

TRIATHLON NZ'S HIGH PERFORMANCE REVIEW

1. Background

In August 2018 Tri-NZ appointed an independent Commission to review its High-Performance (HP) Programme to identify and evaluate strengths and weaknesses of the programme and campaigns. The Commission comprised Arthur Klap (Chair), Peter Fitzsimmons and Nick Elsmore, who reported on their findings to the Board in late December 2018.

This is a summary report prepared by the Board for distribution to the membership including athletes and coaches. The Commission broadened the scope of the report to include wider organisational issues and hence releases this summary report focused on the High-Performance Programme to the membership.

The Commission interviewed athletes and coaches, people from within the sport, Sport NZ and High-Performance Sport NZ or allied sports with a focus on the period from 1 September 2017 to 30 September 2018. The Commission expressed its appreciation of the 'open, constructive and honest responses' received to the two on-line surveys and discussions.

The Commission's findings focus on learning from the past, acknowledging what has been done well and considering the many excellent suggestions from the athletes, coaches and wider triathlon community.

The Commission acknowledged the financial constraints under which Tri-NZ operates, with considerably reduced funding from both High-Performance Sport NZ and Sport NZ in the period from 2016-2017. The Commission identified that the funding was at the very minimum level required for a high-performance programme to be able to operate and the 84% reduction in community funding placed Triathlon NZ in a precarious position.

2. Findings and Recommendations

2.1 High Performance Structure

The Commission emphasised the importance of all HP staff, coaches and athletes being aligned with Tri-NZ's coaching principles, values and strategy. The coaching principles, values and strategy need to be clearly defined and communicated so that there is no room for doubt about the end goals and the processes required to achieve those goals.

The Commission recommended a structure for the high-performance programme that provides an absolute focus on coach and athlete development. Roles identified by the Commission as being required include a General Manager Performance (formerly the senior role held by Mark Elliot was titled High Performance Director), a National Performance Manager, a full-time Coach and a part-time Talent Development manager.

The Board is in discussions with High Performance Sport NZ around resourcing of the high-performance structure and will make decisions on the structure when the budget for the 2019-2020 financial year is finalised. At this point in time there is insufficient resource available to fully implement the recommendations of the Commission.

The Board is committed to addressing the areas of concern identified by the Commission but notes also that there are several new pressures on the budget. There is a full international calendar, a requirement to meet High Performance Sport NZ expectations around short and long-term performance outcomes and a requirement to align with the Olympic qualification frameworks.

The Commission emphasised the importance of having complete clarity around roles and responsibilities of high-performance staff that is aligned with needs of individual athletes and their personal coaches. This is even more important with Triathlon being both a team sport and an individual sport.

Athletes and coaches agreed the key skills required of the GM Performance:

1. A flexible approach and be accepting of alternative coaching approaches.
2. An open approach to feedback, takes the feedback on board and responds constructively.
3. Manage strong athlete personalities and get them to want be part of the total programme.
4. Ability to think strategically especially long-term.
5. Have a high EQ (ability to effectively engage and maintain relationships at all levels).

In summary the Commission has recommended the following:

- Create a high-performance structure that focuses on coaching, athlete and coach development.
- Ensure the high-performance programme is integrative and open to several coaching philosophies.
- Ensure complete clarity around roles and responsibilities of high-performance staff aligned with needs of individual athletes and their personal coaches.
- Clearly separate the role of the GM Performance from coaching of athletes.
- Provide enough resource to support regional coaches.
- Develop policies around the welfare of coaches for inclusion in the Tri NZ policy manual.
- Ensure there is an induction process for athletes when they come to Cambridge to join the high-performance programme.

2.2 Selection Policies and Process

The importance of sticking to policies and transparency of decision-making around selection processes and decisions was strongly emphasised by the Commission.

While there are selection policies in place, the Commission identified that further work is needed on how the selection policies are implemented so that they are always applied fairly and consistently.

