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## Ausport Awards Eunice Gill Memorial Award

On 4 March 2005, the Australian sports industry lauded its unsung heroes at the 2005 Ausport Awards. Held in conjunction with the Australian Sports Commission's Our Sporting Future forum, the Ausport Awards were presented in front of over 450 attendees, ranging from grassroots volunteers to national sporting organisation executives and board members.

Across ten categories, 30 finalists were recognised for their contribution to the industry. Anna-Louise Kassulke from Special Olympics Queensland was chosen as the winner of the Eunice Gill Memorial Award, recognising commitment and contribution to coach development. Also receiving recognition for their long-term commitment to developing coaches were fellow finalists Chet Gray, Softball Australia's decorated Coaching Operations Manager, with almost 20

years experience in softball and baseball, and Les Bee from Sport Education Victoria, with over 25 years in diverse coaching development roles.

Kassulke was clearly delighted to win the award, and was even more so when the Minister for the Arts and Sport, Senator Rod Kemp, also announced her as the winner of the Ausport Prize for the most outstanding achievement in Australian sport over the previous year. This was the first time the Ausport Prize had been awarded to an individual, demonstrating how Kassulke's commitment and contribution were viewed by the judging panel.

Kassulke's remarkable contribution has spanned 18 years as a volunteer and had its humble beginnings through attendance at a local meeting to launch the Special Olympics in Queensland. She saw the importance of providing quality sporting opportunities for people with an intellectual disability and realised she could make a difference.

Starting as a volunteer, Kassulke was soon appointed as the Queensland State Director of Sport and Training and to the state management committee. Since then, she has assisted wholeheartedly to growing the program in Queensland and to working with the sport nationally. This has included:

- coordination of training and conditioning programs
- obtaining qualifications in train-the-trainer and Coaching Athletes with a Disability
- becoming the Coaching Athletes with a Disability course regional coordinator
- developing and delivering many other coaching workshops
- developing and improving the coaching pathway.

A number of these programs have been adopted nationally due to their success in Queensland.

Senator the Hon. Rod Kemp, Minister for the Arts and Sport, presents Anna-Louise Kassulke with the Ausport Prize for the most outstanding achievement in Australian sport at the 2005 Ausport Awards.



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Australian Sports Commission CEO Mark Peters commended Kassulke for her outstanding contribution in delivering coach education for people with a disability in the Special Olympics. 'As a coach educator, Ms Kassulke has worked tirelessly to further the training and development of coaching for people with disabilities in the Special Olympics for more than 18 years across Queensland,' Peters said.

'She has led by example, pioneering and delivering innovative coach education programs in Queensland for more people

with a disability to get involved in the Special Olympics, many of which have been adopted at the national level.

'Coach educators like Ms Kassulke play a vital role in supporting the growth and development of the Australian sports system'.

The Australian Sports Commission congratulates the finalists for their achievements and recognition through the Ausport Awards. For more information on the Ausport Awards, visit [www.ausport.gov.au/events/ausportawards2005/index.asp](http://www.ausport.gov.au/events/ausportawards2005/index.asp).



## Coach's Corner — Tony Wynd

### Coaching children: small adults or young people with specific needs?

Coaching children can be an incredibly rewarding activity. It can also be quite taxing, not just because children in sport have seemingly endless reserves of energy, but because of their different needs.

Children are not just small adults and their needs in many areas are different to adults. Coaches of children need to be aware of these needs and diligently apply appropriate practices.

The requirements for coaching children extend well beyond simply providing a safe environment, although this is a very important consideration.

Be well prepared for each session. Activities for children must be fun, have lots of variety and should cater to their shorter attention span. While it is tempting to spend a lot of time giving instructions, children prefer to practise rather than listen. Activities should also be challenging. If children have to work things out for themselves, they will achieve more.

In any group of children there will be individual differences in physical and emotional development. Make sure you emphasise each child's progress individually.

There is no point focusing on complex tactics and strategies. Children just want to play. Clever coaches will develop activities that give children the opportunity to develop these aspects of the game without them even realising.

Children need to learn the concepts of participation and fair play. There will be time

enough for focusing on winning when they reach senior competition. As children, they need to enjoy their participation without worrying about the final score. Coaches of children today can play a vital role in developing the 'good sports' of the future.

Teach them to be honest in their efforts and to contribute to a successful team effort. By avoiding the pressure to win at any cost, you will be creating athletes with a far greater chance of success than adults. While you may have heard it all before, it should be remembered that the main reasons for the vast majority of children playing sport are to have fun and make friends.

