “defeat” of this item in the vote it was proposed to re-visit it in 2006.

I had a discussion with Rob about the use of data from other systems such as the England Athletics workbook. Rob was of the view that the only useful data would be name and date of birth. The reason for this was that he did not trust any other source of data and the Power of Ten database would be built from meeting results processed by statisticians who understood what they were looking at.

### **Conclusions**

I would recommend to England Athletics that support for the Power of Ten project is given based on the following.

This would achieve the aim of Regional ranking lists as used to be produced by some National coaches and would be to a much greater depth and accuracy than previously.

This would be the first major “non initiative” based support from UK Athletics that would impact the Regions. It would indicate a commitment to raising standards across a wider spectrum than just World Class.

The Regions would have information on which to base planning and funding applications. They would also have a measure of the success or otherwise of their development plans.

I support the view that the pyramid model will raise elite standards but the adoption of the Power of Ten would give all the benefits of this without precluding Performance from following a Commando model concurrently.

### **Issues**

The Power of Ten contains no athlete location or ethnicity information. I have previously stated that without a full membership system we will struggle to provide information to Sport England on items such as participation in deprived wards. As a sport we might hope that the Power of Ten information would be accepted as our true measure of success as a sport but we would be well advised to get written agreement of such before adopting that assumption! I suspect that there will still be a need to provide data to our government funders based on location and ethnicity etc.

England Athletics should therefore continue to develop and implement the athlete tracking system until such point that a full membership scheme supercedes this. The issue of how this will be funded by EA / Regions will need to be addressed and will need to take account of any further reporting requirements resulting from the One Stop Plan.

Chris Bowman

13 Dec. 05



LET'S think for a moment about this thing 'performance' in athletics. What does it really mean to you? Sometimes it seems that the only thing the other media are interested in is the performance of our athletes in major competitions against a "medal standard".

Sometimes, it may seem the only thing that the company UK Athletics Ltd is interested in is this same medal standard performance. This causes some of us to perhaps question who is calling the tune. Are we doing this sport only so that we can meet the insatiable demand of the quangos and politicians for medals? I think not.

The vast majority of us are part of the wider community of athletics in the UK and are principally interested in two distinct types of performance. The relative importance of these two types of performance will be decided by your individual values and reasons for being involved with athletics.

The first type of performance we can all recognise is that of each and every athlete in the hundreds of clubs throughout the length and breadth of this diverse land. As these individuals run, walk, wheel, jump, throw and compete inside stadiums, on the roads, over the country and on to the hills, they are concerned primarily with their own and their team-mates' performance. The second type of performance is the one that most of us can enjoy only as spectators, supporters and fans – watching and reading about the very highest performances at world and Olympic levels – elite performance.

It is in this arena of elite performance that there has been an increasing discussion surrounding the overall results of our athletes. We have all watched and read with interest this ongoing debate about the declining performance of UK teams, particularly since the recent World Championships in Helsinki. There have been as many examinations of what went wrong as there have been solutions offered to improve the current situation.

One of the widely offered solutions has been to import foreign coaches. This is because, obviously, the current UK coaches are viewed as not doing

# Innovate to be the best – from grassroots to elite



Taking initiative is the only way forward, says international coach PETER THOMPSON

the job. The 'job' of winning medals now – this instant. Can a few well placed foreign coaches provide the solution? Let's listen to a foreigner, an Australian, on this subject.

In 1983 Rob de Castella achieved the gold medal in the marathon at the inaugural IAAF World Championships in Helsinki. On retiring from competitive athletics he was appointed to the position of director of the Australian Institute of Sport in Canberra. In this role he challenged the Institute with the statement, "If we do what we did yesterday we will be beaten, if we do what others are doing today we can be competitive, but if we fill every day with initiative we will be the best". Perhaps this statement points the way forward for the UK.

If we appoint foreign coaches to lead us to the Promised Land the best we can hope for, according to De Castella, is to be 'competitive'. We do not strive collectively, however, to just be 'competitive'. To be truly successful by any measure we have to be innovative and then act with initiative. While we can always learn from other countries and their coaches, do we not have coaches in this country who are, or could be, innovative? Do we not have athletes who can act with initiative?

Accompanying this initiative in training must be a broad, open and relevant competitive structure to provide the fertile seed bed for the champions of tomorrow. It has often been said that the best talent ID programme in athletics is competition itself. An appropriate competitive structure provides us with an ongoing, self-adjusting talent ID programme. In the long term, it is just not possible to have a healthy, successful and progressive international programme without



Rob de Castella: challenged the Australian Institute of Sport with thoughtful words

having a healthy sport throughout all its levels of operation – throughout all levels of performance.

The performer pathway structure must be established to truly value, and be seen to value, participation at all levels and in all venues. Within this competitive structure, the developing elite and achieving elite performers can maintain close involvement with and participate alongside all other athletes. If there is an over-emphasis both within the sport and within society itself on the value of medals over participation, the long term prognosis would see the situation develop with shrinkage of the participation base and eventual separation of the elite from the base, as shown in the accompanying diagram (left).

We have already witnessed this separation of performance levels within athletics in Australia. The Australian Institute of Sport was created in 1976 following the abysmal performance of the Australian team at the Montreal Olympic Games. Next year will mark 30 years of the 'institute approach'; since the foundation of the AIS and the accompanying political and sporting drive for medals. This institute approach demanded that athletes leave their home clubs and often their long-time coaches, by incorporating them to train in and compete for state institutes and academies or, for the chosen few, the AIS itself.

For some sports, the approach of the AIS has worked remarkably well. These are the sports where a very small core of elite and potential elite performers can be identified – sports such as rowing, cycling and netball. Athletics, however, covers a diverse area of physical activity and encompasses all the human movement of walking, running, jumping and throwing for both able-bodied athletes and athletes with disability, AWD. Add to this a high turnover of potential elite performers in athletics and it is difficult to bring together the numbers of athletes required to give success using this approach.

An additional factor to consider is that, if athletes are continually 'mined' from their clubs, and the clubs and competition structures fold, as they have in Australia, where can the champions and potential champions of the future come from? When and where are skills handed down to both athletes and coaches?

We must trust that UK Athletics has the correct strategies and emphasis internally and we must also ensure that clubs become more involved in participating and shaping change. If a model of performance development is initiated which is seen to respect and support the role of the clubs, all athletes will have greater possibilities to be in a position to transfer their experiences. This transfer of experience will be equally important to coaches as to other athletes. Any regional and national performance squads are crucially important in the development of elite performers, as are regional and national institute structures. Their influence becomes even stronger if their message is carried back to the home club environment.

In the final analysis, it is your club, alongside all others, that must remain as the most important environment for athletes of all abilities, up to and including the elite level. If we accept this, we must recognise that, ultimately, we are all concerned with and contribute to performance. For this reason, *let us all* take the initiative in performance, for the benefit of ourselves and for the benefit of others.



Changes in participation numbers at different levels of performance: the long-term result of an Elite Performance programme isolating elite performers from 'mainstream' Athletics performance