

High Performance Meeting Notes

March 20, 2002 at 7:00 PM at 200 Main Street

Attendance: Vern Zatwarnicki, Murray Marchment, Al Siemens, Judy Chernis, Peter Chernis, Andy Dwilow, Jan Coates, Audrey Siemens, Ian Siemens, Paul Lapointe, Rob Cook, Vern Redpath, Jane Redpath, Rob Kirchmann, Rich Pettit, Brent Bottomley, Harvey Miller, Doug Sinclair, Ken Goodridge, Len Rivard, Cheryl Zubrack, Steve Scoles, Heidie Plett, Megan Hudson, Sarah Chernis, Laurel Hudson, Lindsay Gauld, Brian Burke, Sandra Gadawski, Bob Hudson, Nadene McBride, Jay Hawranik, John Hawranik, Drew Hawranik, Trevor Potapoff.

Agenda:

- 1. Chairs Introductions**
- 2. Explore Models To Produce Excellence**
- 3. Open Discussion**
- 4. What are our options**
- 5. Next Steps**

Mission: To Produce Competitive Manitoba Skiers At The International Level

Goal(s): Manitoba Skiers On The 2014... Olympic Team

1. Chair's Introductions

Brent Bottomley (Chair) convened the meeting by introducing the Mission and Goal of Manitoba's High Performance Program as he sees them (Stated above). He also pointed out that this is a meeting to discuss the future of CCSAM's high performance program during which he is encouraging everyone to give their input as to what they feel is needed. Brent also pointed out that there are two realities we must take into account as a ski association and as we plan for the future.

- i. Finally the association will financially be in the Black at the end of this fiscal year.
- ii. Sport Manitoba has re-categorized Cross Country Skiing from a "B" sport to a "C" sport. What this means that for a minimum of the next four years CCSAM will be funded at a lower level than it has been in the past. i.e. smaller grant from Sport Manitoba and our bingo revenue will go down for the 2003/04 season.

Taking the above two mentioned points into consideration one must realize that our Full Time Coach position is in question and our high performance program needs to be reviewed.

2. Explore Models to Produce Excellence (What are other provinces / sports doing?)

A number of different High Performance Models were discussed. Below is a highlight of the predominate models that were outlined:

- i. TEST Program. Was a well funded program by _____. It was run in _____. All they had was 36 young keen skiers, built a 3 km lit loop and skied like hell. This tiny program in the north developed 5 hot international caliber skiers. To date this is probably one of Canada's most successful Cross Country Ski Programs ever run.
- ii. Hockey Program. Take thousands and thousands of participants and these big numbers will simple grind out some top level athletes.
- iii. Rowing Model: Work very hard with a small number of athletes to produce quality results. Becomes a very elitists group. Challenging if you are trying to represent a large geographical area.
- iv. Swimming Model: Club coaching which is capable of taking athletes from the grassroots right up to the national and international level. This system has a very high commitment at the club level including a large financial commitment of the athletes (parents). Frequently coaches in this system get paid very well (\$40,000 per year plus). The Provincial Team in

- this system is a virtual team, athletes train with and represent their perspective clubs and are selected out of these teams to receive financial/coaching assistance from the PSO to represent the province at selected National events / Canada Games. Cross Country BC and Cross Country Alberta follows a very similar format to the above mentioned swimming model.
- v. Pyramid Model: Ensure that there are good programs to support a large base (grassroots) and identify athletes with potential out of this group.

3. Open Discussion

Going Forward:

- Do we want a full time coach or the Provincial Team?
- How do we fund this if so?
- What are our other options?

Open Discussion topics/comments made:

- Possibly we should be promoting multi-sport year round clubs i.e. clubs with winter skiing and summer mountain biking etc... (Inbreeding).
- If we are going to go with a club coaching system we should scrap the Manitoba Racing Club that we currently use for provincial team members and have athletes represent their perspective clubs at nationals etc... Insisting only that the club they are representing is a Manitoba affiliated club.
- We need to define the needs of coaches in Manitoba. Possibly instead of a Provincial Team Coach CCSAM needs a coaching coordinator to provide support to our club coaches (coordinate, recruitment of coaches and administrative assistance).
- If we go to a club based coaching system a concern is, do the clubs have a large enough critical mass to financially support a paid coaching position. Maybe Regional teams should be pursued rather than club teams (club teams may fragment our small population to much making it difficult for clubs to afford a coach). Are our clubs strong enough??? Fundraising will have to become an even larger part of club activities.
- The club coaching system would provide coaching opportunities for newly certified coaches in the province. Possibly this would help to prevent the trend of certifying coaches and then never seeing them again.
- Maybe CCSAM should supply incentive grants to the clubs who buy into the club coaching program i.e. have a granting system that reflects 3 different components to make up the size of grant a club would receive 1. Base Grant, 2. Specific Incentive Grants, 3. Results Based on selected races throughout the season.
- There was detailed discussion on how a club based coaching system should and could work with the support of CCSAM. If we are to return to a club based coaching system it must be developed with the clubs and with the clubs and athletes in mind.
- There was an outline of the Frontier School Divisions activities pointing out that there is a lot of people out there skiing we need to figure out how we can recognize/assist in the development of these programs.
- There was also an inquiry as to how Cross Country Skiing can become a sanctioned sport in the eyes of the Manitoba High School Sport Association. It was pointed out that if an official sanctioned High School Championship was developed that this would help out because it would free up funds from the school divisions for athletes to attend the event, develop programs, etc...
- How do we assist the parents, especially the parents who do not ski?
- Suggested that we run Big Guest camps where we bring in guest coaches and bring in kids from around the province to attend the camps.
- Need to develop a coaching plan.

