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**“Factors perceived to influence the preparation  
of athletes for performance at major games –  
considerations for low-resource campaigns”**

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## **ABSTRACT**

This abstract explores the factors perceived to influence the preparation of athletes for performance at major games, with a specific focus on the considerations and challenges faced by campaigns with minimal investment, constraints on time or limited expertise. Major games such as the Olympics, World Championships, and other international sporting events demand optimal performance from athletes, making effective preparation crucial. While high-resource campaigns often have access to state-of-the-art facilities, coaching expertise, and ample financial support, low-resource campaigns face unique constraints that necessitate alternative strategies for athlete preparation.

This study aims to identify and examine the key factors perceived to influence an athlete's preparation for performance at a pinnacle event (world championships or major games) and how can does this differ for athletes with limited resource (time, money, expertise)? These factors encompass various domains, including financial limitations, inadequate training facilities, limited access to technologies, limited access to qualified coaching and support staff, and the potential impact of these constraints on athlete performance. Furthermore, the study investigates how athletes and coaches in low-resource campaigns could adapt their training methodologies, tactics, and mental preparation to optimize performance despite limited resources.

To gather insights, a single-methods approach was utilized, using qualitative interviews with experts in the fields of coaches, athlete preparation, sport science and health and well-being. The data collected was analysed using thematic analysis to identify recurring themes, patterns, and potential strategies employed by low-resource campaigns to overcome challenges.

The key findings of the research detail the strategic and operational concepts of partnerships and relationships, components of performance, planning, expertise, and capability building and health and wellbeing (physical and mental) as critical success factors to include in the preparation of resource-poor athletes and shed light on the unique considerations and strategies employed by low-resource campaigns to enhance athlete preparation for major games.

By identifying effective approaches and best practices, this research contributes to the development of practical recommendations and interventions for low-resource campaigns seeking to optimize their athletes' performance despite limited resources. These insights benefit sports organizations, coaches, and athletes in similar contexts, providing guidance for resource allocation, training program design, and performance enhancement strategies.

Ultimately, this study seeks to bridge the gap between high-resource and low-resource campaigns by highlighting the factors that influence athlete preparation at major games and offering feasible solutions that can help level the playing field for athletes from low-resource settings.

Ce résumé explore les facteurs perçus comme influençant la préparation des athlètes en vue de leur performance lors de grands jeux, en mettant l'accent sur les considérations et les défis auxquels sont confrontées les campagnes avec un investissement minimal, des contraintes de temps ou une expertise limitée. Les grands jeux tels que les Jeux olympiques, les championnats du monde et d'autres événements sportifs internationaux exigent des performances optimales de la part des athlètes, d'où l'importance d'une préparation efficace. Alors que les campagnes disposant de ressources importantes ont souvent accès à des installations de pointe, à l'expertise des entraîneurs et à un soutien financier important, les campagnes disposant de peu de ressources sont confrontées à des contraintes uniques qui nécessitent des stratégies alternatives pour la préparation des athlètes.

Cette étude vise à identifier et à examiner les facteurs clés perçus comme influençant la préparation d'un athlète en vue d'une performance lors d'une manifestation de haut niveau (championnats du monde ou jeux majeurs) et comment cela diffère-t-il pour les athlètes disposant de ressources limitées (temps, argent, expertise) ? Ces facteurs englobent différents domaines, notamment les limitations financières, les installations d'entraînement inadéquates, l'accès limité aux technologies, l'accès limité à un personnel d'entraînement et de soutien qualifié, et l'impact potentiel de ces contraintes sur la performance de l'athlète. En outre, l'étude examine comment les athlètes et les entraîneurs des campagnes à faibles ressources peuvent adapter leurs méthodologies d'entraînement, leurs tactiques et leur préparation mentale afin d'optimiser leurs performances malgré des ressources limitées.

