



NextGen HUB Review – Discussion Paper (August 2020)

Background:

Over the past decade, Rowing Canada Aviron (RCA) has been building an evolutionary system of athlete identification and development. During this time, RCA has built several strategic partnerships to best position and support the delivery of RCA's athlete development system and pathway. RCA's goal and intent throughout these years has been and will continue to be ensuring ongoing podium success of Canada's Senior National Team at the Olympic and Paralympic Games. RCA continues to strive to evaluate and explore the learnings - inclusive of the successes, limitations and challenges experienced through the evolution of the athlete pathway.

Throughout this evolution, RCA has partnered with academic institutions (universities: 2010-2013 and 2018-2020), and direct provincial partnerships (2013-2017). With strong and continuing private sector alignment with the Royal Bank of Canada (RBC) Training Ground (2015-2020), supporting the implementation of RCA's Talent Identification Assessment measures which have been repeatably validated in the identification and advancement of many RCA targeted NextGen rowers. Rowing is RBC Training Ground's leading National Sport in both the identification of potential high performance rowers and the successful transition to National Team programming.

These established partnerships with RCA's athlete development system, *Row to Podium*, and RCA's current *Next Generation (NextGen) Athlete Strategy* have reaffirmed RCA's extensive level of understanding and expertise in athlete development and the performance monitoring measures required to be successful. The recent findings of the NextGen HUB review, coupled with information shared during RCA's 2017 Townhall style consultation are outlined below.

NextGen HUB Goals – As outlined within Partner Memorandum of Understandings:

Increased focus on “existing rowers” trending 5-8 years from Olympic / Paralympic program.

- Group is primarily university aged
- HUBs linked to Universities

Elevate the quality and quantity of athletes progressing within varsity program.

- Enhanced technical coaching embedded within NextGen Training environments (HUBS)
- Strengthen entire program through systematic engagement.
- Use existing HP athlete development and monitoring system (tools) to support a larger group of athletes.

Elevate the quality and quantity of regional athletes progressing on podium pathway.

- Similar to point above

Systematic approach to monitoring and development.

- Yearly training plan that supports athlete's development on HP pathway
- Evolved monitoring camps
- RADAR
- Water (i.e. NRCs, Speed Orders, & Rate Speed Assessment Tool)
- Monthly monitoring camps (only offer 6)

Talent ID, shift from sole focus to supporting clubs and universities interested in delivering programming.

- Standardized tools, tests and performance targets for delivery and recruitment.

Empower Canadian Universities as high performance partners.

- Support and promote sustainable and "accountable" regional partnerships

NextGen Strategy & HUB Learnings:

1. RCA's monitoring and development strategy has proven successful. Athletes who fully engaged RCA's System of Training and Monitoring have successfully transitioned to the Senior National Team.
 - Of RCA's 58 currently Sport Canada Athlete Assistance Program Carded athletes, 12 have transitioned via RCA's Talent Development Centre model (2013-17).
2. There are varying paths to the National Team. Creating a one-size fits all for athletes and coaches is not effective.

Athletes should be supported to choose what is the best fit for their development.

HUBs hosted within university environments are challenged with competing interests and inevitably succumb to focusing on the Canadian University pathway and prioritizing USport goals over provincial/national pathway development. This is a complicated challenge as these environments have many talented athletes from a variety of sports with their own strategic approaches to advancing to the highest level across all university sports. Some focusing on the systemic and sequential approach to progressing through the athlete pathways while others to look to fully engage in the university student life. Therefore, a National NextGen Structure must consider how to support varying pathways that allow athletes to select the best opportunity for their circumstances. The following are some examples of possible situations:

- Athlete fully engages in University program and lifestyle
 - Engages in Seasonal HP programming or following graduation from university
- Athlete attending Canadian university, does not race for the university
 - Attends a university or college without a rowing program
 - Training with club or provincial program
- Athlete attends Canadian university and only competes during Canadian University Rowing Championships season
 - Typically, small university programs without a full-time coach
 - Trains with club or provincial program outside university season
- Athlete attends university outside of Canada

- High school athletes not yet in college or university

Current HUB model heavily supports athletes in first bullet. In order to have a greater impact, RCA requires a system that impacts more athletes and clubs.