- What rewards does a cross country ski coach receive at the club level: Incentives (monetary incentives are currently rather small), rewards of coaching skiers, fun satisfaction (is the key let them know they are appreciated)
- The major KEY for the success of any program is that someone has to take ownership of the program in order for it to become successful. Who will take ownership of these programs? Need to identify key volunteers/leaders. CCSAM can assist in the development and maintenance of this program but it can not run them, the clubs must run them.
- WHO IS GOING TO IMPLEMENT THIS?
- Brief discussion on how the Manitoba Racer (Current Provincial Ski Team Model) crippled the club system that was in place because it took a clubs role models (elite athletes) out of the club coaching system.

4. What are our options?

- i. Status Quo – If \$ remains the same.
- ii. Partial User Pay – Hire the best in the world and have athletes pay for a large share of these costs.
- iii. Club/Regional Club Coaching Model and have a Virtual Provincial Ski Team.
- iv. Multiple Designated Provincial Coach (Part Time)
- v. Do Nothing. This is not an option unless we want to see our sport fall into a downward spiral.
- vi. Cost sharing with other sports.
- vii. Mentoring ID Coaching Options.
- viii. Combination of the above.

5. Next Steps

At the conclusion of this meeting it is of our opinion that the majority of people believe that we need to return to a club coaching system in order for our sport to grow. WE hope to develop a club coaching system that has the support of CCSAM in the form of funding and administrative assistance. An idea was to have a coaching coordinator that would assist coaches to acquire the resources the need to do the best possible job with the funds available.

Upon the distribution of these notes CCSAM is beginning to devise a plan of action and will then circulate this plan for your comments. During the development of this plan we will be asking for your assistance and for your level of commitment to the programs that we are developing. Remember CCSAM is here to help the development of Cross Country Skiing here in the province of Manitoba and we require your input and commitment to ensure that our plans and actions are in the best interest of skiing for Manitoba.

We encourage you to voice your comments and concerns to us at any time.

In the mean time I would suggest that if your club is interested in developing a competitive program with regular coaching that you should begin think of the who, what, where and when's of your program plan.

Suggestions to the High Performance Planning Session on March 20, 2002

Number 1: Adopt the idea that skiing is a sport: drop the recreational tag. We are a medal sport at the Olympics.

You still need a full time technical/coach, minimum level 3.

Why?

Admin staff don't have the background or training to produce programs or assess skills of athletes and local trainers. If you want high performance then you need training to go with that. High level of skill and training is required for even a regional championships event (i.e. Westerns and Canada Points List races). Past game plans have targeted minimum L2 certified coaches at the club level.

Funding is available for professional training staff. The funding bodies are asking for this one item.

Race travel:

There is a correlation with event experience and championship results.

We have to attend out of province races as soon as the athletes are socially mature enough to travel. This is necessary to develop mental toughness and to be included in a bigger picture. The athletes must see for themselves where they stand nationally.

Early snow camps:

These are critical for development of skills and capacities. This also allows for trainers to spend concentrated efforts on athletes that will not be readily seen at home. Also the athletes fight to get onto these camps.

Regional development:

Head trainer will be in contact with regional club coaches. The club coaches must ask for assistance from the head trainer and develop a team. We don't need to re-invent the wheel with a Kids of Mud program, and the resource materials already exist -- talk to CCC. Kids of Mud and Steel run parallel to our Jackrabbit program. I would not want to be a 14 year old and be called a "kid of snow". After Rabbits then you are in Zipps or Track Attack or what ever name the club has adopted for the pre adolescents. To remember: those programs were successful because of the individuals running the programs. Birch is currently a success story because they have leadership, a year round facility and they are in contact with their membership year-round. Pinawa is training coaches this spring.