Pour recueillir des informations, une approche à méthode unique a été utilisée, avec des entretiens qualitatifs avec des experts dans les domaines de l'entraînement, de la préparation des athlètes, des sciences du sport, de la santé et du bien-être. Les données recueillies ont été analysées à l'aide d'une analyse thématique afin d'identifier les thèmes récurrents, les modèles et les stratégies potentielles employées par les campagnes à faibles ressources pour surmonter les difficultés. Les principaux résultats de la recherche détaillent les concepts stratégiques et opérationnels des partenariats et des relations, les composantes de la performance, la planification, l'expertise et le renforcement des capacités, ainsi que la santé et le bien-être (physique et mental) en tant que facteurs de réussite essentiels à inclure dans la préparation des athlètes à faibles ressources, et mettent en lumière les considérations et les stratégies uniques employées par les campagnes à faibles ressources pour améliorer la préparation des athlètes pour les grands jeux.

En identifiant les approches efficaces et les meilleures pratiques, cette recherche contribue à l'élaboration de recommandations et d'interventions pratiques pour les campagnes à faibles ressources qui cherchent à optimiser les performances de leurs athlètes malgré des ressources limitées. Les organisations sportives, les entraîneurs et les athlètes se trouvant dans des contextes similaires bénéficieront de ces informations, qui les guideront dans l'allocation des ressources, la conception des programmes d'entraînement et les stratégies d'amélioration des performances. En fin de compte, cette étude cherche à combler le fossé entre les campagnes à ressources élevées et à ressources faibles en mettant en évidence les facteurs qui influencent la préparation des athlètes lors des grands jeux et en proposant des solutions réalisables qui peuvent aider à égaliser les chances pour les athlètes issus de milieux à ressources faibles.

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## 1. INTRODUCTION

New Zealand has a rich history in international sporting success, backed by the significant investment provided by the New Zealand Government. As such and as seen in the representation below New Zealand is the only nation to have increased its total medal tally at the Summer Olympic Games for the past six consecutive games.

Country	2000	2004	2008	2012	2016	2020
New Zealand	4	5	9	13	18	20

In 2012, the New Zealand Government created the entity, High Performance Sport New Zealand (HPSNZ) which exists as a subsidiary of Sport New Zealand (SNZ), the government funded guardian of the New Zealand sport system that supports sport from grassroots through to Elite. It is responsible for leading the high-performance system in New Zealand. “Work in partnership to deliver a high performance system that enables our athletes to excel on the world stage” is the organisation’s mission, whereas the vision is “Inspiring Performance Every Day”. For HPSNZ to deliver these goals it requires a clear and unwavering strategic intent. HPSNZ targets and prioritises its investment and support to sports and athletes that both have and aspire to have medal potential at the Olympic and Paralympic Games (Summer and Winter) and non-Olympic sports that can win at World Championships. To lead the high performance sport system, HPSNZ works in partnership with National Sports Organisations (NSOs) and other key stakeholders by providing the following:

- Allocating resources to targeted sports and athletes (campaign investment, athlete training and excellence grants, study grants for athletes, medical insurance for athletes and training and support facilities)
- Allocating and delivering performance support services to athletes (medical, paramedical, physiology, psychology, nutrition, strength and conditioning, performance analysis, and well-being and life coaching)
- Delivering coach performance support (high performance coaching consultation, coach development)
- Assisting NSOs in building high performance capability and capacity (coaching, leadership, talent identification and development)

- Leading the system in the identification and development of integrated innovation, research and technology solutions.

The New Zealand Government by way of HPSNZ invests in excess of 60 million dollars (NZD) per annum and targets its investment through classifying its sports as either:

- Podium – sports that have a consistent recent history of podium performances at pinnacle events and are highly likely to deliver podium performances at future pinnacle events. These sports are contributing significantly to HPSNZ's international performance targets.
- Aspirational – Sports that have the potential to inspire the nation and its communities and potentially deliver podium performances now or in the future.



## **2. LITERATURE REVIEW**

This chapter presents a review of the literature relating to the preparation of athletes to perform optimally at pinnacle events such as the Olympic and Paralympic Games and World Championships. The first part of the chapter will describe Olympic sport and the context of how it operates in relation to the New Zealand high performance sport system. Following this an overview of the broader nature of sport management, sport and organisational psychology research relating to international sporting success will be provided. The following section will provide an overview of the SPLISS framework which attempts to conceptualise the key components of a high performance sports system required if a nation is to be competitive internationally. This overview will identify the wider body of literature relating to factors influencing performance and explain areas and perspectives that have been addressed to date and provides the context for accepted thinking on what is needed for high performance sport development.

