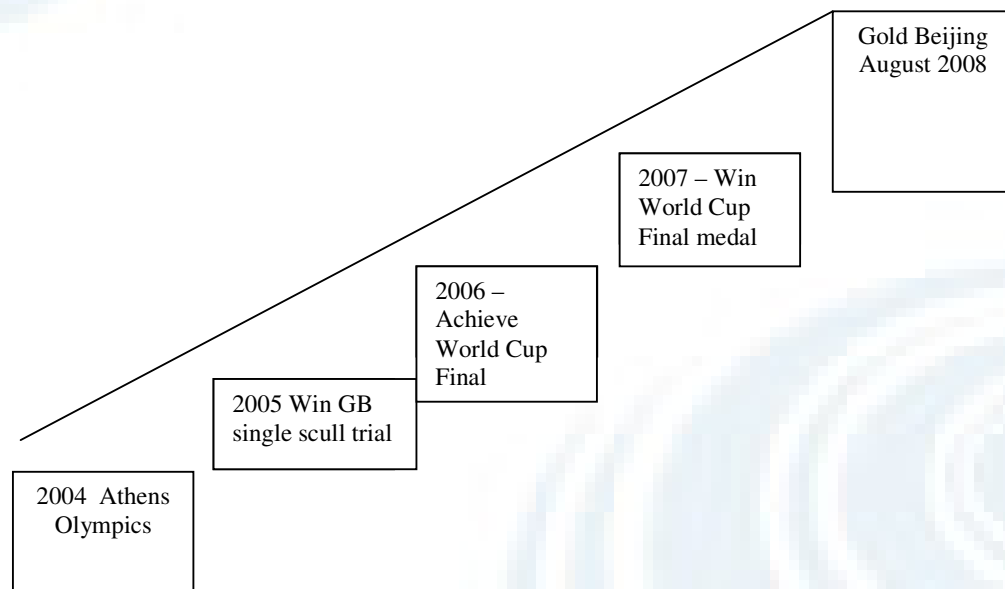


## Coaching an Olympic Athlete



On the 8<sup>th</sup> of the 8<sup>th</sup> month, 2008 the Beijing Olympics will open. We at 121 are particularly excited as Alan Campbell will be representing Great Britain at Beijing. Alan has been coached by Bill Barry, co-founder of 121partners, since 2003. With early season wins in Spain they are on course to achieve their dream of winning the gold medal in Beijing at 15.30 (local time) on Saturday 16<sup>th</sup> August 2008. The 'business plan' below charts their course from Athens 2004 to Beijing 2008.



This simple 'business plan' hides many coaching principles:-

- First of all it represented a line of constant improvement over a timescale of four years
- It was necessary to set clear objectives for each year in order to reach the 'big goal'
- The line contained clear key performance indicators (KPIs) to provide focus and motivation and constantly improve performance towards the goal:
- The line reflected the need to match and surpass the changing and improving competition. It embodied the belief that everyone can improve and usually

improve more than they think. In fact much of the coach's work is changing and creating new beliefs.

- Each milestone on the line had to be clear and measurable –in other words SMART.
- The line itself is again not so simple since it had to contain all the ingredients to realise the final goal – the training of endurance, strength, flexibility, technique, mental strength, boat, sculls ,diet, rest, finance, stress etc



To achieve these objectives and to stay on the line of continual improvement, Alan and Bill have a strategy that is so clear and mutually shared that one word, or one hand gesture, can sum up one of their key guiding principles. Their guiding principles are simple and yet incisive:

- 'The perfect cake' - When analysing the ingredients necessary to reach the goal, Bill uses the analogy of baking a cake. If you imagine trying to bake the perfect cake then all the ingredients have to be of a gold medal standard. If just one ingredient falls below that level you will fail. So in sport every ingredient that's needed to achieve the goal has to be analysed and each one has to be honed to that level of excellence.
- 'Squeezing the cheese' - Bill talks about an 'Ironman' athlete who wanted to lose 4% body fat so he could improve his running time and therefore win the 'Ironman' for the record 5<sup>th</sup> time. In his special diet he even squeezed the fat out of cottage cheese to gain the additional benefit of nutrition and low fat content. As for everything, there is an extra ounce of fat to squeeze, with a little more commitment there is an extra benefit.
- 'Training when others don't.' - There is a story of Lance Armstrong, the Tour de France champion, being telephoned by one his great rivals Greg Lamond. Lance was having a meal with his friends on the Champs-Elysees. While enjoying the company of his friends, Lance realised that Greg was on his bike

training. Greg Lemond won the next Tour de France. For Alan and Bill Christmas day 2007 was an example of training when others don't. Alan was up at 6.30am on Christmas morning to run up and down frost-covered sand dunes on the bleak Northern Ireland coast for five miles before 40 minutes of shuttle runs, carrying 50kg bags of sand back and forth on a 40-metre course before finishing by sawing a felled telegraph pole with a massive cross saw for one hour. Every time Alan ran up that sand dune on Christmas Day, he believed that his rivals probably weren't doing this and therefore built his belief that he could overcome his competition.

- 'Virtus' – this is one of Bill's and Alan's 'trigger words'. It derives from Latin meaning valor, excellence, courage, and character. Each Roman centurion was brought up from an early age to believe that they were invincible and that nothing was impossible. This spirit of 'virtus' gave each man the belief they had the strength of the entire contingent and could overcome all odds. For Alan and Bill it has inspired their inner individual and team belief that everything is possible and a fundamental belief that they can win the gold medal.