Be creative — coaching children can allow the child inside of you, the coach, to blossom. Children love it when adults play with them. Be involved — have as much fun at 'training' as the kids do.

There is a wealth of literature and other resources available on appropriate techniques and methods for coaching children. Coaches who intend coaching children, or indeed, already are, would be well advised to seek out and consult these resources.

The end result will be a more enjoyable experience and greater skill and personal development for all concerned.

**Tony Wynd**  
Manager  
Coaching and Officiating  
Australian Sports Commission

## Shannon Rollason

### *Turbo-charged coach careers to the top*

If he was not coaching Olympic swimming gold medallists and world record holders, you get the feeling from talking to Shannon Rollason that he would love to be behind the wheel of a Formula One car.

He speaks with reverence about the professionalism of the sport, the teamwork required to get a precision car over the finish line in first place, and the sense at both a micro and macro level that the sport is constantly moving forward. It is his biggest passion outside his family and swimming.

At just 33, Rollason himself is not short on horsepower, nor is he the one-horse wonder that some thought he may have been way back when he started coaching in his early 20s.

He started his coaching career with 12 students at a school in Brisbane's eastern suburbs. They trained in an 18.3-metre pool without gutters or blocks.

In his first season there, Rollason put one of his female swimmers on a Brisbane team. These days, he coaches swimmers to Olympic gold medals and to world records.

In May, Rollason was named Australian Swimming Coaches and Teachers Association Coach of the Year for his efforts with Jodie Henry and Alice Mills at the Athens 2004 Olympics.

It was at Athens that Henry, in her Olympic debut, won three gold medals, broke the 100-metre freestyle world record and broke two other world records as part of relay teams. Meanwhile Mills, also on Olympic debut, was the youngest member of the world record breaking 4 x 100-metre freestyle relay quartet and won a gold medal for her work in getting the team to the medley relay finals.

Many will recall the successes of Mills and Henry. Few would be able to identify Rollason as their coach. Yet Rollason



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has been coaching both women since they were youngsters swimming at the Chandler Swimming Club in Brisbane.

Such is their trust in their coach that in 2005, when Rollason relocated to Canberra and the Australian Institute of Sport, Mills and Henry followed.

He has variously been described as radical and strong-willed, but Rollason believes that much of his success can be attributed to an unshakable thirst for knowledge and a questioning mind from an early age.

In fact, it was that questioning nature that eventually saw him abandon his goal of being an Australian representative swimmer.

'I was fascinated with training ... the physiological processes, the sets, the different ways of training,' Rollason says. 'At 13 and 14 I was reading anything to do with swimming — sports science, anything. If you went back to my old school you'd find that all of the library books on these subjects would have my name in them.'

This thirst for knowledge did not always wear well with his swim coaches. 'I was always asking technical questions on why they had done one thing or another. My coaches thought I was challenging them, but I wasn't. I genuinely had an interest in why they had decided to use one technique on me over another.'

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**Coach profile** *continued*

He went as far as national open breaststroke finalist behind swimming champion Phil Rogers, but soon realised that what he really wanted was to spend his time on the pool deck, not in the water.

'I make a conscious effort to design training sessions,' he says. 'I try to build [training] sets that have flair and don't allow swimmers to get bored. It's the stimulation that's the important thing.'

Nor does he believe that the emphasis should be on how many kilometres his swimmers put into their training, rather, he prefers that they focus on the quality of their work ... training to race, not training for the sake of training.

It is even not unheard of for Rollason's swimmers to miss whole training sessions.

He once told an ABC reporter that he wanted to empower athletes with responsibility for their own future and to foster an honest relationship between him and his athletes.

'I'm a hard task master,' he said. 'I don't think there are many people around who are as committed and as particular and precise. It's not all fun and games and blowing bubbles.'



*He has variously been described as radical and strong-willed, but Rollason believes that much of his success can be attributed to an unshakable thirst for knowledge and a questioning mind from an early age.*

'But if someone doesn't want to be there, if they're not going to do a good job and they're only there because they'll get in trouble, you have to question the value of putting them through a session.'

A profile of Shannon Rollason will also be featured in *Sports Coach*, Vol. 28 No. 2, due to be published by the Australian Sports Commission in September 2005.