### **2.1. Sport Management**

Sport management research has among other things, been used to significantly inform the development and implementation of systematic and strategic approaches to the development of elite athletes. Researchers across different countries have identified factors deemed necessary for successful elite athlete development (De Bosscher et al., 2009; Green & Houlihan, 2005; Houlihan & Green, 2008; Oakley & Green, 2001; Sotiriadou & Shilbury, 2009). As part of a largescale multi-nation initiative, De Bosscher and colleagues (De Bosscher, De Knop, Van Bottenburg, & Shibli, 2006; De Bosscher et al., 2009; De Bosscher et al., 2011) concluded that the sport policy factors leading to international sporting success can be classified under the following nine 'pillars': financial support, integrated approach to policy development, foundation and participation, talent identification and development system, athletic and post-career support, training facilities, coaching provision and coach development, national and international competition and scientific research. Notwithstanding the undoubted importance of these 'pillars', Fletcher and Wagstaff (2009) argued that 'these policy and strategic level developments alone will not guarantee international success; to attain and sustain successful outcomes such initiatives need to be inspirationally led, effectively managed and competently executed' (p. 427). Hence, if nations wish to maximise the likelihood of success at the Olympic Games, they must

not only design and develop effective elite sport policies, they must also have the right personnel in place to lead and manage their Olympic programmes, competently respond to and address issues, and create, optimise and maintain a high performance environment.

## **2.2. Sport Psychology**

A substantial body of sport psychology research has investigated the factors perceived to influence the Olympic performance of athletes (Gould, Greenleaf, Chung, & Guinan, 2002; Gould, Greenleaf, Guinan, & Yongchul, 2002; Greenleaf, Gould, & Dieffenbach, 2001) and coaches (Gould, Greenleaf, Guinan, et al., 2002; Olusoga, Maynard, Hays, & Butt, 2012). Interestingly, in this body of work, the management of organisational-related issues has been consistently identified as a significant distinguishing factor in achieving Olympic success. Example organisational-related issues include: travel, team cohesion, selection, spectators, coach and athlete interactions, and media distractions (Arnold & Fletcher, 2012). Reflecting on existing sport psychology and sport management research, Fletcher and Wagstaff (2009) observed that these two disciplines have typically focused on individual and governance level factors influencing Olympic performance respectively, which has created a 'twilight zone' between them. They concluded by suggesting that factors within this zone, such as an organisation's culture and personnel, need to be better understood so that sport organisations can more effectively manage these performance influences when preparing for Olympic competition.

## **2.3. Sports Policy Factors Leading to International Sporting Success (SPLISS)**

As reviewed in the literature the SPLISS model (De Bosscher et al., 2006) primarily focuses on policy and environmental factors, however it can be used to indirectly link to the preparation of athletes for optimal performance through the following modalities.

### **2.3.1. Talent Identification and Development**

The SPLISS model recognizes the importance of talent identification and development programs in achieving international sporting success. To prepare athletes for optimal performance, sports organizations and those preparing athletes can use the findings of the SPLISS model to design effective talent identification systems and development pathways. This includes identifying

young athletes with potential, providing them with appropriate preparation, training and resources, and monitoring their progress to ensure they reach their full potential.

### **2.3.2. Training and Coaching**

The SPLISS model acknowledges the significance of training and coaching in athlete preparation. It highlights the role of coaching expertise, training facilities, and resources as influential factors in achieving optimal performance. By considering the recommendations of the SPLISS model, coaches and trainers can design training and preparation programs that align with the identified policy factors, ensuring athletes receive the necessary support and guidance to enhance their performance.

### **2.3.3. Sports Science and Technology**

The SPLISS model emphasizes the role of sports science and technology in athlete preparation. It recognizes the impact of factors such as sports medicine, sports psychology, and technological advancements in sports performance analysis. To optimize athlete preparation, those planning and implementing preparation strategies can leverage the insights from the SPLISS model to invest in sports science research, utilize technologies, and provide sports-specific support services. This can include biomechanical analysis, physiological testing, mental skills training, and injury prevention strategies.