In summary the Commission has recommended the following:

- Ensure coaches and athletes have a clear understanding of the policies, qualification and selection criteria and how they will be applied.
- Effectively communicate selection criteria so that all athletes can plan and schedule races to maximise their performance and achieve qualification.
- Selection should consider both training data and race results; selectors should be independent from coaches; and selection criteria must be applied consistently and clearly.
- The (Selection) Commission to be clear about who needs to be consulted prior to decisions being made on athlete selection.

- The GM Performance not to be a member of the selection commission.
- Ensure all individual medal potential athletes that show a commitment to MTR are provided with the opportunity to be selected for the Mixed Team Relay team.
- Ensure decisions are communicated effectively to build confidence and trust in the selection process.

2.3 Mixed Team Relay

Introduction of the Mixed Team Relay as an Olympic discipline created a new dynamic for the sport and the Commission identified learnings which provide a very good base for future decision-making.

1. Understanding of performance related critical success factors helped guide specificity of the daily training environment.
2. Having a full-time coach in Cambridge enabled a positive and effective central training group.
3. Providing coach scholarships to support MTR events helped accelerate coach knowledge of this new Olympic event
4. Utilisation of a Performance Analyst to interpret ITU data helped to provide an evidence-based pathway.
5. Developing innovative peddle plates saved each athlete between 5-7 seconds on the bike-run transition
6. PEG's incentives for athletes who prioritised and raced MTR events had a positive impact

The Commission identified that for athletes to have the best chance to reach Olympic qualification in the Mixed Team Relay, both the Cambridge based athletes and those athletes not in Cambridge require the following attributes and considerations:

- Clarity on Tri NZ roles and responsibilities and responsibility of the athlete's own coaches
- Clear, consistent and transparent decision-making from the selectors
- Clear lines of communication between coaches, athletes and the HP programme.

The Commission also identified a need for the following:

- Support for younger or inexperienced athletes entering the top level of racing.
- Clarity around the athlete 'reserves' framework.
- Clarity around selection and funding of MTR coaches.
- Tri-NZ support people to attend each race.

2.4 Sport Culture

The Commission identified that building a positive team culture is essential and highlighted the importance of the following attributes required to achieve success at an international level.

- HP leaders have an important role in developing a strong and healthy team culture
- Senior athletes are given the opportunity to help create a team culture where all athletes are accountable for their actions.
- A positive team culture will engender respect between the different athletes so there are not too many rules enforced.
- A positive team culture will ensure bias or favouritism does not play a role within the team environment; will support teammates in their races and celebrate their success; will respect feedback from other athletes so the group can continue to move forward.
- Social gatherings not related to training help build a strong team environment and culture.

3. Other Areas for Improvement

Other significant points commented on by the Commission includes the following:

- The regional youth academies are very successful with good structures and provide a social environment that supports athletes in their training, but there needs to be a strong connection between the youth academies and the high-performance programme.
- The role of the Cambridge programme needs to be reviewed e.g. should it be all year or only for a defined period; is it a series of camps; should it primarily be aimed at U23s, but others can also be part of the programme; should special camps be held for elite athletes?
- National Sports organisations need to be pro-active in looking after the welfare of staff, coaches, volunteers and athletes. Consideration needs to be given to having a mechanism in place where issues can be raised without fear or favour by athletes, coaches and staff. This could be an independent person to be an 'ombudsman' to whom the athletes, coaches or staff can have direct access.

4. Next Steps

The Board acknowledges and sees value in the strength of the process that has been undertaken to review the high-performance programme. Priority is being given to the following as the next steps in the review process:

1. Define and communicate Tri NZ's coaching principles, values and strategy.
2. Clearly communicate the roles and responsibilities of high-performance staff.
3. Clearly communicate selection policies, criteria and process so all athletes can plan and schedule races to maximise their performance and achieve qualification.
4. Introduce an induction process for athletes when they come to Cambridge to join the high-performance programme.
5. Develop policies around the welfare of coaches for inclusion in the Tri NZ policy manual.
6. Put a mechanism in place where issues can be raised without fear or favour by athletes, coaches, and other staff.