

Coaching Campbell to Olympics glory

In the run-up to the Beijing Olympics in August, Bill Barry, coach to British sculler Alan Campbell, is keeping a diary for Coaching at Work of their quest for gold. This issue: setting objectives

Alan and I have recently returned from Spain, where he won the International Fisa Cup. These were the first races of the season to test his speed and he did this in some style, winning by 10 seconds over some of his Olympic rivals. Shortly after, Alan went to Belgium to compete in the final Olympic trials and once again he won all his races easily. These represent two milestones achieved on this year's path to fulfilling his Olympic dream.

Setting objectives has been an important part of Alan's success and to understand this fully we need to go back just over five years to when I first met him. At that time he was a raw novice sculler. "What is your goal?" I asked him. "A gold medal at the Olympics in the single scull," he replied. So from the start we shared a clear common dream, which we turned into a four-year business plan just before the Athens Olympics.

Set a timeframe

The plan started with a simple timeline, although it had a lot of meanings embodied in it:

- It represented a line of constant improvement over a timescale of four years, from Athens to Beijing.
- To reach the long-term goal we needed to set clear objectives for each year (key performance indicators):
 - 2004** Athens Olympics
 - 2005** Win Great British trials for single scull
 - 2006** Reach final of World Championships
 - 2007** Achieve medal at World Championships
 - 2008** Gold medal at Beijing Olympics

Aim high

The line of constant improvement was not only necessary for Alan to achieve gold medal standard by 2008 but to match and defeat the changing and improving competition over that time. It also embodies the belief that everyone can improve, usually more than they think. Much of the coach's work is about changing and creating new beliefs, which I will look at in the next issue. Each objective had to be clear and measurable; in other words, Smart.

Be consistent

The line had to contain all the ingredients to realise the final goal: endurance, strength, flexibility, technique, mental strength, boat, sculls, diet, rest, finance, stress, and so on. If you imagine trying to make a gold medal cake then all the ingredients have to be of gold medal standard. If just one ingredient falls below that level you will fail. In sport, every ingredient that's needed to achieve the goal has to be analysed and each one has to reach the right level of excellence.

Show commitment

To train for two to three sessions every day of the week for 10 months of the year in a particularly tough sport such as rowing needs an incredible level of commitment; not just to give the time but to be disciplined enough to carry out all the actions necessary to ensure all the ingredients are developed to perfection. Commitment is a vital behaviour in the development of talent.

Not all is perfection, as we will no doubt see as we near the Olympics. In the meantime, Alan is on track with the business plan and on course to achieve the dream.

Bill Barry is co-founder of coaching consultancy 121partners. He took silver in the 1964 Olympics coxless fours.

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