### **2.3.4. Competition Structure and Support**

The SPLISS model also considers the competition structure and support systems as important factors in achieving international success. By analysing the policies and support mechanisms that successful sporting nations have in place, coaches, support staff and sporting organisations can shape competition structures that enhance athlete preparation. This may involve creating high-level domestic leagues, establishing strong national teams, and providing financial and logistical support to athletes during training and competition.

Overall, while the SPLISS model primarily focuses on policy factors, it indirectly influences athlete preparation for optimal performance by providing insights into talent identification, training and coaching, sports science and technology, and competition structure and support. By considering the recommendations of the SPLISS model, those responsible for preparation

athletes and planning for their success can enhance their strategies and programs to maximize athlete performance at the international level.

#### **2.4. Olympic Performance Factors**

An in-depth indication of the factors that can influence performance are perhaps easiest seen at the summer and winter Olympic Games. History shows that many athletes and teams meet their performance targets at this event, whilst history is also littered with examples of others with similar talent and preparation failing to perform to the desired standard. In an attempt to better understand why this occurs, the United States Olympic Committee (USOC) commissioned a large-scale evaluative research project designed to distinguish the positive and negative factors that influence Olympic performance (Gould, Greenleaf, Chung, et al., 2002; Gould, Greenleaf, Guinan, et al., 2002; Gould, Guinan, Greenleaf, Medbery, & Peterson, 1999; Greenleaf et al., 2001) Throughout this four pronged body of work one of the most consistent findings was that the management of organisational-related issues is a significant distinguishing factor in achieving Olympic success.

The first of four papers in the research project employed the method of in-depth focus group interviews conducted with Olympic athletes and coaches. The summary of these results showed that teams that met or exceeded expectations participated in centralised live-in training programmes with strong feelings of perceived support. Teams that did not meet performance expectations indicated perceiving planning and team cohesion problems, faced travel problems, and issues related to coaching problems (Gould et al., 1999). The second of the qualitative studies concentrated on in-depth interviews with athletes in order to gain greater insights into the experiences of Olympic athletes (Greenleaf et al., 2001). Common factors shown to have positively influenced performance included using support services, having high quality coaching, and positive coach–athlete relationships. Conversely, the common factors perceived to have negatively influenced performance included departing from normal routine, facing media distractions, and encountering coach issues. Through the use of athlete surveys the third paper in the research project aimed to establish the frequency and magnitude of the individual factors that athletes thought influenced their Olympic performance (Gould, Greenleaf, Chung, et al., 2002). Results showed that a number of organisational factors were perceived to influence

performance, including cohesion, positive coach–athlete relationships, the coach's ability to deal with crises, coaching expectations, general social support, ticketing arrangements, venue transportation difficulties, and Olympic village distractions. The final study also conducted via the use of surveys, however on this occasion with Olympic coaches, again showed a large number of organisational factors were perceived to have influenced athlete performances including; having plans for dealing with distractions, strong team chemistry and cohesion, loud and enthusiastic crowd support, and fair and effective team selection (Gould, Greenleaf, Guinan, et al., 2002). Taking the above factors into consideration one can surmise that whilst Olympic performance is undoubtedly a multifaceted phenomenon, several organisational related factors appear to have a perceived impact on performance outcomes.

## **2.5. Roles within Sport Teams**

Moore and Collins (1996) when investigating role-related insights in elite sport employed the use of case studies to investigate the implications of contrasting perceptions of role responsibilities for individual and team functioning. The elite athletes sampled reported varying perceptions of the administrative and social support roles they expected coaches and administrators to fulfil. This could clearly be seen as having a potential impact on role execution and team cohesion. Extending on this work Collins, Moore, Mitchell, and Alpress (1999) interviewed physiotherapists operating in international and/or professional sport. A number of key issues in the provision of effective support were identified, including the importance of medical and scientific based roles and their interrelations with coaches and athletes. The main issues identified were role conflict in medical support personnel, conflicts of ethical duty to athletes and impression management. Similar findings were reported by (Reid, Stewart, & Thorne, 2004) in their analysis of multidisciplinary sport science teams in Australian high performance sport. Collectively, these findings suggest that whilst multidimensional and multidisciplinary support teams are now commonplace amongst elite sport teams this can often lead to or exacerbate role-related issues. It has therefore become important for the wider performance team (e.g. high performance directors, coaches, science, medical and support staff) to communicate and reinforce their understanding of individual and group roles in order to ensure cohesion amongst the group and maximise the potential for effective organisational functioning.

