

SOUTH AFRICAN ORIENTEERING FEDERATION



High Performance Report – April 2011

This is the first report on the High Performance portfolio since its introduction at the beginning of 2011. The first quarter of the year has seen some rapid developments and action in this portfolio. Even though the position is quite new and it will be quite a while before result / performances can be used to judge its effectiveness, I believe that already we can see notable improvements in various aspects of the High Performance. Some of these are:

- better administration, co-ordination and policy of the HP arena;
- a higher level of transparency in associated SAOF structures;
- an improved HP structure for squads and national teams;
- improved awareness of athletes of their responsibilities;
- improved communications between various committees, posts and athletes.

The policy documents drawn up by Garry Morrison and his committee high performance committee have laid the ground work for improved high performance excellence. In this report I will discuss and comment on the current status of High Performance and various developments in the first few months of 2011.

Squad Selections

The Junior, Senior and newly created Youth squads were announced in December 2011.

The Squad members were:

Seniors: Michael Crone, Garry Morrison, Martin Kleynhans, Alex Pope, Nicholas Mulder, Jeremy Green, Nico Van Hoepen, Cobus Van Zyl, Tania Wimberley, Zoe Brentano, Margaret Archibald, Cindy Van Zyl.

Juniors: Bradley Lund, Anthony Stott, JP Sissing, Sarah Pope, Salome Van Hoepen, Jessica Hemer, Stephanie Courtnage, Jessica Lund.

Youth: Roark Robinson, Timothy Chambers, Cian Oldknow, Laura Troost.

Of the Senior Squad members, only Michael Crone, Nicholas Mulder, Jeremy Green and Nico Van Hoepen made themselves available for WOC 2011.

Of the Junior Squad members, Jessica Lund later gave notice of her withdrawal from the squad in 2011 due to study commitments whilst JP Sissing has given notice that he will have difficulty committing to orienteering in 2011 due to work commitments.

Of the Youth Squad members, Roark Robinson, Laura Troost and Timothy Chambers have all indicated that they are financially unable to travel on a Youth tour to Europe in 2011.

WOC / JWOC Selections

In line with the revised high performance policy, where teams would be selected later in the year than in previous years, the WOC selections were made on 13th April, after the Western Cape Champs weekend. The goal of this approach is to force the squad members to be more focused in their training and competition, giving them a marker point (the selection trials and selection date) to focus on en route to JWOC and WOC. In addition to this, it was decided that the selection policy would be more exclusive and limiting for Senior teams than in previous years, so as to obtain a higher standard of participation at WOC. Youth and Junior teams would still be inclusive, with the aim of sending juniors and youths overseas in the hope that it could inspire them to train and perform better in future years.

The team selections were:

WOC 2011: Jeremy Green, Michael Crone, Nicholas Mulder

JWOC 2011: Sarah Pope, Salome Van Hoepen, Stephanie Courtnage, Jessica Hemer, Anthony Stott, Bradley Lund.

Athletes will have a week to confirm their acceptance of selection, as various logistical processes need to be put in place as soon as possible.

The identification of potential managers / coaches to tour with the teams has been problematic. It was agreed early on that the current WOC team would be able to do without an independent manager / coach at WOC in 2011, with team members deputizing as team manager where needed. For the JWOC team however this is a poor option, and the only indication of interest in touring with the team to date is from myself. Given that the majority of team members have JWOC experience, a single manager will suffice in 2011 if necessary, provided the number of athletes is six or less. Although delayed, official calls will shortly go out with precise job descriptions for manager and coach for both the Senior and Junior Teams. Unfortunately, the late date will require a short response time before applications close. There will not be any funding for a stipend in 2011 and expenses and contributions will be low or non-existent.

World Games 2013 Columbia

In March, the SAOF was also asked to submit candidates for operation excellence with the aim of these athletes attending the World Games in 2013 in Columbia.

With the guidelines that the terrain would probably be very fast and technically easy parkland as per WG 2009 in Taiwan, the selectors nominated the following athletes:

Men: Bradley Lund, Michael Crone.

Women: Sarah Pope, Salome Van Hoepen, Stephanie Courtnage.

No response has been received as yet from SASCO.

Youth Tour

Early in 2011, Colin Dutkiewicz was approached and agreed to organize a Youth Tour for youth squad members to Europe. The original plan of attending EYOC was shelved after a consensus agreement that it was best for the youth team not to attend a championship in their first touring year. Alternatives in Sweden were looked at, but it now appears likely that a tour will be organized to Hungary in conjunction with the MWOC and making use of the training opportunities and spectator events. Unfortunately, only one of the youth squad is still keen to travel and it might be worthwhile and sensible to open the doors to other interested and sufficiently proficient youths that are not in the squad. No job description for manager or coach of the Youth squad has been drawn up at yet.

3000m Time Trials

Early in the year, the squads were notified that there would be three 3000m time trials during the year, in February, April and June. The goal of these physical tests was to encourage a focus on speed and athletic training in orienteering, particularly amongst the juniors, and to start a process whereby the abilities of athletes and their performance improvements could be recorded and compared objectively. In 2011 it was agreed that the time trials would not be used in the selection process, but this could become a selection or funding benchmark in future years.

