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WHY CHANGE OUR COACHING SYSTEM?

by
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I am writing this article today, in hindsight, two weeks too late, but as many say, better late than never. Since posting the integrated USAA Coaching Program announcement on December 30th, I have received non-stop phone calls and emails. There has been no shortage of feedback, for which I thank you. With that said, let me back up and first apologize for not providing better background information as to why we made the changes we did, as well as what we see for the future of the coaching program.

During the last USAA Board meeting, at the end of October, one of the underlying themes from the meeting was that if we are going to hire a National Head Coach then we need to provide support for him, integrate his teachings into the framework of our coach development system and only in this way would we be able to evaluate the effectiveness of a national training program. The Board did not believe this had been done effectively since Coach Lee moved here and began teaching.

To fully incorporate Coach Lee's teachings, the HP Team created a Regional High Performance program that was specific to Coach Lee's training. However, in the creation of this separate track, it completely disregarded any past training of those who had moved through the ranks to Level 3 and 4 on the coaching pyramid. So in essence, the organization created a new path, the High Performance path, where you could be a part of USAA teams and integrated into Coach Lee's program or you could continue to get your Level 3 and 4 designations which provided great educational background, but was not tied to any advancement relative to National Training.

This dual path created confusion and frustration for many new coaches wondering how to advance their coaching careers. Feedback I received from many that were part of the HP track claimed that they seemed to be learning the same basic information at each of the seminars and did not feel there was enough information added to the program. On the Level 3 and 4 tracks, I heard the frustration from many on the lack of available classes – stemming mainly from the lack of involved upper-level coaches to teach the program, as most of the active coaches were busy being involved in the HP track. When the Board reviewed this dilemma, it was clear that we needed to create a single coaching track that provided both a structured opportunity for advancement as well as an area for Coach Lee to have specific and advanced training for those coaches who were capable of making major time commitments, all the while integrating our National Coach's teachings into all levels and their curricula.

Because of the loss of the CEO and High Performance Manager, combined with the past Coaches Development Committee's (CDC) difficulty making headway in this area, the Board felt we needed to "fast track" the program by creating a Transition Task Force to create a transitional system that would serve until we could hire a new HP manager and restructure the

CDC to be more effective. So the Transition Task Force, which included USAA Board Directors, Lloyd Brown, Sheri Rhodes and Derek Davis, first met in December in Chula Vista with National Head Coach Kisik Lee and R.A. Coach Guy Krueger. The Task Force's directive from the Board and me was clear:

1. Integrate the two tracks (RHP and Level 3, 4) to create one coaching progression that the organization could get behind.
2. Be sure that the new program supports Coach Lee and provides him with the coaches and the level of commitment that he needs on a national level.
3. Identify a transition plan as to how we can transition those with Level 3 and 4 coaches into the new unified structure.

There has been much discussion in the past regarding the need for a course between the Intermediate Instruction level and the past Level 3 course. The Community Coach Course had been introduced in the past, but had not been officially integrated into the system. The Task Force felt the course could fill the gap, but thought it needed some review by all parties that would be sharing the curriculum *i.e.* ASA and NFAA.

A second meeting needed to happen for these organizations to review the curriculum and be certain that it fit the needs of all the groups. This meeting occurred in December with the Transition Task Force and M.J. Rogers from the NFAA, Dee Falks from ASA, and Larry Wise, who had been involved in trying to incorporate compound tuning and shooting technique into current material. This group agreed that there needed to be some modifications in the materials to meet the needs of all the parties, but the group felt strongly that this course was beneficial and could meet the needs of many between the Intermediate Instructor Course and Regional and Elite Coach levels.

The yearly recertification seminar and fee came into play when Coach Lee explained his need for coaches to be more engaged and the pitfall of not communicating better with them. This yearly recertification seminar *was not* created with the intent of providing more travel or excessive time requirements on our current coaches. It was meant to provide updated information to coaches. The content of the seminar would include updated coaching material, changes to USAA coaching and athlete programs or simply an opportunity for coaches in the program to provide direct feedback. This seminar is meant to be as quick and simple as possible. It is our hope that this seminar can be delivered online at many times over and over throughout the year. However, Coach Lee is still working on the format, so we need some time to determine whether an online method will work for what he wants to communicate.

The group recognizes that we are asking a lot of the Elite level coaches as outlined in the structure. This will, unfortunately, limit the number of coaches who can participate at this level. Coach Lee expressed a great need to develop a pool of coaches that he can call upon to help him teach at camps and provide regional training and educational opportunities in their area. We understand that not all coaches will be able to participate at this level due to time or money constraints. It would be our hope that someday we could help offset these coaches' time commitment with financial resources, but the organization is not at that point yet.

