

An investigation into the talent development environment (TDE) in canoe slalom within the United Kingdom

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Abstract

Background and Purpose: Talent development rather than mere identification of talent is the most important factor in facilitating the progress of athletes to elite levels of performance. However, talent development is complex and multifaceted. Therefore, the purpose of this study was to explore the talent development environment in canoe slalom within the UK. In particular, to investigate the specific factors that come together to create this environment.

What was done?

Participants: Three coaches and three athletes participated in the study. The coaches were male, they were employed in a full-time lead coaching role in canoe slalom talent development. The athletes were two female and one male paddlers aged 18-21 years. They were purposively sample due to their experience in the talent development pathway, having been selected into junior national programmes, and their ability to reflect objectively on their experiences.

Process: Information on the talent development environment was collected through: 1) analysis of supporting documents provide by each coach; 2) a questionnaire examining coaches' and athletes' views on the important features of a talent development environment (Martindale, et al., 2010); 3) interviews with each of the participants. The questionnaire responses were used to calculate separate scores for coaches and athletes on the 7 features of the TDE. The interviews and documents were analysed through a coding process where key themes in the responses are developed.

Key findings

Coaches and athletes felt all seven features of the TDE were important. These features are: long term development focus; quality preparation; communication; understanding the athlete; support network; challenging and supportive environment, long term development fundamentals.

From the interviews the following themes were important to the athletes:

- Coach's approach (e.g., process focused, paddler's development at core)
- Facility (e.g., easy access to flat and white water)
- Positive psychological environment (e.g., positive atmosphere, long term focus not next race, learning from others, culture of programme such as work ethic)
- Parents (e.g., provision of resources such as transport and finances, support such as keeping things in perspective)
- Education (e.g., support from school, success at school)

The same broad themes were important to the coaches, however, the detail and emphasis within the themes was different:

- Coach's approach (e.g., coaching controllables such as contact time, individualisation, and developmentally appropriate; talent development focus to coaching philosophy and selection; selection criteria based on range of indicators including psychology and physiology; clear 'key' factors for success coach works on such as hard work, technical excellence, responsibility, grit, passion)
- Facility (e.g., access, climate/geography limitations)
- Positive psychological environment (e.g., long term focus of programme; culture of programme such as work ethic, developmentally appropriate, enjoyable; communication of programme values)
- Education (e.g., school timetable doesn't support talent development)
- Parents (e.g., family support, transport)

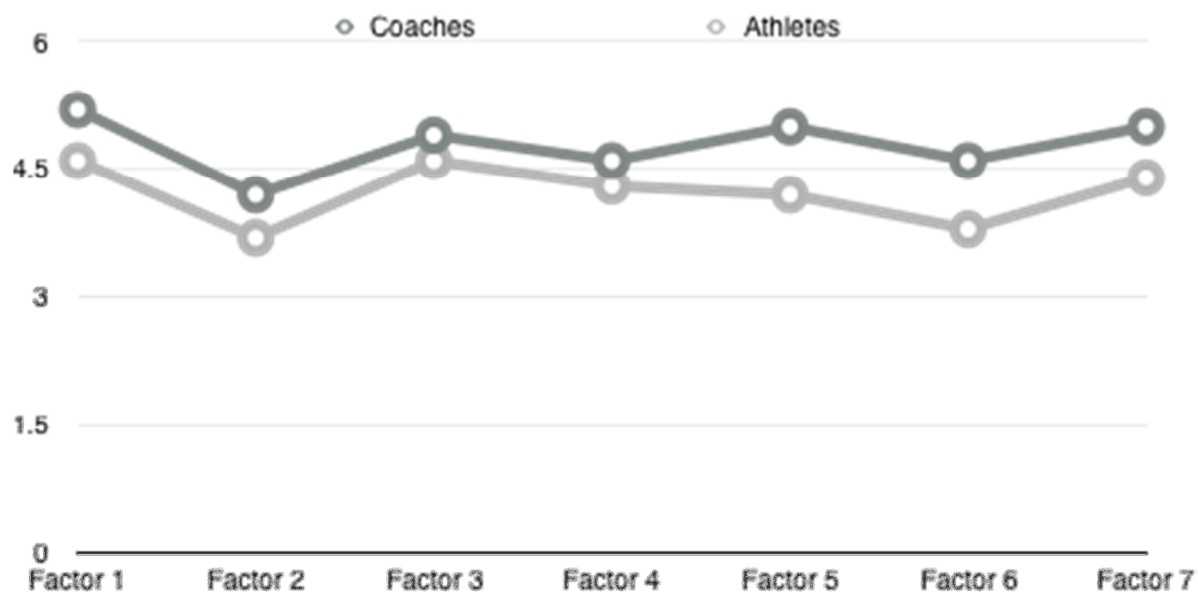
Points of interest for coaches

Important to both athletes and coaches was having a coach with a long term development focus and the knowledge and ability to deliver the key factors they believed necessary for a successful TDE. Access to relevant facilities was also important but also suggest an element of 'luck' whether paddlers lived close to a facility to take advantage of the TDE. Based on the volume of responses creating a positive psychological environment was viewed by both coaches and athletes as paramount to a successful TDE.

Conclusion

Based on the findings the TDE for canoe slalom in the UK for these coaches and athletes is effective. There is a positive psychological environment where paddlers have access to coaching which is underpinned by a robust long term development philosophy, other paddlers who range in ability (i.e., access to paddlers who are able to provide training challenge), and facilities that are appropriate for the development needs. These findings are consistent with research on talent development environments in other sports and in other countries.

If you would like further information on the research or to receive a copy of the full project please contact Steve Macdonald on: email@SteveMacCoaching.co.uk



TDEQ Factor	Coaches	Athletes
FACTOR 1 - LONG TERM DEVELOPMENT FOCUS	5.2	4.6
FACTOR 2 - QUALITY PREPARATION	4.2	3.7
FACTOR 3 - COMMUNICATION	4.9	4.6
FACTOR 4 - UNDERSTANDING THE ATHLETE	4.6	4.3
FACTOR 5 - SUPPORT NETWORK	5	4.2
FACTOR 6 - CHALLENGING & SUPPORTIVE ENV.	4.6	3.8
FACTOR 7 - LONG TERM DEVELOPMENT FUNDAMENTALS	5	4.4
Mean	4.79	4.23