

What is the AISL High Performance Program and what does it mean for shooting?

Much has been said about the High Performance Program and indeed the question is oft asked, "how does it benefit the sport overall?" In the first instance it is necessary to understand the Program is geared toward the elite level of the sport, which is the top ten or fifteen athletes, across the Olympic disciplines, we have who are capable of being among the best in the world. As a sport we all benefit from the results achieved internationally and, in particular, those of our Olympians and Commonwealth Games athletes.

Australian International Shooting Limited (AISL) is the body charged with the task of winning medals and is funded by the Australian Sports Commission. In turn AISL works with its member bodies to develop the High Performance Program through the High Performance Program Management Committee which is made up of representatives from the member bodies, the national coaches, the high performance manager and a representative from the Sports Commission. The current focus is on achieving medals in Beijing 2008, New Delhi in 2010 and London 2012; to this end those top athletes will be supported via a new program to be announced following the end of the 49th ISSF World Championships in Zagreb.

The program is, unashamedly, not about promoting the top scoring Australians but rather those Australians who are able to achieve medal results internationally. To date qualifying scores have been set at an achievable standard, that required just a little stretch to reach, in order to attract more shooters to the squad level; however the funds available cannot hope to provide adequate support for the numbers able to achieve these scores and so those who are truly seeking "elite status" will need to be capable of higher scores. The program is about success at the highest level and not about just featuring on a ranking list.

Our program employs four full time coaches and a full time sports scientist to assist the athletes in achieving their goals. On the sports science front our athletes also have access to sports psychologists, sports nutrition, masseur and physiotherapists along with medical support. The program also assists with travel, training, daily allowances whilst overseas, ammunition and target costs.

The flow down effect from these program areas is that the knowledge gained can be disseminated to all coaches, with the result that clubs, state and national federations need not fund research on such items enabling them to fund more on coaching and athlete development.

The funding also provides the opportunity for AISL to develop programs such as:

- the Level One generic courses in both coaching and officiating,
- policies which have been drawn up by legal resources and approved by the member bodies and,
- also conduct major competitions.

This reduces the need for member bodies and clubs to spend money and time in such areas, allowing them to allocate their funds and resources to development of the next generation of shooters.

Some athletes may also be eligible for a direct support grant (which is a means-tested grant) as a contribution towards sporting and living costs. This money is not unencumbered though; recipients will need to agree to a plan for their own development in the run up to Beijing, the demands of which are rigorous unlike previous similar grants. This funding is to assist the athletes to have more quality training time; it is not simply additional income. Whilst the recent Commonwealth Games saw Medal performances it should be noted that we failed to improve on 2002 when we gathered 30 medals. In 2006 we managed only 23.

The following table shows the results.

| | | | % of Prediction | %of total |
|----------|----|------------|-----------------|-----------|
| Clay | 7 | 4G; 2S; 1B | 50% | 30% |
| Pistol | 11 | 4G; 4S; 3B | 92% | 48% |
| Fullbore | 3 | 1G; 1S; 1B | 150% | 13% |
| SB-Rifle | 2 | 1S; 1B | 100% | 9% |

A medal at the Olympics means our sport will be in the public eye and the more successful we are, the more likely we are to grow the sport. Recently there has been criticism of the program, those running the program, the score levels required to achieve a berth on an Australian Team, etc and I am sure this criticism is likely to continue. However, like in any endeavour the criticism is generated by some who fail to reach the scores. To this end I would encourage all, not to concentrate on the qualifying score but rather look at the score that is required to win a medal overseas and then put a plan in place to win that medal and work at the technique required. "Let your scores do the talking."

A 'tool' that has been developed to assist in making decisions at selection meetings is a graph of those shooters seeking selection which shows their form achieved overseas dating back to 1996, including Oceania, and provides an output showing the likelihood of a competitor achieving a 'finals' placing at a major event; this provides valuable assistance to the selection panel in making impartial and informed decisions.

This is invaluable in determining whether a competitor who may consistently shoot the qualifying score in Australia but is unable to achieve under pressure at the major events should be sent, bearing in mind our stated goal is to medal. Conversely, the same tool serves to highlight problems such as just described and may enable us to assist an athlete in overcoming those areas of concern. Interestingly the top male and female clay target shooters have a 70% (male) and a 42% (female) chance of making the finals whilst in the pistol program there are two in the 70% region (female). In the rifle program steps have been taken to re-establish the positioning gained in the lead up to 2000. Of course all of this is irrelevant if a competitor does not first achieve a qualifying score. Interestingly in some other sports (non professional and less supported than ours) you need to be capable of world record performances to qualify and, yes, some of those who don't make the mark complain about the system being unfair.

It should also be pointed out that the role of the National High Performance Coach is not that of an individual coach, rather someone who develops and coordinates a program. Each competitor should be working with a coach either at the club or state level to 'hone' their skills. Here again clubs and states should be spending monies to support a coach; this need not be large sums but at least cover the incidentals such as petrol, phone etc. Those coaches would then work in with the National HP Coach to ensure the success of their athletes, whether that is at national or international level. This is not to say that the National HP Coach does not or will not provide individual attention, but it is impossible to be everywhere; many sports are centric to a training centre and athletes need to weigh up the pros and cons of moving to that centre.

Details of the new plan will be made available on the web site www.ausshooting.org in August.



With less than 740 days to go to the Olympic Games and just over 760 to the Paralympics, preparation is already well under way; have you set your goals?