Notes and Key Learnings from RMG Athlete Case Studies

Meeting date: Friday 26th May 2023

**Bryce Collins Notes**

Card sort tests assumptions in goals/ambitions.

Case Study 1:

Age 19, in Junior Black Sticks (U21 team) and has recently debuted for the Black Sticks somewhat due to many players playing overseas. Quite a long process too around three hours.

Key take aways for Bryce:

1. Elevated awareness that the athlete puts on herself to perform, more prevalent in teams where she is expected to be the star performer. Reflecting on this she has developed focus on ‘keeping it real’ and this was useful recently when she was called in to play some matches for the Black Sticks. Still a gap in terms of exposing her to some mental skills strategies.
2. Also a key focus is to be better planned. As the athlete has moved from school to university, life is a lot less structured and planned. This lack of planning is causing retained stress that she is taking on to the field. The athlete is now using the RMG weekly planner to connect parents, rep, and her club coach into her plans. Bryce has been able to give feedback on how the athlete has structured her week each week.

The process has had a significant impact on this athlete. Process has helped raise awareness and for Bryce to find practical ways to support the athlete.

Technology:

Bryce is using teams (locked channels) for each athlete to connect the circle of support into the athletes’ growth plan, athlete series/camp reflections, and weekly schedule. Has also used google docs in the past.

Takeouts:

* Although the process is time-consuming, it saves you time and energy down the track. Especially with new players, the time that you deliberately give them is really valued.
* RMG is encouraging self-directed action, the process is designed to not give the answers, to ask the right questions, and let the athlete explore themselves. It is a shift for the athlete not to be ‘told’ what to do.
* The process facilitates relationship enrichment and a higher level of trust.
* It is a niche opportunity to get it right in the 16-21 year olds, as they are very malleable. If we can get it right in this space, this will continue on to the HP space.

Answers to questions:

* In team sports coaches are stretched. HNZ is thinking about how they might use RMG with development, potentially using volunteers, but will take some time to reflect on the model going forward.
* In past years, HNZ has used a development plan template, the missing link has been the process to inform the development plan. Agree RMG process is also a valuable process for players over 21yrs of age (100%). Bryce would estimate that in the Black Sticks 1/3 doing IDPs well, 1/3 going ok, 1/3 struggling.
* Joe commented on child psychology research reinforces the importance of decluttering life in order for the limbic system to function effectively and support decision-making on the field.
* The experience of the group is that card sorts can take 1.5-3 hours. There is a sweet spot to find between getting enough information and spending hours going through the cards.
* If following a meeting, there is more work to do to refine the action plan, Bryce gave the athlete one week to reflect and complete.
* When funding is a major barrier, it is important for the IF to support engagement with the circle of support, community, and club in order to find support for the athlete.
* Helping athletes manage the complexity of juggling everything is also an important role for the IF.

**Tanya Hamilton – Notes**

General comments:

* All athletes interviewed who attended the recent World Cup campaign review said that they felt they were unprepared. SLSNZ needs mechanisms to find out issues early and link athletes with the right support at the right time better.
* RMG has been the most valuable thing in SLSNZ programmes. Its value is in relationship building; seeing priorities emerge for athletes; athlete engagement; and athletes taking ownership of how they can lift their own game.
* Tanya really enjoys the sessions with athletes, because as an HP manager, she gets to learn about what they can do to support athletes as a system, and she can keep evolving the system.

Case studies:

Case study one

* This athlete is competing in three sports (hockey, swimming, SLS swimming as well as ocean craft events. Lots of coaches and amazing support network.
* Whilst they have a heavy work-load other sports can have positive benefits for SLSNZ (e.g., sprinting in hockey can help speed for beach sprints).
* On the downside, there are many conflicting voices in her circle of support. As conversations are had to sort out issues amongst the circle of support, the athlete experiences anxiety being ‘out of the loop’ while issues are resolved; the RMG process has been important to cut out the ‘worry time’.
* Struggled with self-belief.
* Performance review is a high-priority
* Recovery issues.
* Although the circle of support is excellent, the athlete is missing someone in her circle of support that has a holistic overview of her life. Cost/benefit of adding another person into the network.
* High drive/determination, some awesome strengths.
* The result of the meeting was a call to have monthly meetings amongst the circle of support. Great to have x-discipline people in the room so everyone can see what the athlete is doing in terms of training load. Sharing the plan has raised awareness amongst her coaches of the no. people in the athletes’ circle of support and the risks/challenges this presents for communication.
* Some follow-up with clinical needs and nutrition.
* Athlete keen to be a leader, but needs to do this around a complex sporting life without being fatigued and affecting recovery.
* Pre-brief and debrief were areas of focus.

Case study two

* Parent attended.
* Location causes isolation. Wanted to make sure she wasn’t missing out on support due to her location. The strengthened relationship with Tanya, and removed a barrier to asking for help when needed.
* Circle of support has been tight.
* Gaps around S&C. Follow-up support has been great in this area.

