

**NEW ZEALAND SECONDARY SCHOOLS
SPORTS COUNCIL INCORPORATED**

PO Box 36005, Merivale, CHRISTCHURCH

Executive Director: Peter Sharp

Phone 0274 332 438; Fax 03 355 9656; e-mail nzsssc@xtra.co.nz

Memo to: Secondary School principals
Coaches of Secondary School athletes
Parents of Secondary School athletes
National Sporting Organisations
Regional Sporting Organisations including clubs

From: Peter Sharp

Date: 21 February 2005

Subject: The needs of secondary school athletes

Towards the end of 2004 New Zealand Secondary Schools Sports Council convened a meeting of representatives of some of the sporting codes that provide for large numbers of secondary school athletes and that are, as a result, likely to be most affected by changes to the school year from 2006. The meeting focussed on the provision of the best possible sporting opportunities for young people and, among other things, it spent considerable time looking at ways of making sport more appealing to school participants.

One of the real concerns, especially for talented athletes, is the competing pressure, from within a code and from other sporting codes, [not to mention their often substantial academic, family and personal responsibilities] for the time and energies of the player. All codes want to provide the best sporting opportunity for its participants. Most codes, however, can cite instances of young players being put under unreasonable pressure to fulfil too many commitments within their sport; all codes can cite instances of the intrusions of competing codes, in and out of season.

It has been recognised for many years that one of the greatest problems is the transition from summer to winter sports and, less serious, the later change from winter to summer sport. Several summer codes reported that the demands of pre-season training for winter sports often caused defections from summer code teams, especially from key players, so that, at the end of the local competitive season when teams were attempting to qualify for national competitions, some teams were seriously weakened to the point that they had been withdrawn. It seemed increasingly unlikely that the best young athletes were being allowed to enjoy a summer and a winter sport [are Jeff Wilson and Anna Scarlett products of a system that has disappeared?] and this, in turn, impacted on the sporting involvements of other young people.

Even though the problem has been clearly identified it is unlikely that the situation has improved; in fact, the meeting agreed that the position was deteriorating. The matter is significant to the continuing involvement of young people in sport and it has wider implications, not only for sport, but also for society and, especially, for the young people who are affected. As a result, it was agreed that it was timely to re-focus attention to some common sense principles that should underpin how sport is presented to young people in secondary schools. The following guidelines are written as a reminder about some of the issues confronting young people in sport.

1. Guiding principle

Sports programmes for young people should be designed with the interests of the young person always first.

[Reference #1.]

2. Change of Season

For secondary school students, the sports focus in Terms 1 and 4 should be 'summer' sport, and, in Terms 2 and 3, 'winter' sport should have priority.

Those involved in secondary school sport are urged to schedule pre-season activities, as far as possible, around existing sports commitments of the players and not to disqualify a player who elects to fulfil previously committed responsibilities. Athletes must be encouraged to meet and communicate obligations and commitments to sports codes/teams in an honest and responsible manner. It is important that they are met by similar responsibilities from their administrators and coaches.

Where there is a clash [even with the best of intentions and the most sensitive scheduling these will occur] all coaches and administrators are urged to communicate, at all appropriate times, with all of those involved so that the athletes are not forced to compromise between impossibly conflicting options beyond their control that could have been avoided.

[Reference #2.]

3. Intensity of programmes

Sports coaches and administrators should be aware of the dangers of over-commitment and possible burnout and should take steps to protect young people from these. Administrators and coaches of those involved in secondary school sports should be particularly aware of this issue as school players often have to mix school, provincial and national representations, sometimes at a range of age group levels.

[Reference #3.]

4. Early specialisation

Research suggests that it is 'healthy' for young people to participate in a range of sporting activities. Administrators and coaches of those involved in secondary school sports should actively encourage multi-code involvement and not schedule programmes in any sport that make it difficult for a young person to enjoy and benefit from the experience of a variety of different sports and skill opportunities.

[Reference #4.]

APPENDIX

Reference #1.

- “The wellbeing and the health promotion of the young person is (sic) paramount.”¹
- “Athletes’ welfare is paramount and must take precedence over the self-interest of other persons or organisation[s].”²

Reference #2.

- “Sports administrators must be sensitive to the pressures, which are often placed on young participants at times of the change of season. Even if adult seasons must overlap it is important to control the length of season in junior sport so that ... young people are able to enjoy the full experience of several activities.

Agreements should be negotiated between the various codes and education authorities so that the transition from one season to another is coordinated.”³

- “[For secondary schools]
 - (i) local and regional summer sports competitions take precedence until the end of summer tournament week [end of March approximately] and will not continue after that week and
 - (ii) national and island competitions are able to use weekends and vacation time up until the end of the Term 1 vacation.
 - (iii) local and regional winter sports competitions take precedence until the end of winter tournament week [end of August approximately] and will not continue after that week and
 - (iv) national and island competitions are able to use weekends and vacation time up until the end of the Term 3 vacation.”⁴

Reference #3.

- “young people, especially those who are the most talented, can easily be over-committed in school sport, club sport, under-age provincial sport and across sporting codes. Participation ... in too many events or activities can lead to overtraining, confusion and ‘burn out’.
- The duplication of junior sport activities can be reduced by establishing mechanisms that will ensure ongoing communication and consultation between school and club or community organisations.
- Some ways of reducing duplication in the provision of junior sport include:
 - Coordinated scheduling of school and club/community events and competitions at all levels
 - Junior development programmes that incorporate both school and community-based components”⁵

Reference #4.

- “Most ‘champion’ athletes participate in more than one sport during their formative years.”⁶
- “Most elite athletes were “active in more sports, ...specialised later and had a relatively slow career development.”⁷
- current motor-skills development theory and training methodologies conclude that it’s beneficial ... to undertake more than one physical activity By learning a variety of fundamental motor-skills, e.g. stability, locomotion and manipulation - under varying conditions - young athletes can develop a large, well-organised set of movements that can be transferred across sports.”⁸
- “Multi-dimensional talent development will provide a solid foundation of strong fundamental skills. This will in turn provide athletes with flexible and adaptable skills ideal for competition and a base on which more complex skills can be learnt quickly and efficiently over time. Physical activity levels will be raised, by equipping young people with a wide range of competencies.”⁹
- “Early specialisation can increase the chances of medical injuries”¹⁰

¹ Moving Through Sport – from Junior to Adult. The National Junior Sport Policy. Hillary Commission 1997. p9

² Linking Promise to the Podium - Talent Identification and Development (TID) in New Zealand. A Report to SPARC’s Board from the TID Taskforce, 2004. p34

³ Moving Through Sport p25

⁴ Minutes of meeting of Board of NZSSSC, 1 July 1997

⁵ Moving Through Sport p25

⁶ Linking Promise to the Podium p10

⁷ *ibid* p43

⁸ *ibid* p34

⁹ *ibid* p28

¹⁰ *ibid* p9