Evaluation of Talent Development in Rugby League: Measuring the Impact of Coaching Interventions at Regional Talent Centre(s) on Player Performance

Introduction

The Rugby Football League (RFL) in partnership with sports coach UK are seeking expressions of interest from universities willing to undertake all, or part of, new research into the impact of coaches’ interventions on player performance. Expressions of interest are welcomed from academics working in this area or from universities who could provide suitably supervised post-graduate research capacity.

Background

The Rugby Football League (RFL) is the governing body for rugby league football in Britain and Ireland. Based at Red Hall in Leeds, it administers the England national rugby league team, the Challenge Cup, Super League and the Championships which form the professional and semi-professional structure game structure in the UK. The RFL also administers the amateur and junior game across the country in association with the British Amateur Rugby League Association (BARLA).

With the Rugby League World Cup being held in England & Wales in 2013 (http://www.rlwc2013.com/world_cup) this is an exciting time to collaborate with one of the nation’s leading governing bodies in a vibrant and growing sport. The game is one of Sport England's Top 10 ‘priority’ sports and as a result receives significant annual Government investment. In the last two years, Rugby League has experienced a 27% increase in participation with almost 250,000 people currently involved as players, coaches, match officials or volunteers. Participation among women and girls has also seen a healthy year-on-year increase of 42%. (Information from www.TheRFL.com)

sports coach UK support our partners to recruit, develop and retain the coaches they need to achieve their sports participation and performance goals.

Project Aims

The RFL have identified a need to evaluate the effectiveness of The RFL Talent Pathway. The talent pathway will play a crucial role in meeting the Rugby League Sustain and Excel targets. The effective development of the players selected to be on the talent pathway is fundamental to The RFL’s objective to be the number one rugby league nation in the world.

As part of this overall objective, RFL would like to commission the following research project:

Measuring the Impact of coaching interventions at one (potentially two) RFL Regional Talent Centre on player performance

It is envisaged that there is flexibility for the University to develop the research project in ways that meets their needs whilst continuing to achieve the stated objectives of The RFL.
It is expected that the University will determine the research methods to use to measure ‘coaching interventions’ and ‘player performance’ and they may include:

**Coaching interventions**
- implementing the RFL Player Development Curriculum
- Delivering coaching sessions
- Game management
- Providing instructions and advice

Player performance measurements may include
- Performance Profiling by players
- Performance Profiling by coaches
- Match analysis
- Interviews with players and coaches

For both of these projects researchers would be expected to carry out analysis of existing data along with primary research with coaches and participants.

**Research setting**

The RFL have implemented a Player Pathway to enhance the development of players with the ability and motivation to play rugby league at a high level. The pathway takes players from community clubs to National Team through Regional Talent Centres. For further information [http://www.therfl.co.uk/play/player_pathway](http://www.therfl.co.uk/play/player_pathway)

**Access to data and fieldwork**

Researchers will have access to the following data provided by the RFL:

- RFL Regional Talent Centres
- Performance Profiles – self-evaluation by players
- Performance Profiles – evaluation by coaches
- DVD footage of matches for analysis

Researchers will also be expected to identify and gather their own data from coaching staff and players. This could include:

- Interviews with talent coaches, mentors and relevant support personnel involved in the talent centre (pre and post training).
- Interviews with players in the talent development pathway.
- Observation of coaches’ (sample size TBC) behaviour and performance
- Observation of training days at the regional talent centre

**Required Outputs**

The University will produce a report for sports coach UK and the RFL on the impact of coaching interventions within the desired outcomes of the Talent Centres.

The University will have access to the data for publication in peer-reviewed academic journals, conference presentations, teaching and appropriate dissertations or thesis.

**Project Management**

The project would be managed by the Research Team at sports coach UK with support from the RFL to select a Talent Centre and assist with access to coaches and players.
Within the boundaries of the overall project, it is envisaged that the University will have considerable freedom to develop their project schedule based on their specific requirements.

Regular communication between the three organisations will be expected.

**Resources**

The RFL will provide access to coaching staff and players, the data collected as part of the Talent Centre and a designated member of staff within the Performance & Coaching Dept to provide technical support and deal with issues that occur.

Sports coach UK will provide a designated member of staff to manage the overall project.

There is no funding available for covering costs incurred by the University or the researcher.

**Requirements for Expressions of Interest**

In the first instance universities wishing to express an interest should include the following information:

1. Detail a proposed methodology for the project and how the results will be presented.
2. Illustrate their ability to conduct research in this area.
3. Demonstrate their familiarity, understanding and experience of the area under consideration.
4. Provide details on the team proposing to undertake the work.

**Timescales**

The current Talent Centre season runs from May through to Oct 2012. The start dates for the research are to be confirmed in discussions between The RFL, sports coach UK and the University.

The deadline for expressions of interest is **Friday 18 May**.

Expressions of interest can be sent to:

jmciroy@sportscoachuk.org
John McIlroy
Information Manager
sports coach UK