

# Report on the “Connecting Coaches – Striving for Excellence – Conference” 25 & 26 November 2016 – Dunedin

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The Artistic Committee sent me to the Connecting Coaches Conference in Dunedin last year on behalf of our sport. It was a great conference for networking with other coaches from other sports from different levels. It was run by the Otago Academy of Sport in association with Sport New Zealand and held at the University of Otago. There was a similar Conference about 8 years ago in Auckland along the same lines and it was a huge undertaking with multiple speakers. This year they kept it smaller, especially since it was located in Dunedin, and so they had less speakers.

200 Coaches from all levels of sport attended the Conference. I travelled all the way to Dunedin to meet up with a member of Sport Manawatu who took my email address to keep in touch with me regarding more learning opportunities. During the Conference I sat with different people from different sports.

The first main speaker was Rob Waddell. He was an inspiring speaker who has achieved loads of amazing experiences. These include being a young New Zealand champion, winning world rowing titles, the only gold at the Sydney 2000 Olympics, being a member of the Emirates Team New Zealand Sailing Crew and Chef de Mission of the 2014 Commonwealth and 2016 Olympic teams. He mostly talked about his time with Emirates Team New Zealand and the fateful 2013 campaign where Oracle Team USA came from an 8-1 deficit to win the America’s Cup. He believed that they had a great campaign and

95% of it was perfect but the 5% that they lacked, the Oracle Team gained by being very proactive with maintenance and adjusting their stabilising system to their advantage.

He stressed that 1% can make a huge difference between winning and losing and that you need to cover all your bases and possible scenarios to succeed to the top of your field. When he was competing in rowing he knew he was consistently fast so believed that he could win every day, using his “process under pressure” was what he believed in.

He also spoke about his time with the New Zealand team at the Rio Olympics and was most proud of his achievement to have everyone home safe again. That was his main objective as Chef de Mission and he was very passionate about his change of focus as he has gotten older. He made a great point about his time with all the different sports that attend the Olympic Games and that was that the ones that have stringent planning processes in place are the ones that achieve more. With his job he works closely with the sports federations and he has noticed which ones do well with planning procedures, these carry through to top placings and medals.

After Rob’s presentation we separated into breakout groups that were already assigned to us. I had a mixture of sports in my group including cricket, yachting, athletics, long distance running, javelin, golf, indoor bowls and me! Most of the sports in my group were individual sports so when we discussed things it was very relevant to our sport as well. In our breakout groups, we discussed the things we learned from the previous speaker and how it would relate to our experiences.

The second speaker was Jackie Barron who was a wonderful speaker who talked about young people in the 21<sup>st</sup> Century and how sport

and society have changed. Now, she is a Principal at a top girl's school in Dunedin, St Hilda's Collegiate, but she was the former Silver Ferns and Black Ferns manager for many years. She was very frank about the way technology is influencing teens and that in turn is influencing sport. People are connecting in a different way and we, as coaches and influential people in these young people's lives, need to keep up with it and help parents and caregivers to manage it. To not ignore the way technology has changed people.

After Jackie's presentation we had the choice of presenters to listen to. I chose to listen to Andrew Hewetson, a Talent Development Consultant from Sport NZ who talked about the identification and development of talented athletes. I really enjoyed his session and would like to develop my notes on this more. He had a lot of relevant questions – How do we measure talent? Four types of measurement - Physical stuff, Behavioural stuff, Performance, Drivers of performance. Also what do we perceive? He showed a video of Susan Boyle's audition on "Britain's Got Talent" to highlight what we perceive before we actually see a performance. He also used the analogy that there is a huge place for rough diamonds, using a development programme to develop improvement. It is an up and down path and very unstable especially in young people. Another question he asked us as sports facilitators to think about was how do we balance winning as a young person with long-term development? Is it all about winning – like in age groups divisions – or is it about developing top athletes for the future?

