

Vale of Aylesbury – Youth Development Policy

Purpose

The purpose of this document is to outline the suggested development pathway for any young athlete joining the Vale of Aylesbury Athletics Club. This document also seeks to provide clear guidelines on how the coaches based at Vale of Aylesbury should work together to maximise the enjoyment and development of every member of the athletics club.

The Clubs Philosophy

Any child participating in athletics at the Vale of Aylesbury Athletics Club should follow a pathway of multi-skills / multi-events training progressing to event group and finally event specific training (and as such the appropriate training groups). The club should provide coaching support appropriate to each stage of this pathway.

There are many reasons for following this philosophy which include the following:

- Recognised World Wide as the most effective way to develop and retain athletes in sport.
- Provides the correct foundation for future athletics development and performance.
- Helps athletes minimise injury risk.
- Provides great opportunities to identify and fulfil their full potential
- Is recognised by the Governing Body of Sport as the most appropriate pathway. [See link](#)
- Avoids early specialisation, which can provide multiple issues.

While many coaches may be aware of this process there is the natural temptation to encourage athletes to specialise early, especially if they show promise in a particular area. This pressure may also come from the parents / guardians.

It should be noted that there is no evidence that specialising early will help an athlete's senior career and there is substantial evidence against this approach.

Our duty as coaches and as a club is to provide the best experience and best possible coaching to help an athlete in both their short and long term development in athletics career.

Proposal

With the above suggestion in mind the club proposes the following:

- Any athlete under the age of 11 should be sign posted initially to Kestrels
- Any athlete under the age of 14 should be sign posted initially to the Induction group
- Any athletes 14 years and above should have the opportunity to move around several event groups (e.g. to jumps and throws) so as to establish their preferred event. This could be a combination of both.

It should be recognised that most athletes do not stop developing until 18/19 years of age and as such there is an argument for not specialising completely until full maturation.

- Athletes should work with event group coaches until at least U15 but ideally U17 level prior to specialising in a particular event.

What if an athlete does not want to do Multi Skills /Events at the ages set out above?

- The first stage of the process would be to discuss with the athlete and their parents / guardian what their concerns are and explain the reason why the club takes this philosophy and benefits of this approach.
- If the athlete and parents are still not happy the next step would be as follows:
 - Any one joining Kestrels should be told this is the philosophy and the only option open to them as this age and stage.
 - Any one at Induction age would be strongly encouraged to stick with the Multi skills / events approach, but if they are at the top of this age group (e.g. 12/13) and they have strong desire to do one event area specifically (e.g. Endurance) **then the club at a last resort would offer a 1:1 ratio of sessions**. That being the athlete does one multi and one event group session per week. If they are down more than twice this should be 2:1 in favour of multi events approach.

If the above is to take place a conversation and agreement should be had by both of group coaches involved (i.e. Induction coach and Endurance coach).

Any coach who acts outside the above stipulation should explain their conduct to the Director of Coaching and Exec Committee as this will be a breach of the clubs philosophy.

Any concerns about the potential poor conduct of a coach should be raised with both the Chairman and Director of Coaching E.g. Recruiting athletes behind another coach's back.

It should be strongly recommend though that the above is not the best approach for the long term athlete development.

If in the event an athlete or parent is unhappy with the suggestion outlined above it will be down to the discretion of the Exec committee advised by the Youth Committee and Director of Coaching to whether an athlete can follow a different pathway or if they should seek another arrangement.

Existing Athletes who don't align with these arrangements

The club is aware that as of when this document was produced (12th October 2015) some athletes have already moved to groups which would not fall in line with the above philosophy.

While ideally they should be encouraged to revisit the multi skills approach (e.g. go back to the 1:1 session approach or previous group) the club is concerned moving an athlete (what would be perceived as backwards) could be at the detriment to the athlete and club at this late stage.

With this in mind the club would encourage all groups to ensure that any athlete under the age of 17 is doing movement skills and condition work in addition to their event specific training.

Conclusion

This document should initially be agreed by the Youth Committee before presentation to the Exec Committee and if agreed by both should be shared with the current coaching workforce at the club. Any questions or comments to Scott Grace – Director of Coaching.