Case study three

* No support person present.
* Gap S&C. Keen to develop speed (support pending).
* Keen to be a leader.
* Easy to give answers but couldn’t due to funding restrictions. The athlete took on the responsibility to independently seek support and accountability for filling the gaps. Not just identifying the tools but discussing how they would put these into practice.
* The discussion covered the athlete’s fit within a (theoretical) SLSNZ team and areas that she could develop to increase her selection chances. This was followed by conversations with campaign leads so athlete knows what they are targeting in training.

Case study four

* Coaches were present at the meeting.
* Good at identifying priorities, had quite a few, maybe too much to focus on? Tight circle of support.
* Needed S&C, body robustness (pre-hab work), and clarity on recovery plan.

Case study five

* Parent attended the meeting.
* Key issue was the transition from school to a new location, finance a priority amongst training needs (need to figure out how to support themselves). Discussion about who do you need to speak to and what do you need to weigh up.
* Desire to be an athlete leader. Lots of discussion about who could support transition and decisions that will need to be made.
* No gaps in circle of support.
* Athlete’s personal values were a strength.
* Great self-awareness for a young athlete.
* Athlete made a tranisition plan.
* Recovery solution was to create a decided space with tools, to complete recovery.
* Asked Tanya to keep him honest about authenticity against goals, the process has shifted behaviour and better depth to training content. A lovely reflection of trust.
* Athlete has moved as a result of transition planning process to an area with a better training squad.

Case study six

* Nice to see a serious considered side of thinking.
* The athlete is isolated from the hub of other like-minded athletes so specialist support was really valuable. Being able to linked the athlete with S&C and speedwork support was awesome.
* Allowed the athlete to come up with answers for recovery and nutrition (although nutrition support has been provided).
* Yoga was added to the recovery routine.

Case study seven

* No support person present.
* Athlete was very emotional from the beginning of the meeting. Over the last two years, there was a difficult build up to World Cup due to a drawn-out selection period (due to a lack of data, trials, and an appeal). This had taken its toll on the athlete and the process uncovered that they needed support to work through the issues to get their self-confidence back. In hindsight, Tanya reflected that the athlete was afraid to raise it because they were in a selection period.
* Athlete is an incredibly planned and disciplined person evident in communication before and after the sort meeting as well as during the meeting.
* Uncovered gaps in mental skills, athlete life, S&C, and physiotherapy, which are now all sorted out through the hub programme.
* Meeting has built a connection with Tanya and SLSNZ, now athlete is not hesitating to ask for support, which she has done on a few occasions since the meeting.

Case study eight:

* Coaches attended the session.
* Power/speed athlete.
* Great circle of support.
* Independent.
* Discussion around performance review revealed that there was a race at World Cup that the athlete ‘glazed-over’ because it was a poor result and didn’t want to discuss. This raised awareness among coaches that there was something there that needed to be unpicked as it is important for athletes to interrogate all performances for learnings.
* S&C support and equipment has been added to develop explosiveness.
* The athlete thought they needed a subscription to expensive self-monitoring technology. They had seen senior athletes using this technology. HPSNZ doesn’t have the funds to support this but with the coaches there, it was a good chance for them to explain how data was being used (primarily to observe only), which led to putting in place some simple checks which didn’t cost anything.

Key learnings for Tanya reflecting on the group as a whole:

1. Tanya’s reference point is that there was not a lot of dialogue in the past, Tanya wasn’t part of the communication loop with athletes to understand their needs, and also wasn’t aware of what communication was happening between coaches and athletes.
2. The feedback from coaches is that they are now getting richer information from athletes, allowing them to understand their goals better.
3. There is now better dialogue with other sports (their athletes have a lot of cross-over with canoe racing and swimming). As other sports are Olympic sports and on the pathway, so decision-making to prioritise training content is challenging. As a result, many SLSNZ athletes may be sacrificing an element of their SLSNZ training that they really enjoy and is good for their well-being due to their training programmes in other sports.
4. As a result of the process there is increased athlete awareness of services that SLSNZ can provide with the support of HPSNZ. Funding is now being used on more important priorities to raise their training game, compared to the past (e.g., athletes tapping into nutrition, mental skills, S&C, etc.). The athletes go away believing they now have the opportunity to ‘be the best versions of themselves’.
5. The RMG process challenges athletes about what they thought were their priorities. The process raises awareness, but funnels them into a prioritisation. The priorities that emerge are often different from what they thought they were beforehand.
6. Reflecting on the selection process in the build-up World Cup campaign, there were issues that didn’t bubble to the surface until after the event. Sometimes whole lot of small issues, put together, can be a big problem. Building relationships (which is facilitated by the RMG process) is key when you are trying to give athletes mechanisms to feedback when there are challenges. And important to this, in the conversation is setting up that non-judgemental safe space.
7. Discussions around how the athletes can position themselves for team selection, is empowering for the athletes and creates a valuable dialogue with coaches.
8. Robust plans can be an enabler for alignment of support where there the athlete is in multiple sports with many stakeholders.
9. Athletes sometimes need to be resourceful, creative and realistic to solve support gaps (with the help of their circle of support).