

Independent Review of the BSS Olympic Selection Procedure

Executive Summary

A Background

In May 2014 the BSS commissioned Dr Sarah Rowell of Wharton Consulting to carry out an independent review into the process that *resulted in selection of athletes by the British Olympic Association (BOA) for TeamGB to represent Great Britain at the Sochi 2014 Olympic Winter Games with a view to understanding what worked well, what didn't work so well, what lessons can be learned and where we need to make improvements.*

BSS specifically asked the consultant to ensure that as far as possible all interested parties were consulted as part of this review so that as widest range of views could be gathered. The consultant would like to thank all those who gave their time and honest views as part of the review either via interview or email.

A detailed presentation on the review and its findings was made to the BSS Board on 10 September 2014. This document sets out the key findings from the review, and importantly the subsequent recommendations.

B The Process

Analysis of the information and data available regarding selection criteria and subsequent athlete performances showed that:

- everyone who was selected fully met the criteria and rightfully went to the 2014 Winter Olympic Games
- those not selected did not meet the criteria and nobody who met the criteria was left behind
- there were no appeals against selection decisions by any athletes

Overall the BSS selection criteria and process was both followed and worked. However, the BSS Board in considering, challenging and endorsing the BSS selection panel recommendations on 20 January prior to them being submitted to the BOA, took on a role which was not included within the organisation's written selection policy (although no changes to the decisions of the Selection Committee were made by the Board).

C Did BSS Set The Right Level Of OQS?

Two years prior to an Olympic Games the IOC publish the standards and process for selection for each event, at which point the BOA then enter into discussion and negotiation with each national governing body around their plans for selection.

For Sochi 2014, it was the BOA's stated policy that:

- there is no 'right to go' to an Olympic Games and that the Olympic Games are not about gaining experience, rather about ensuring a credible performance, namely finishing in the top 2/3
- there should be consistency across sports/disciplines
- athletes could only compete in the event selected for
- there would, for 2014, be no reallocation of quota slots/hand back places

At the time of the selection criteria being produced both the BSS CEO and Performance Director had been left in no doubt by both UK Sport and the BOA that there was a need to raise the selection criteria, especially for the alpine events, in order to improve the organisation's credibility with their key stakeholders. This was as a direct result of lower levels of expectation and performance at the Vancouver Olympic Games four years previously. For the BSS to ignore such a steer would have been a high risk strategy and appears to have been a core driver of the subsequent selection policy, especially for the alpine disciplines.

A brief analysis of the results from a range of winter disciplines in Sochi 2014 show that the BOA's stated requirements in terms '*consistency of performance*', '*competitive performance*' and '*finishing in the top 2/3 of the starting field*' are not fully compatible statements.

This, combined with the apparent lack of an overarching BSS selection philosophy lead to the situation where the selection criteria for the individual disciplines differed significantly in stated outcome and hence perceived obtainability. Broadly speaking, both in terms of criteria and outcome this equated to:

- Park and Pipe - Podium
- Alpine - Top 20
- Nordic – Top 2/3 of the field

D Were the OQS Clear, Transparent and well Communicated?

It was unanimously felt that the selection criteria were clear and transparent. However there was also consensus among those interviewed that communication around selection between representatives of the BSS could be improved in terms of content, method, frequency and tone.

E How Did The Athletes Who Went To the Olympic Games Perform?

In winning a medal and achieving six other top 10 finishes, the BSS hit their UK Sport medal target. This combined with the overall organisational and governance changes have helped build stakeholder credibility, in turn helping to secure significant financial support from UK Sport for the next four year Olympic cycle, albeit ring fenced around park and pipe.

Of those athletes who took part in Sochi 2014:

- eight (44%) achieved their stated BSS performance target, ten failed to meet it
- thirteen (72%) achieved a top 2/3 finish, five failed to do so
- of those predicted to finish in the top three of their event (five athletes), one (20%) did so

While the criteria (and subsequent results) have therefore without doubt led to a re-building of stakeholder trust, there is also evidence that the opposite effect has happened with a proportion of the sporting stakeholder community, especially alpine. Here trust and confidence has been damaged due to seemingly 'inequitable' selection criteria, differing messages and an apparent lack of ownership of the criteria by the BSS once published.

F The Alpine Issue

One question asked by BSS was *'If the OQS were clear, transparent and communicated why did we get the various reactions from alpine?'* From the evidence available it would appear that the reactions around the selection criteria and subsequent decisions were as much a symptom of the wider breakdown in relationships between professional/appointed BSS personnel and the alpine skiing community.

G What Should We Change For The Future?

G.1 Selection

Philosophy – BSS should agree and publish its own selection philosophy which is understood and bought into by all disciplines. In doing so it should consider making use of an overarching performance management structure which includes representatives of all the disciplines who are subsequently empowered to deliver against what is agreed.

Olympic Selection Criteria – Having established their selection philosophy the BSS should proactively work with the BOA to ensure that the 2018 selection criteria are appropriate and compatible. Given the difficulties previously highlighted, it is recommended that:

- the focus should be on a consistent approach to selection across all disciplines, not necessarily a consistent application
- BSS continue to work with BOA to ensure the selection criteria are appropriate to each discipline, in doing so they should make greater use of discipline leads and not rely solely on the PD to do the negotiation
- this process is one which can be started as early as seen fit, and in terms of the detail should aim to be complete prior to the commencement of the qualifying season (2016)

Process – In establishing the finer detail of the selection criteria, it is difficult to see any harm, once the overall philosophy has been agreed, in consulting fairly widely with discipline experts.

Other process focused recommendations are:

- ensure there is clarity and consistency of the language used in all documentation (for example quota places, handback places, re-allocated places), thus removing any possibility of misunderstanding
- agree at what point the BSS Board is best involved in the selection process and ensure that this is written into the selection documents
- road test the selection criteria at appropriate times with all groups involved
- ensure the appeals process wording is clear about what athletes can and cannot appeal against
- to develop a robust communication plan to ensure that:
 - the criteria and the BSS philosophy behind the criteria are clearly set out
 - these are communicated widely across the sport using the most appropriate methods
 - on-going communication continues right up until the end of the qualification period

G.2 Performance Support

Many of consulted made reference not only to the Olympic selection criteria, but also the toughness of the World Championship selection criteria, as well as a general lack of an understanding of the wider athlete performance pathway now in place. There is therefore a need to ensure that, as part of a clear, well understood athlete performance pathway, there is clarity of purpose around selection for all events. The establishment of a cross discipline performance management group or similar as suggested above would play a key part in this, as should the discipline committees.

There also is a need to review in detail athletes' performances, forecasts and form to ensure future competition predictions are realistic.

G.3 Communication

Much of the good work and progress made by the current BSS regime has at times been overshadowed by poor communication, perceived inappropriate communication, incorrect language, mistakes, apparent disregard felt by athletes, and non-returning of calls and emails.

This, combined with the focus on re-building a strong relationship with the BOA, has unfortunately led to the situation where there is a perception in some quarters that the BSS and particularly the PD, were keener on keeping the BOA happy compared to the athletes, and also were quite happy if some athletes did not achieve the bar that had been set for selection.

It is therefore essential, that all future communication from the BSS to athletes and coaches is professional, accurate and supportive. If additional support is required to ensure that this occurs, then that should be viewed as a priority.

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