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# MENTORING

Mentoring is nothing new, particularly in sport. Most sportspeople and many coaches would freely admit that they have sought the advice of an experienced player or coach at some point in their career.

Mentoring is a highly effective way for new coaches to learn the 'art' of their role, and apply theory that they may have learnt in a classroom or through independent study. Mentoring relationships can be formally structured, with mentors assigned to coaches, or they can grow out of a chance encounter with a like-minded coach and remain very informal.

Mentoring for coaches' development can serve a variety of purposes. It can be used as a:

- key learning experience for coaches to gain their accreditation
- means of supervising coaching practice associated with accreditation
- means of professional development for coaches at any level of accreditation
- means to 'fast track' coaches with potential through their accreditation.

The benefits to the organisation of establishing a mentoring program include:

- easing the difficulty and costs involved in conducting lengthy residential training courses
- tapping into the expertise of experienced coaches in the organisation
- re-energising experienced coaches who take on mentoring roles
- developing coaches so they become future mentors and better people managers
- encouraging coaches to progress to the next level of accreditation through the motivation and assistance they receive from a mentor
- being a particularly useful tool to recruit, educate and retain female coaches.

The benefits to the mentor include:

- renewed enthusiasm and commitment to their own work
- opportunities to share their knowledge and skills
- recognition of personal expertise
- new learning for themselves
- promotion of lifelong learning through relationships.

The benefits to the coach include:

- increased confidence and motivation
- constructive feedback on performance
- help to translate theory into practice
- networking opportunities and enhanced career prospects
- promotion of lifelong learning through relationships
- minimising the difficulties of attending training courses.

## Some do's and don'ts for coaches being mentored:

- Be clear about your goals and desires and be able to express your needs and accept responsibility for your decisions and choices.
- Take responsibility for 'driving' the relationship — do not wait for your mentor to initiate action.
- Have reasonable expectations of your mentor — respect your mentor's time and needs.
- Look for a mentor with similar values and with the skills that you wish to gain.
- Acknowledge your mentor's role in your achievements.

## When can mentoring occur?

Some opportunities for mentoring include:

- **At training** — a mentor can be invited to observe some of the coach's training sessions, or they may even take a part of a session to give the coach an opportunity to see them in action.
- **At competitions** — you need to consider, however, the effect that any mentoring will have on the performance of the athletes. Perhaps scheduling some time with a mentor after competition to review the coach's performance is the best compromise.
- **Video analysis** — it may be difficult to have a mentor attend a practice session or competition, particularly for coaches in rural areas. A good alternative is to video tape the coach in action and send the footage to the mentor for comment. It is also important to provide the mentor with some background, as they will not be aware of the context in which the footage is taken. The video process should ideally be a catalyst for discussion of the coach's performance, not become the focus of the exercise in itself.

## Characteristics of successful mentoring relationships

- Good rapport between the mentor and the coach
- Trust and confidentiality
- Demonstrated interest and enthusiasm
- Clear objectives and goals
- Mutual respect
- Clear communication and feedback — the mentor becomes a 'critical friend'
- Physical environment for meetings is comfortable
- A shared experience
- Fun and enjoyment
- Acknowledgment and celebration of achievements
- Others are aware and supportive of the mentoring relationship

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Adapted from *Making Mentors: a guide to establishing a successful mentoring program for coaches and officials*, Australian Sports Commission, Canberra 2002.

Available for \$25.00 from the Australian Sports Commission. For a complete listing of Australian Sports Commission publications and information on ordering, visit [www.ausport.gov.au/publications/catalogue/index.asp](http://www.ausport.gov.au/publications/catalogue/index.asp).

# Keeping the bugs at bay during the winter season

The relationship between exercise and the immune system is of great importance for coaches and their athletes during the winter season, when illness and infection can compromise an athlete in training and competition.

## The 'open window' theory

It has been suggested that bouts of heavy, prolonged exercise can lead to a temporary but clinically significant reduction in an athlete's immune function.

During this so-called 'open window' of altered immunity, which may last between three and 72 hours depending on the immune measure, viruses and bacteria may be able to gain a foothold, increasing the risk of infection.

Parts of the immune system that may change after prolonged, heavy exertion include:

- decrease in natural killer-cell activity — the ability to kill infected cells or cancer cells

- decrease in nasal and salivary Immunoglobulin A concentration — an antibody that combines with protein in saliva and tears to defend the body from invading germs
- high blood levels of the hormone cortisol cause high blood levels of neutrophils and low levels of lymphocytes — two different types of white blood cells
- decrease in nasal mucociliary clearance — sweeping movement of small hair-like structures in the nose
- increase in plasma concentrations of pro and anti-inflammatory immune cells known as cytokines.

