

## Stirling Triathlon Club Performance Development Case Study

### Club background

Stirling Triathlon Club is one of Scotland's largest clubs. Since forming in the late 1980s, the club has grown to more than 300 members and a committee of 14, with everyone taking an active role in ensuring the club goes from strength to strength.

The club has an established coaching team consisting of nearly 20 coaches, an events portfolio which regularly includes two Scottish Championship events and a training programme that has specific sessions for youths and adults as well as training groups for triathletes competing from novice to ironman distances.

### Establishing the Gold, Silver & Bronze programme

One of the club's more innovative programmes has been the creation, development and impact of Gold, Silver and Bronze (GSB). Established in 2008, the programme was originally introduced to provide a training environment and support structure for athletes with aspirations to become elite and professional. It was aptly named as it provides three-tiered support with those on Gold receiving the fullest support. Inducted athletes onto the programme in year one included the likes of Fraser Cartmell, Gavin Noble and David McNamee.

The programme was established after consultation with the local sports development unit (Active Stirling) as well as the local sports council (Clubsport Stirling). A development plan was worked on and submitted to Clubsport Stirling who awarded the club a grant worth £7,000 in order to implement the GSB concept. There was further external funding provided from sponsors as well as [sportsmatch](#) funding, which provides pound for pound funding matching any external funding. This is available to all not-for-profit organisations.



## Athlete selection

During the initial phase of the programme, it was clear the athletes were improving, but due to their successes were moving on, either to other parts of the world to train and race or to national programmes. As a result, the support the programme hoped to offer was not being fully utilised.

It was clear the club had to look at who they were accepting onto the programme and 'why' they were accepting people. A decision was made to open up the GSB programme not to just athletes with the opportunity to turn professional, but to youths, juniors and age group athletes with the ambition and skill to compete on the world stage.

## GSB today

Now, the club has approximately 30 athletes on the GSB programme, ranging from youths who are competing nationally, to age group athletes taking part in aquathlon, duathlon and triathlon. Indeed, at the present time, there are seven members of the GSB squad who are representing Scotland in their respective age groups.

At a training session on a sunny Sunday morning in May, athletes attending included young Inter Regional Championship (IRC) level athlete Helen Mitchell, triathlonscotland Foundation Squad athlete Cliona Ferguson, former Ironman competitor Dave McDonald and British Triathlon 60-64 Age Group athlete Sybil Davidson, who has excelled at European and World Age Group Championships.



## Coaching

In order to cater for the high number of athletes, the club requires a driven head coach – namely Graham Coull - and a number of other coaches capable of supporting the delivery.

The club also utilises the knowledge and additional input from coaches from other sports who have a wealth of sport specific knowledge, such as club member and Level 4 athletics coach Gordon Crawford.

Graham Coull said: *“We will not play about with technique in the sessions as the athletes receive this information during other club sessions. What we provide is a race environment and real race scenarios so that athletes can be at their best as they enter events. We focus on delivering a high intensity session for a group of like-minded athletes who want to succeed in the sport”*

It could be easy to think that with such a large age range within the group and diverse performance levels, that it would be extremely hard to deliver to a group of this dynamic. However, Graham believes that this is one of the key strengths of the programme.

He said: *“We have athletes attending from different backgrounds, age groups and indeed different race disciplines and distances. Each individual’s skills and expertise differ and because of this each athlete is able to push the others on.”*

*“For example, some of our junior athletes are fantastic swimmers but this pushes some of our age groupers on, and vice versa, some of our seniors can really support the kids when it comes to the bike riding and running. It’s a great dynamic of the GSB squad to be able to push each other on.”*



It’s not just in the training environment where juniors and adults support one and other, it is indeed spread throughout the club.

Graham added: *“Within the club, we have a tremendous amount of skills and experiences, not just in triathlon racing, but in business, health, financial planning and such like. Those who have the drive and ambition to be professional athletes or age group representatives give so much to the sport and their training they don’t always have the time to commit the necessary time to other aspects of their lives. We try to encourage certain club members to support the athletes in their areas of expertise, creating a support network for them when required.”*

## How do the sessions work?

The sessions take place during the race season, and the aim is to get athletes 'race ready', sharpen up their race skills and reach their individual targets. Specific coaching advice and training structure is provided as well as various forms of fitness testing.

The sessions include:

- Benchmarking for swim, bike and run).
- Computrainer sessions and races with full data feedback.
- Team Races and relays.
- Access to elite testing facilities at the University of Stirling.
- Group and individual progress discussions.
- Race calendar planning.
- A TEAM environment.
- Mentoring from experienced GB Elite and Age Group athletes.



## A typical session

One observation of the training day, which took place at the University of Stirling in May, was the competitive feel oozing out each of athlete. It was evident the key ingredient to the success of the sessions lay in the environment created. During two time trials, a 400m swim and a 2km run, more than 50% of the athletes achieved personal best times and within the training programme, athletes young and old pushed themselves to their limits.

The session started at 6.30am and finished around 12pm. It comprised:

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| 06.30 | Poolside team meeting to cover ground rules and set individual targets for the season ahead.   |
| 07.00 | Swim session for open water followed by 400m time trial. Duathletes completed a track session. |
| 08.30 | Turbo set-up.  |
| 09.00 | Transition practice and bike warm-up.  |
| 09.15 | Turbo session.   |
| 10.25 | Track sessions aimed at pace control plus 1,600m and 2,000m time trials.                       |
| 11.00 | Feedback session.  |

Similar sessions are delivered on a monthly basis, focusing on race preparation, while also delivering moral and mental support.

## Challenges

Although the programme has been very successful in developing top performances, it has not always been easy to implement. Some of the key challenges over the last few years have included:

- Identifying coaches to lead the session and create the environment required.
- Accessing facilities.
- Being prepared to turn away members who were not capable.
- Catering for the different distances athletes compete in.
- Ensuring athletes fully commit to the programme.

While the programme has faced these challenges, it appears it also delivers on its promise, with many of athletes enjoying great race results. What is clear is the environment created allows for a positive and at the same time competitive training experience, which adds value to the programme Stirling Triathlon Club offers to its members.

For more information on Stirling Triathlon Club, visit: [www.stirlingtriathlon.com](http://www.stirlingtriathlon.com)