With regard to the transition issues outlined in the first posting, clearly the task force could not have anticipated all of the issues, and we missed some big ones. For that we apologize. We have been, and continue to be, open to making the transition fair, yet not sacrificing the intent of the new program. Your patience and feedback during this process is much appreciated. It may very well take a few months to sort out all the various issues relative to this transition. However,

please know that we want to be inclusive, and we want to support coaches in getting transitioned into the new structure, yet not denying them or recognizing any past training or education.

Regarding the requirement of background checks, many have asked, "Why is this necessary?" So let me shed some light on this subject. When Brad Camp left the organization, he told me that our insurance carrier had been pushing integrating background checks into our certification process for some time. When I researched this issue with the insurance agency and the USOC, I found that we are required by the USOC to acquire Abuse and Molestation coverage under our general insurance policy. Many insurance companies are beginning to mandate that an organization performs background checks in order to even be issued this policy. Do they require it now? No. Is it likely that in the near future we would not be able to get the policy without requiring the checks? Yes. It was my belief that it is in the best interests of the organization *and* the youth associated with our programs to implement this change now while we are restructuring the program anyway. We are researching what other groups do and the alternatives available to us. We will do our best to make this as unobtrusive and as inexpensive as possible. All of the programs we have researched to date simply provide the organization with a green light or red light scenario, so you do not have to worry about USAA receiving your records. Of course, there will also be an appeal process, if you feel the check was not accurate.

Another added benefit that will be coming to certified instructors, who are also members of the organization, is extended insurance to cover them when they are coaching or instructing. USAA's current insurance policy protects members and clubs during sanctioned tournaments or club activities *i.e.* ongoing JOAD programs or leagues. However, when you step out of that arena and provide individual coaching or teaching you are currently not protected as an individual coach. I am finalizing the wording with our insurance companies, but included in the new certification fees, will be this individual coverage for coaches. We see this as an added benefit and protection for coaches in the program.

Let me be very clear in stating that this last work done to integrate the coaching program has not even touched the curriculum side of the project. There is a *tremendous* amount of work to do to upgrade our curriculum and create better and easier ways to provide educational opportunities to our coaches. Much more work will be needed to figure out ways to reduce the need for trainings that require 5-7 days off work, flights across the country and hundreds of dollars spent to receive certifications. We need a comprehensive review of the material that has already been created and identification of gaps in the current education system. We need creative thinking to provide better quality information in a medium that is more accessible to our coaches. We, as an organization, need to do a better job of reaching out to our coaches and helping them in their development. We need to find opportunities to engage them in training opportunities and hopefully not always at their cost. There is *much* work to be done here, and I want to be sure everyone knows that we haven't even scratched the surface.

Let me also be clear that we need reform in the way we present information to our membership, our method for feedback and how we engage people in the development process. I have seen first-hand from this past process that it is very difficult to make change in programs because it affects so many in a very personal and unique way. We have had a past that has limited feedback and open communication, and I believe, as an organization, we have lost trust because of it. There is constant discussion of "why something was changed" and "who benefited from it" within that cloud of distrust. Our Board needs to help in this process to be sure programs and processes are set up to provide open and unbiased input.

In closing, let me say that I feel there are two very important things we need to do as an organization. The first is that we need to strengthen our grassroots programs. We need better materials for JOAD and CAP. We need better programs that are open and welcoming to the many NASP archers and newcomers. Thanks to Lorretta Sinclair and funding from the Easton Foundation, the CAP program is well on its way. JOAD still needs a lot of work.

In my mind however, the real key to the development of these programs is the development of the instructors and coaches that run them. We have for too long taken for granted the work that these individuals do in preparing and developing our talent across the country. We owe it to them to provide them with the necessary resources to run an effective program. We owe it to them to provide as much educational information and opportunity for training as we can. Of course this will not happen overnight, but it is my opinion that we have lost sight of this. Not everyone can be training in Chula Vista and if that is the plan for success, we have not used our many resources available to us across the country. I feel strongly that as an organization, we need to shore up our educational opportunities for coaches and the integration was simply a *first step*. An obvious painful one for many, but in no way is this "the answer." We all have much work to do in this area. We have fallen behind in providing the resources to help our troops in the field, so to speak.

I appreciate all the support I have received from many of you during this process and know that change is difficult, which makes it all the more important that we begin to set things right and create lasting support structures that will carry us into the future. If you have any questions or concerns, please feel free to contact me at dparker@usarchery.org.

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