

Dave MacLellan, Ocean Physiotherapy & James Marshall, Excelsior

The Physiotherapist and Strength and Conditioning Coach

Case Study No 6



The South West Talent Development Centre is a joint initiative between the University of Bath and Sport England. Its objective is to maximize the potential of people from the South West to progress to elite levels in sport by providing support to and building the capacity of National Governing Bodies to implement their talent pathways in the South West.

For the past three years Dave MacLellan and James Marshall have used their expertise to help athletes on the Southwest Talent Centre programme. They have worked together for many more years as part of the support service network for Exeter and Millfield based Talented Athlete Support Scholarship (TASS) athletes. Their experiences working with the Talent Centre athletes where they have worked with athletes aged 13 to 20 from a wide variety of sports has particularly influenced their approach to developing athletes and increased the level of collaborative working between the two of them.



"We're used to working with elite athletes, so you never really see what the young players do before they get there, or more importantly what they're not doing," said Dave. "There are some fantastic young athletes out there who will slip through the net. We'll lose them because they're not getting the right support for their physical development early enough."

Together Dave and James conducted 75 movement screenings on the Talent Centre athletes. What they learned led to a re-evaluation of their approach.

"I was shocked at what I was seeing in the screenings. These were some of the best young athletes for their age group but they really didn't look like athletes. Some of them were not far off having unfixable problems which is horrifying when they're only 14 years old," said Dave. "Before we had hunches, now we have an evidence base from the screenings of what's really happening and we've learnt so much about how to develop them in a way that will give them the best chance of making it."



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James agreed. "Before I started working on this programme, my first priority as a strength and conditioning coach would have been to get the athletes metabolically fit first. Now it isn't. It's correcting poor movement patterns. Most of the athletes have adapted to the sport that they're playing and they're fine in their own environments, playing at the level they're currently at. But getting beyond that into true high performance levels is another thing altogether and without correcting some of the problems I can't see them still being good athletes three or four years down the road. I've added lots of skills co-ordination into every session because I think it's really important to do more than just traditional lifting."

The Talent Centre became something of an ideas laboratory for Dave and James. Many of the athletes were pre-specialised and still competing in a variety of sports with differing performance demands. Asked why working with on the project interested them from the outset, Dave said, "I liked the idea that we would have the freedom be able to use our expertise to help address the athlete's long term developmental needs without having to follow the specific direction of a particular governing body. We were dealing with them as athletes and individuals not as rugby players or sprinters -- that can come later."

"I've worked with young athletes before as part of the rugby academy but this was a great opportunity to work with a really broad range of sports," said James. "The Talent Centre training sessions are great for them, especially the girls. They're competitive sessions but in a positive way because they're not competing against one another for places on a team. And it challenges them because they aren't necessarily the best in the training group anymore so it opens their eyes to what they do well and what others do well. "

"Some of the athletes were a little bit lightweight when they first started coming to the sessions but there's been such a turn around. Steve Turnock used to get a lot of stick from the girls for moaning and just generally being soft. He stuck at it because his javelin coach was supportive of him coming and look at him now, English Schools Champion (Javelin) and one of the best athletes we've got," said James

Dave added "We really need to educate the parents more about what they can do to ensure there is the right kind of coaching support in place for the developing body."



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To find out more about the Southwest Regional Talent Centre go to:
<http://www.teambath.com/what-we-do/sports-development/south-west-regional-talent-centre>