There is a lot of data in the office right now due to recent Manitoba Games. This list has been used in the past to identify racers and coaches in each region. This should be repeated.

Work within the existing and successful Jackrabbit programs instead. The bottom line is that we need more trained ski leaders. This task would normally be undertaken by older racers. There is a lot of knowledge in our community but it is not used on the target group of juniors.

Currently, working areas with coaches: Birch, Falcon, Pinawa, Winnipeg.

Areas that need concentrated help to get going: Flin Flon/The Pas, Thompson, Russell and Parkland, Birds Hill Park/Interlake.

Centralize within a region:

We have too many clubs with too few resource staff, Winnipeg especially. Specifically Winnipeg needs to welcome back into the fold Red River Nordic and its wealth of training experience and Junior members. This is critical.

While it is nice to have a club in every valley, clubs should be built around first class facilities to allow for a gathering point, both social and competitive.

Events:

Need more event infrastructure: Signs, promo, banners, flagging, fences, items to dress it up. Look at regular, out of town events. We also need to look outside of our regular group to bring in race staff. Recognize racing centers: **Falcon, Birch, Pinawa, Russell, Thompson, Flin Flon/The Pas**, and make them really good instead of diluting things. Ensure that they have the material resources to run a big event once a season. Recent success stories: The Pas, Birch and Falcon. Of course these larger events require event personnel.

Change race formats.

We can sprint but we have no sprints at home. They should be included in the Provincial Champs program even if it means eliminating a distance event. If the Masters cry over this one they shouldn't. Sprinting is good for you and the sport. Try some speed work for a change. Sprints are not an afterthought: they are a reality and a medal event. Sprints will bring out more juniors -- guaranteed.

Most of these items are in previous business plans submitted to Sport Manitoba. CCSAM has never made it a priority to implement the plans or at least try to attain some of the targets set out. Much thought, research and resources were spent on developing them and these should be activated. As well, you are marked on how your plan is coming along. So far with no adherence to the document, we will be behind Fencing, who are doing a pretty good job right now.

All members of the Board must adopt a vision of excellence and at the very least memorize all juniors' names and who is training them. The Board must not run ski team business, the Ski Team Committee will.

Respectfully,
Ihor Barwinsky

To Everyone present at the CCSAM High Performance Meeting:

I have compiled some of my concerns and ideas that I would like Nadene McBride to bring up for me at this meeting, in lieu of my presence. Like all of you, I am concerned about the future of XC skiing in Manitoba, as well as in Canada. I strongly believe in the values associated with XC skiing, such as the fact that it is a lifetime sport, promotes a healthy lifestyle, and improves the self-esteem and confidence of many people, young and old. I want to see more and more children on Tuesday nights and Saturday mornings enjoying the Jackrabbit Ski Program, and having fun playing in the snow on their skis. I want to see the elation on their faces when they finish their first race, win a small prize, and move forward, all the way to a medal at the Junior National Championships, and beyond. Of course, this all requires hard work and dedication, on the part of the athlete, as well as club coaches, and countless volunteers and officials. I know first hand that the rewards, however, are infinite. I want to do all I can (now, and in the future) to help in the development of these athletes. Right now, I offer myself as a role model to young athletes, so that they can see what it is possible to achieve if your heart is in the right place.

I would now like to present a few points that pertain to me specifically, as a member of the National Team Development Centre (NTDC), as well as any other athlete who reaches the level that I am currently at.

- NTDC is an important part of the National Ski Team (NST) program, which is part of Cross Country Canada (CCC). It is a stepping-stone to the NST.
- Athletes who ski with this team still need the support of their home province and home club.
- I want to stress that I am legally not an “out of province” skier, as I am a permanent Manitoba resident, I pay taxes to the Government of Manitoba, and I represent Manitoba at competitions.
- CCSAM cannot start phasing out funding to high-level skiers who need to train elsewhere, in an environment more conducive to a high performance program. If the top athletes are not given some assistance, the programs for athletes at the bottom end of the spectrum will weaken due to a lack of role models, as well as funding from CCC and other government organizations.
- The perfect example of a working situation is Beckie Scott. She trains in Bend Oregon, but she is still very much a Canadian who represents Canada at international competitions and who receives the same amount of funding (if not more) as the other athletes on the NST.
- I believe myself to be eligible for the 40% funding allocated to athletes from Manitoba to compete at Nationals, based on my strong commitment to a year-round training program, high-level competition, and status as a Manitoba resident.
- NTDC is able to provide the coaching, wax support, and technical support that I need to achieve my goals in XC skiing, but NTDC does not provide any financial support. Manitoba is my home, and I need the support of my fellow Manitobans, now more than ever. It is not the responsibility of Ontario, or any other province but Manitoba to provide me with any financial assistance.
- I agree that it is very important to support skiers in Manitoba, at all levels of development, but there needs to be a solid framework in place to decide how the budget of CCSAM can be most fairly and efficiently distributed.