The second to last speaker of the day that I chose to go to was a Nutritionist, Dr Kirsty Fairbairn. She works for Invigorate Nutrition and works with athletes to advise them on what the best nutrition they need for their sport. Recently, she has worked with the Highlanders and multiple other athletes but during her presentation

she talked about her most recent experience with a top swimmer from Singapore. He trains in Florida at a specific sports academy but needed help with his food choices even though the food was provided in a food hall. She gave him lots of advice and helped him with his food diary because he was eating like a regular 19 year old and not like a world champion which he was destined to be. He went on to win the 100m butterfly at the 2016 Rio Olympics beating legendary Michael Phelps and winning Singapore's first ever Gold Olympic medal. The swimmer credits his work with Dr Fairbairn as a big part of the reason he did so well.

This brings me back to the 1% difference that Rob Waddell talked about.

The last speaker of the first day was Dr Jake Pearson from ACC who talked to the whole group about concussion. I didn't think this topic was too relative to our sport until I remembered a few months ago when there was water on the floor at the rink when I was coaching and I slipped over and hit my head! He mostly talked about recognising the signs of concussion and making sure us, as coaches, were aware to remove the athlete from the activity if there was any sign of head trauma and for them to see a doctor immediately. He showed a few examples of professional rugby games that have sent players back onto the field too early in his opinion.

The Conference provided a cocktail hour at a different venue which was hosted by the Otago Polytechnic Hospitality Institute. They also did an "Address to the Haggis" which was a great experience in itself especially for those who travelled to the Conference.

The second day started with Kylie Robinson from Igtimi Ltd, a technology company that develops event tracking for yachting, sailing and kayaking sports. Her product has helped those sports

become more spectator and TV friendly by involving computer graphics to the events, coaching and training.

The next session that I attended was with Debbie Strange, coach of Multiple Olympian, javelin thrower, Stuart Farquhar. I was looking forward to this as I thought I would be able to relate more with her as a coach of a minority, individual sport. She trained Stuart from school age right through to his fourth Olympic Games at Rio. As he got to the top of the sport she encouraged him to do as many overseas competitions against the world's best and for him to train overseas with other top javelin throwers and coaches. She also had to encourage him to sacrifice the national season for international competitions for him to achieve. I thought that these are things that we need to do with our very top athletes also.

Next was an entertaining speaker, Dr Phil Handcock, from the School of Physical Education, Sport and Exercise Sciences at the University of Otago. He talked about Zombies and are we breeding zombies or are we teaching young people to use their brains. There can be a wide range of results for different people. Instead of asking how much training can we do to improve, should we be asking how little training can we do to get the same result? It was an interesting session and I would like to develop my notes on this more.

The second to last speaker was Tony Reading, Coach of the Football Ferns, the New Zealand Women's Football team. He had a lot of information on the way he plans and analyses his player's training and performances so that they can train to improve on specific aspects that they need improvement on. He was very enthusiastic about the planning process and vision of the team which he has spent the last 10 years working on. He talked about how to improve without weakening the players strengths, keeping their strengths

because that is what will keep them going in the long run. He said my favourite quote of the weekend – “It is all about the journey, not the destination”.

The final speaker was Nigel Avery, who, like Rob Waddell has been involved at a high level as an athlete in multiple sports. He was involved in athletics and bob-sleigh in the first instance and took up weightlifting to help with these sports. Weightlifting eventually took over and he won 2 gold medals at the 2002 Commonwealth Games in Manchester. He now runs a successful winery in the Hawkes Bay. He talked about what we have to consider in sport and in business to achieve – Striving for Excellence – the motto for the Conference in all aspects of life.

At the closure of the Conference, the Sport NZ team announced that they are working towards having another conference next year in the lower North Island. We then went out to the field next to the Conference Room and some young kids demonstrated some warmups that have been developed from ACC SportSmart. It was a local kid’s football team but the warmups were very generic and could be adapted for most sports.

I would like to thank the Artistic Committee for funding my trip to this Conference. My head was spinning with information and motivation after attending it. If anyone would like to ask more questions, I still have all my notes and programme information from the Conference so hopefully I can help with more details. I really enjoyed it and would recommend any coach, from any level, to attend something like this in the future for their own self development.

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