Taken together, these changes suggest that the immune system is temporarily suppressed and stressed following prolonged endurance exercise.

It has been suggested that the immune system reacts to the inflammation caused by heavy exertion, diverting resources that normally protect against infection, particularly upper respiratory tract infection.

Thus it makes sense, but still remains unproven, that upper respiratory tract infection risk is probably increased when an athlete goes through repeated cycles of heavy exertion, has been exposed to viruses and bacteria that cause infections, and has experienced other stressors to the immune system, including lack of sleep, severe mental stress, poor nutrition or weight loss.

## Role of nutritional supplements in reducing exercise-induced changes in immunity

Although endurance athletes may be at increased risk of upper respiratory tract infections during heavy training cycles, they still need to exercise intensively to compete successfully. Therefore, one solution could be taking nutrient supplements that have the potential to boost immune function. The influence of carbohydrate, vitamin C and glutamine on the immune response to intense and prolonged exercise has been investigated with varying results.

## Carbohydrate

The most impressive results have been reported in carbohydrate supplementation studies. Research has established that blood glucose concentrations are linked to the body's hormonal system, including the stress hormones. This, in turn, is linked to the



body's immune system. By keeping the blood glucose levels up, stress hormones are reduced and immune system function is better maintained than when just water is ingested.

Research shows that athletes ingesting carbohydrate beverages before, during and after prolonged and intensive exercise should experience lowered physiologic stress.

This model suggests that carbohydrate supplementation during prolonged and intensive exercise maintains or elevates blood glucose concentrations, reduces the normal rise in stress hormones, and thereby counters negative immune changes.

### Vitamin C

Several studies of South African ultra-marathon runners have shown a link between vitamin C supplementation (about 600 mg/day for three weeks) and fewer reports of upper respiratory tract infection. While findings suggest that vitamin C supplementation may be beneficial during and after strenuous physical activity, the data does not prove that supplementation with vitamin C is also beneficial during moderate training.

### Glutamine

Glutamine, a non-essential amino acid (building block of protein), has attracted much attention from investigators. Lower levels of glutamine result in reduced immune function, and reduced blood glutamine levels have been observed after prolonged exercise. It has been suggested that glutamine supplementation may overcome the problems of overtraining, or the impaired immune function suffered by athletes involved in heavy training. However, most studies have not favoured such a relationship.

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### Summary

There is growing evidence that prolonged intensive exercise is associated with reduced immune function and an increased susceptibility to opportunistic infections, particularly upper respiratory tract infections. Exercise-induced increases in stress hormones may be responsible. Attempts have been made to prevent these negative changes through nutritional means, with carbohydrate supplementation via a sports drink offering the most promising results so far.

### Practical tips for coaches

Athletes are urged to eat a well-balanced diet, minimise other life stresses, avoid overtraining, get adequate sleep and space vigorous workouts as far apart as possible.

New research suggests that drinking carbohydrate beverages before, during, and after prolonged and intensive sessions can lessen the stress on the immune system.

The immune system appears to be suppressed during periods of low energy intake and weight reduction, so athletes should lose weight slowly during non-competitive phases.

Cold viruses are spread by personal contact and breathing the air near sick people. Athletes should avoid being around sick people before and after important events.

If the athlete is competing during winter, a flu shot may be recommended, particularly for those at high risk of infection.

## A letter to the coach

Dear Coach

Tomorrow morning my children start playing on the team you are coaching. They are going to run onto the oval and begin a great adventure that will include joys and disappointments. I hope you will take them by their young hands and teach them the things they will have to know.

Teach them to respect the umpire and that the umpire's judgment is final.

Teach them not to hate their competitors but to admire their skill.

Teach them it is just as important to be a playmaker as it is to be the scorer of the winning goal.

Teach them never to blame their team-mates when a goal is scored against them because five mistakes were made before the ball got to a scoring position.

Teach them that winning is not everything, but trying to win is.

Teach them to close their ears to the howling mob and to stand up for themselves if they think they are right.

Teach them gently, but not too gently, for the test of fire makes fine steel.

This is a big order, Coach, and I place my children in your hands. See what you can do for them. They are such nice little people.

Their parent.

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