It will not be easy to come to a decision regarding how to develop young skiers in Manitoba. I do have some more suggestions regarding ways to distribute funding most effectively, but I don't think that that is the focus of this particular meeting. When CCSAM decides to hold its Annual General Meeting, I would be pleased to attend and learn more about the sport of XC skiing in Manitoba. I would like to highlight the fact that there are indeed models in this country that CCSAM could consider when making changes to the organization. The example I've chosen in the Lake Superior Ski Division (LSSD), which is an organization that oversees about the same number and quality of clubs in Manitoba. Many of these clubs are very small, and not all that interested in ski racing, but LSSD also has some high level athletes that it continues to support. They operate more on a project-by-project basis, where a consultant is hired to specifically accomplish one project, as voted on by their volunteer board of directors. They do not have any full-time paid staff, as this simply leaves less of the budget for operating programs to enhance the sport.

Thank you for allowing me to participate in this meeting. I look forward to seeing all of you when I return home this summer.

Yours in Skiing,
Tara Redpath

Our apologies for not being able to make the end of season banquet or the performance meeting. It's too bad as we have had a great season and would have liked to make it. As I said we head off for Calgary early on Saturday to catch a plane for the UK (it may not seem obvious but there you are!)

Perhaps I could put my 2 cents into the discussion and make the following points:

Nadene did an excellent job throughout the season. The ski team itself appeared to be disjointed, in terms of individual training schedules and goals, which presented a challenge. But Nadene worked very hard with consistent members to create a central training hub and to assist all established athletes and to bring in new athletes at all levels through the formation of the development team.

Redefinition of the MB ski team is perhaps needed. The establishment of a permanent 'MB Ski Team' has merits and disadvantages. A major advantage is technical and psychological synchronizing and moulding amongst elements of a team, but the former aspect is less of a challenge in this type of sport. On the other hand, loss of sufficient stimulus to individuals to improve once on the team (and to be seen to work to improve), and also loss of involvement/ownership is lethal in a small province. Not only for those athletes on the team but also for younger athletes aspiring to make the team, and amongst those coaches who are not involved. Perhaps the 'team' would be best transformed into a broader MB ski squad, from which actual team representatives are selected part-way into the season and on a per season or bi-season basis according to established criteria. We have discussed this before on committee and I see a very good selection template has been posted for the Canada Games.

The decision on provincial focused vs club focused coaching is important. I am aware of only some of the arguments and as a neophyte in this sport would have liked to hear both the cases presented. A club system works if there are numbers and wide geography. My concern for a club based system in the Winnipeg context is that a) the Winnipeg skiers already meet mostly at a single training site and this offers an opportunity for a centralized system which should be optimal for what is a fairly small number of competitive skiers, b) there are not enough skiers to form more than a couple of competitive clubs and so fragmentation on a personal level rather than improved competition may dominate, c) it may be difficult to encourage or impose a mandate to bring on new skiers on all clubs, d) if the coaches are volunteers and not 'peer reviewed' then the quality will be uneven. So if the current system is not optimal I think the system needs overhaul to create incentives, not necessarily a new model.

One suggestion would be to create a provincial coaching team led by a provincial coach or manager. The coaching team would be selected by the provincial coach/manager and would select both the squad and then the ski team. The squad would be formed in the mid-summer or fall, and team selection might occur in mid-December. Criteria should include several performance and attitude indicators judged by the coaching team that includes the provincial coach. These indicators should include and be weighted by racing attendance and performance from the previous season, but should also include pre-season land training and early season ski attendance and performance and attitude. The squad and team would be coached by this small group of selected coaches according to an agreed training schedule devised together with the provincial coach. The coaching team would each take a sessional period for the team and the squad, and work on specifics of technique and training that are relevant to the skills of the coach and time in the season. This is a format that can allow involvement by many and a better dialogue between coaches. These suggestions of course ignore critical issues like money and incentives, and the balance between city and 'country' groups.

These suggestions focus on the 'snow end' since this seems to be mostly up for debate, but I would also thank Trevor as well for his hard work behind the scenes, only a little of which was visible to be appreciated I'm quite sure - but I noted that Trevor was always there to assist at all events, offered very good support and advice to Nadene in committee, and occasionally had to reason very tactfully with 'keen' parents. Anyhow, a great season!

Peter Watson