3. Complete partnership buy-in for high performance outcomes is essential to ensuring the same overarching goals and objectives are being pursued. Competing interests and intent for the delivery of high-performance outcomes creates unnecessary distractions and challenges for coaches and most importantly targeted athletes. Partnerships require the dedication and collaborative commitment for progressing athletes through the athlete development pathway and onto the podium at the World Rowing Championships and Olympic/Paralympic Games.
 - Strategic partnerships require the commitment of resources from all parties to be invested and accountable.
4. Under HUB Model, “Regional” (HUB targeted athlete outside of University or host environment) engagement has significantly increased, exhibiting greater buy-in and compliance towards the prescribed monitoring practices. During this time, ‘Host’ location engagement (HUB targeted athletes within university environment) from program partners has recorded a steady decline.
 - *RADAR Engagement:* Regional HUB athlete compliance is nearly twice the level of HUB Host athletes, with 61% of Regional HUB athletes submitting RADAR results.
 - *HUB Targets:* Since 2018 Regional Athletes achieved the stated HUB standards at nearly double the success rate of HUB Host athletes as Host location athletes demonstrated a nearly 80% decline.

The above information is an average of all regions, it is important to note that some Host locations individually showed stronger engagement.

5. Find the balance between supporting “new athletes” (Talent Identification/Sport Transfer) and “existing athletes”. Rowing has experienced success in recruiting and developing “new athletes” through the Talent Development Centre model (see 1.1). The identified challenge within this system was the potential for missing athletes that already existed within the ‘traditional’ pathway as there was no mechanisms or additional attention provided to foster and facilitate their continual success. The current HUB model has focused more on the “existing athlete” which is gaining momentum within the regional groups outside of the host environments. With the right alignment of partnership and support programming can be delivered to both groups effectively. *Both can be achieved without compromise.*
6. US based student athletes: The HUB Model is generating a greater reciprocal engagement from US based athletes with a strong value being place on the connection and relationship to the HUB coaches and targeted communications. RCA must foster and enhance relationships with US college programs that continue to reciprocate and support RCA’s NextGen goals.
7. There are trends and themes to the “needs / wants” of the partner universities. Through the evaluation process 3 common themes arose:
 - Coach mentorship: All ‘Host Partners’ valued the ability to utilize the knowledge of the HUB coaches and RCA staff. All HUB environments confirmed mentoring developing coaches on RCA athlete development strategies was highly valued.
 - Athlete recruitment: Some ‘Host Partners’ felt strongly that all was needed for success was to be better supported with athlete recruitment. Once identified,

these universities could independently foster the growth and development of the athletes throughout their university career and onto the national level.

- Training program support: Some 'Host Partners' placed a strong value on accessing RCA's NextGen Sport Science & Sport Medicine Lead (SSSM - Jordan Clarke). Accessing support for training programs and monitoring/testing analysis.

Restructuring the NextGen Program while maintaining or increasing support in these three areas could serve as a strategic opportunity to progress RCA's System while continuing to enhance and align to pathway programs.

Summary Recommendations:

1. Invest in Reciprocal & Strategic Partnerships. Organizations that share the same primary goal of placing athletes on the podium at the World Rowing Championships and Olympic/Paralympic Games
 - Shift from University NextGen HUB hosted partnerships to Provincially aligned partnerships;
 - Maintain strong working relationships with Universities and continue to explore and invest in mutually beneficial initiatives; &
 - Seek enhanced national competition and NextGen pathway alignment.
2. Continue building on the proven practices of success:
 - Training and Monitoring Principles;
 - Individualized Programming;
 - Technical Development; &
 - Recruitment and Identification
3. Uncompromised Approach to NextGen Strategy
 - Invest in: Athletes; Coaches; and Partners, who embrace and bolster the NextGen Strategy
 - Don't chase those who aren't invested