The concept was well received by all squad members and the first time trial was very successful. Only three squad members (Cobus Van Zyl, Cindy Van Zyl, JP Sissing) did not attend one of the trial meets in Cape Town, Johannesburg or Pretoria, nor was any explanation given. Two athletes (Stephanie Courtnage and Salome Van Hoepen) applied for exemption in advance due to injuries. A mixture of good to bad times were posted, which will be used at future trials to analyze training and improvement. The next time trial is during the week of 18 April.

Race Results

One of the big changes with regard to orienteering races in 2011 (at least in Gauteng, where the majority of squad members are based) has been the delaying of the competitive season in line with suggestions from the SAOF's LTPD program. This is to give more focus and a more structured training schedule for HP athletes. Initial indications are that this has been a big success

in Gauteng. Squad members were significantly improved on performances a year ago, with a much higher level of competition seen from the first event in the series. Together with the 3000m time trials, the more focused season appears to have given the majority of Gauteng squad members a more focused and therefore stronger training ethic.

Training Camps

Two training camps were scheduled for the first half of 2011. So as not to favour any province, it was decided that one would be hosted down in the Cape and another on the Highveld.

The first camp was held 7 – 8 April in the Lebanon forests, in the two days prior to the SA Sprint and WC Champs. There was a good response from Gauteng squad members (mainly juniors). Unfortunately, there were no representatives from the Cape. Transport and work issues seemed to be constraining factors, with some juniors (Roark Robinson) keen, but unable to organize transport at last minute notice (Roark notified me of his interest less than 24 hours before the camp). The junior squad participants were Sarah Pope, Salome Van Hoepen, Bradley Lund. The youth squad participants were Cian Oldknow and Timothy Stott. The senior squad participants were Michael Crone, Jeremy Green and Zoe Brentano.

Interest to join in the camp was also shown by 3 other Gauteng orienteers, David Avierinos, Greg Avierinos and Devon Cowling. Since at that stage, there was sufficient capacity and I believed they showed sufficient expertise, they were welcomed onto the camp. I acted as manager and coach during the camp, with Jeremy assisting with transport logistics. No squad funding was available for the athletes on the camp, but the burden on the athletes was alleviated by the procurement of very cheap accommodation.

A second camp is scheduled for 30th April to 2nd of May in the Belfast forests. There has been an overwhelming response to this, with 19 squad members signed up for the three-day camp. Unfortunately, no further persons can be taken, as we already have 2 people sleeping on mattresses on the floor. Squad funding will be used to partially alleviate the costs of accommodation.

HP Budget

The High Performance portfolio was allocated R50'000 at the beginning of the year. With various consultations with the VP Technical and members of the Selection and Coaching committees, the following allocations have been made.

Training Camps – R11'500
WOC – R3'000
JWOC – R29'500
Youth tour – R6'000

The precise figure for these allocations may change depending on the exact number of squad members attending WOC / JWOC and the Youth tour. The

current model puts the vast majority of funding behind the junior and youth squads, for which the training camps are also orientated. Funding is currently not performance-based, but is spread equally between those on each tour.

To date, the following funding has been used.

Training Camps – R16'925 (funds have still to be recovered from participants for accommodation expenses at the Belfast camp, which will then be refunded to the SAOF account, to return the balance to the level of R11'500).

HP Policy Update

The policy documents surrounding HP are still being tested and will continue to evolve over the short and medium term. During the first few months we've found one or two areas that weren't discussed sufficiently, were ambiguous, or restrictive. One of the most important of these is the selection committee's ability to add athletes to the squads mid-season, which is currently not mentioned / allowed / forbidden in the current documents. Updates to the HP documentation will be undertaken to correct these areas.

Concerns

Currently, the running of the high performance portfolio is going smoothly. However, there is one concern with regards to coaching, where there is a noticeable gap between athletes starting the sport, and the national youth and junior squads. There is significant interest from various youths and juniors not currently in these squads to be involved with them for the benefits of coaching, etc. Most of these athletes are highly talented and have recently started orienteering through the schools / development programs where they received basic introductory-level coaching. There is currently a lack of intermediate (club-level and provincial) coaching, with the result that some athletes are looking to make the leap directly from beginner coaching to national squad coaching. Whilst there is capacity and the logistics allow, I am more than happy to welcome any interested and talented athletes to receive coaching alongside the national squads, provided this is not to the detriment of the squad members. However, with greater numbers and future development of the sport, options like this would be very limited. A strong emphasis needs to be placed urgently for the development of mid-level (club and provincial) coaching to streamline the coaching structure, making it more effective as a result.

Conclusion

High Performance seems to be off to a good start. One of the most notable steps in the last few months has been the formation of a Youth Squad, which aims to prepare talented orienteers to represent South Africa at Junior level. So far, this has been highly successful, despite the low number of squad members able to travel on a youth tour in 2011. Recent success in schools and development arenas will feed into this in the future and we need to be ready to streamline the whole HP process so that our future elite orienteers can excel. The three touring

teams show great promise. The Youth tour should introduce a new generation of our young orienteers to international competition, whilst there is some good potential for even better results in JWOC than last year. At WOC, we have new, young blood in the form of Michael Crone (freshly graduated from the junior team), who should be able to post a good result in at least the Sprint event.

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