

## Chris Baillieu: coaching in the spotlight

The chair of Sportscoach UK talks to *The Leisure Review* about the future of sports coaching in the UK and the role of his agency in the post-CSR sports system.

**Why did a man with no ostensible background in coaching take on the role of chair of the nation's coaching agency?**

Because I have a passion for improving British sport. Building a world-class coaching framework is a vital part of this process. While I am not a coach, I have experienced coaching from many different perspectives. First as a competitive rower who, thanks to world-class coaching, became an Olympic medallist and world champion. Secondly as the former chair of British Swimming, one of Britain's largest and now most successful governing bodies. And thirdly as chair of the Active Wandsworth Sport and Physical Activity network and a CSP [county sports partnership] board member where I have assessed and addressed local coaching requirements.

**Given that Seb Coe has recently been quoted as saying, "We have consistently, to our shame, undervalued the role of coaching and demeaned its definition", what do you perceive as being your biggest challenges in, and what are your aims for, the next 12 months?**

We know that the role of active, skilled and qualified coaches is recognised at every level throughout British sport. Lord Coe has always been a strong advocate and we welcome his support in highlighting the need to value coaches and coaching. Our major aim for the next 12 months is to continue to support our partners to recruit, develop and retain enough coaches to meet their overall objectives. By building a coherent development pathway and, where appropriate, career structure for coaches we can also begin to address the perceived value of coaches and coaching. Specifically, our focus during this period is to continue the excellent start that has been made in creating coaching support networks. These bring together the national strategies of sports with the local delivery agencies who are able to turn policies into real action and results. We're working very closely with the NGBs [national governing bodies] to ensure they understand how those local networks can help them achieve the targets within their Whole Sport plans. At the same time, we're aware that many sports will experience a large surge of interest during the build up to, during and after the summer of 2012. To meet that demand some sports will need many more coaches. In order to have those coaches in place they'll also need more work from the coach educators, assessors and mentors who train, qualify and support their coaches. Other sports have already indicated that they don't need more coaches; they simply need their existing workforce to be more active, so a different approach to coach management is required from them.

**With the current government making swingeing cuts to sports funding even before the Olympics what threats do you see to coaching in the next five years and what are your plans to counter them? What, in simple terms, is the future for coaching?**

We're pleased that the UK Sport funding for the 2012 Olympics and Paralympics is continuing to follow the successful 'no compromise' policy and that realistic plans are already in place for Rio in 2016. We're also reassured that the funding for governing bodies of sport has remained a major priority for Sport England. The move from exchequer to lottery funding means that the future of county sports partnerships is assured. At a local level, there will certainly be changes in the way that coaching is delivered to children and young people and it's too early to comment on those. Similarly, changes in local authority funding will have an impact on availability and management of facilities. With reduced resources, however, the many organisations that make up the sports sector will need to work together more



Chris Baillieu: chair of Sportscoach UK and Olympic medallist

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effectively in the future. The challenge will be to ensure this leads to better co-ordination in the delivery of community and school sport. We also need to be very aware that we do not just focus on 'sport' in a narrow, traditional sense. In order to increase levels of physical activity and counter obesity levels, we need to find more ways of mobilising the significant proportion of the population that is currently insufficiently active and for whom sport in the traditional sense may not be the appropriate answer.

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Regardless of the political landscape and public sector funding, British sport will always need enthusiastic, capable, competent coaches. Our approach is to work with our partners across the UK to match demand and supply. That may sound simple but there's a great deal of research, development, design and delivery which underpins it. Thanks to the UK Coaching Framework, all the partners have an understanding of the tools and processes which make it possible, and we're all talking a common language.

As to the future, we don't expect the current 'mixed economy' of volunteers, part-time and full-time coaches to change radically but we are seeing a shift of focus from coach education to coach management. The majority of sports now have effective coach education schemes in place and are able to recruit, train and qualify their coaches. The challenge now is to support those coaches, encourage and motivate them so they stay involved and active. The retention issue is of great concern within certain sports and we're currently working with them to identify the underlying reasons and address them.

**Sportscoach UK has been without a chief executive for more than a year, there are vacancies in the senior management team and Tony Byrne has been clear that he doesn't want the role full time. Are you concerned about the lack of leadership in the organisation?**

No, I'm not concerned. It's factually incorrect to say that Sportscoach UK has been without a chief executive at any stage, as Dr Tony Byrne was appointed immediately his predecessor left. There are no vacancies in the senior management team. We have a very wide range of skill-sets within the board and senior management, covering all necessary aspects of our work. The governance of Sportscoach UK has reached the highest standards set by our funders and is used to provide best-practice examples for other organisations. Our continued work with all five sports councils in the UK demonstrates the value they place in us. That said, the board is reflecting on the changed landscape post-CSR [comprehensive spending review] and will consider whether any changes are required to our current plans.

**People outside the UK Coaching Framework network, like The Leisure Review, perceive a loss of direction and drive, and a disparity between rhetoric and delivery in the UKCF. For the first time this year there was no declaration of intent at the end of the UK Coaching Summit and we have seen NGBs stepping back from their commitment to the process. Is UKCF losing credibility and what can you do to reassure the coaching public and restore confidence?**

We have seen no evidence of a loss of direction or commitment to the framework. In fact, the complete opposite is true. We have seen repeated examples of sports, such as golf, swimming, hockey, netball and equestrian, which have made a complete change of approach based on their adoption of the framework principles. One of the most fundamental aspects of the Framework – participant modelling – has now been adopted whole-heartedly by Sport England as part of their support to help sports understand their potential markets better. SportScotland's recently published coaching strategy is modelled on the framework as is Sport Wales' coaching strategy; the Coaching Ireland strategy is similarly aligned. Twenty-six sports have their coach education schemes endorsed by the UKCC and a further 11 sports are seeking endorsement. I would not call that "stepping back".

To an outsider there may be a change in that we are all making fewer obvious references to the framework itself. This is an inevitable consequence of progress. During the long consultation process following publication of the UK Action Plan for Coaching there was considerable focus on the framework itself. Now that every sport and major partner has adopted the framework, there is less need for reference to it. One analogy would be a group planning a journey. Before you set off, you need to ensure that everyone understands the direction of travel; once you start, you don't need to refer to the map so often. But it's still there, allowing us to check our progress and get back on track if required.

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**Increasingly we hear calls for an independent voice for coaches within the system. How do you react to the suggestion that a professional body for sports coaches could provide the check and challenge that Sportscoach UK requires to fully serve the sector?**

Such calls are nothing new; we have been hearing them off and on for more than 30 years and various attempts have been made. Hopefully such developments reflect the changing landscape, the increasing number of coaches and the professional qualities of those working in the industry. At present virtually every coach already has the opportunity to belong, whether it's to their club, county association or governing body. In addition, within some sports professional coaches have formed their own associations and we have our own membership scheme. We will also watch with interest the developments for a chartered institute. As far as "check and challenge" is concerned, Sportscoach UK is already well served by our lively and hard-working committees and task-and-finish groups, together with our strong links with CSPs, NGBs, sports councils and partner organisations. In recent years we have also been working with those seeking to represent the private coaching providers. We're certainly no strangers to check and challenge as it's enabled us to refine our work for more than 25 years.

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