Trials and Tribulations

of the

Performance Support Team

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“Bridging the Gaps” between the ART, SCIENCE and BUSINESS of coaching.

The concept of Performance Support Teams is not new.

The Performance X-Pod:

The size of a team can vary with age and competitive development.

In a perfect world, every athlete would have his or her own personal, well-oiled team of support personnel.

Life would be simple.
Even adding the original team to the mix seems manageable.

We are fortunate that such a variety of resources is readily available...but...

Who is communicating with whom?

Is “training” (volumes, workloads) being monitored?
And do the realities of life muddy the water?

- time constraints
- budget limitations
- undefined plans
- uncommunicated plans

Our once-clear vision of *PERFORMANCE* can become obscured.

In the real world, key components of an effective support system are easily overlooked.

It becomes complicated, unclear, overwhelming; Too time-consuming, too distracting; It’s too much to handle and creates more problems than it solves.

While we’re busy being busy, our athletes are at risk of becoming sick, injured and over-trained. We are vulnerable.

It’s not our fault. But we need to SIMPLIFY.
Building a Team... ...and Staying on Top.

Those who have built support teams know that it starts with education and requires the ability to identify strengths and weaknesses, secure resources, and build and sustain good business relationships.

Perhaps most importantly, it requires the ability (and willingness) to **PLAN**.
Network

The only way to develop the best network is to find the best people. Many times it’s word of mouth, but take the time to do a little leg work on your own to get the ball into position and to get the ball rolling.

Talk with local practitioners to find out which ones might have experience with athletes, and better yet, experience with skaters. When you find one you’re comfortable with, ask for recommendations from this person regarding people in some of the other fields.

Learn about the health care businesses in your community. Clinics and/or hospitals are often interested in sponsoring a program or donating supplies to support things like lactate testing or nutrition analysis.

Visit the Sports Medicine department of your local college or university. There may be an opportunity to work into their schedule, or contract out a few of their staff, depending on state laws and your own club situation.

Try the Sports Medicine and Science Network searchable database on the U.S. Figure Skating website to locate the names of a few professionals in your area.

Communicate

Encourage your support network to take a team approach to every problem. Oftentimes the best solution involves the combined effort of two or more disciplines. If the emphasis is unarguably in one area, it will still be beneficial for all members of the team to be kept apprised. Down the road, when their turn comes, it will benefit the athlete if the practitioner is familiar with the history.

Keep it Simple

At least to start, focus on finding professionals to support you in the areas you need it most. For example, if you’re finding yourself in desperate need of someone to teach your skaters about nutrition, focus your efforts on finding a good nutritionist first, and worry about the massage therapist later. Once you find a good nutritionist, you can use this person’s experience to help you find a good massage therapist, psychologist or physical therapist… whichever is most important to your program.

Treat it Like a Business

It’s a great feeling to find Sports Medicine professionals who love to be involved in skating as much as you do. But remember, it’s all about business. They’re providing services for your athletes according to your program philosophy and training strategy.

Develop schedules and letters of agreement, so both you and the service provider are clear on the expectations.

Document any compensation discussions (and be sure to let the parents know about this too, since typically that’s where the money comes from).

Document donation and sponsorship agreements, including specific products, lengths of terms and conditions (i.e. “I’ll give you this in exchange for that”).

Budget for incentives for volunteers. Keep in mind that the service provider has to make a living too. Many people are more than happy to volunteer their time to assist you with your training or treat a skater’s injury, but it’s nice to know that time is appreciated.

Keep all of this in a safe place. It doesn’t have to be fancy… a simple file folder will do, but know where to go should you need to renew an agreement, find a phone number, quote a fee to parents, develop your budget for next year, etc.

Every successful business has a PLAN… What’s yours?

Getting started on your Network can be a daunting task, and when you train some of the best skaters in the world, choosing the right people can be even tougher. Stand your ground. Be selective. Be the leader.

Sports Medicine and Science Network

A lightly screened directory of volunteers willing to work with skaters at the local level.

High Performance Network

A highly screened network of practitioners currently working with and/or qualified to work with elite skaters.

Practitioners are CPR Certified, demonstrate successful involvement/experience with competitive skaters, and commit to reduced rates and expedited visitation for elite athletes.

The goal is to assemble well-screened teams of highly qualified professionals to meet the needs of top skaters across the country.

www.usfigureskating.org

When it comes to implementing an effective performance support system, the fundamental messages are performance and teamwork.

To maximize efficiency, members of a performance support team include the athlete, coach, and performance support professional.

Each must be aware of the other aspects of the training and respect the jobs of each individual.

An effective performance support system works together like a well-oiled machine.

The best performance support team members are there when you need them and not when you don’t. They are not in it for personal gain and ALWAYS have the best interest of the athlete in mind.
There are plenty of opportunities for break-down within a performance support team.

Simplify. Stay true to the core.

Understand all needs, and work with people who can help get the job done.

A little planning goes a long way in keeping our skaters healthy and #1 in the World!

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