## **2.6. Organisational Success Factors**

With the increasing financial investment at government level, NSOs are having to become more accountable against performance outcomes, not least podium performances at international pinnacle events including the Olympic and Paralympic Games, Commonwealth Games and World Championships. Acknowledging the distinction between performance and organisational achievement, Weinberg and McDermott (2002) conducted a study to identify the critical success factors relevant to organisational success.

Through interviewing 20 sport and business leaders about their perceptions of organisational effectiveness in the area of group dynamics, including leadership, group cohesion and communication they were able to show that there was a common agreement of the factors relating to organisational success. The main leadership factors were leader characteristics, interpersonal skills, and leadership skills. An important theme to emerge from this section of the study was the ability to portray various leadership styles in approaching organisational outcomes, an approach which requires skills such as listening, empathy and trust. The main group cohesion factors were: benefits of cohesion, types of cohesion, people enhancing cohesion, techniques fostering cohesion and barriers to cohesion. The main communication factors were message characteristics, communication benefits, communication techniques, and communication barriers.

Whilst remaining focused on the purpose of their research, Weinberg and McDermott (2002) centred their discussion of the results on the similarities between successful sport and business organisations. The importance of performance leadership and management concepts in today's elite sport environment was evident through the discussion. More specifically, the implication that head coaches, team managers, and HPDs need to possess an array of complex managerial skills, including the ability to inspire and motivate others, build a unified team of administrators and technical staff, and maintain clear lines of communication in order to achieve success.

## **2.7. Performance Environments**

Douglas and Carless (2006a, 2006b) in a study commissioned by UK Sport looked further into the performance environment of competitive sport by interviewing athletes about the personal, lifestyle and environmental factors that affect sporting performance. Whilst a number of

limitations are present in the study (e.g., failing to specify the performance level of the sample and over half of the participants being retired at the time of data collection) the findings do highlight the important role of relationships with significant others (i.e., coaches and families), access to funding and communication within the team.

A more in-depth analysis conducted by Pain and Harwood (2007) and Pain and Harwood (2008) further refined the concept of the performance environment via two studies focussed on the England youth football team. The data from both studies showed that organisational factors were perceived as having both a potentially positive (e.g., planning and preparation for the competition environment and opposition, effective rest, and entertainment time) and negative (e.g., boredom and lack of information about opposition) effect on performance. Through the research the authors concluded that organisational issues had the least impact on performance, however following a closer examination of the reported data by Fletcher and Wagstaff (2009) their conclusion was that the opposite was true with factors such as training facilities, role understanding and inadequate nutrition all influencing performance. What this does highlight however, is the important distinction and clarification regarding what exactly constitutes the organisational environment in elite sport. This is important concept for researchers to note as without adequate distinction research findings could be regarded as flawed and highly subjective.

From a review of the literature it can be concluded that there are a number of factors that can be perceived to impact an athlete's ability to prepare for and perform at pinnacle events. Pinnacle events are events which athletes attribute to being of the highest level and will ordinarily include, world championships and Olympic Games. High level factors relating to sports management, sport psychology and organisational psychology have all been found to impact preparation and performance as have perceptions of roles within sports teams and the specific factors related to performance environments in elite sport.

### **3. RESEARCH APPROACH**

#### **3.1. Method**

The process taken to develop the data collection strategy was to initially define the research question and objectives. This was done to support the development of a clear understanding as to what was to be learnt from the participants.

#### **3.2. Research Question**

- What are the factors perceived to influence an athlete's preparation for performance at a pinnacle event (world championships or major games) and how does this differ for athletes with limited resource (time, money, expertise)?

#### **3.3. Objectives**

- The objective of this study is make recommendations as to a concept framework of support that can be tailored to help athletes as they prepare to perform at pinnacle events (world championships or major games).

#### **3.4. Design**

Qualitative research is grounded in the sense that it is based on the evidence gathered about the context or topic being studied (Hair, Celsi, Money, Samouel, & Page, 2015) and was therefore deemed best suited to this study as the data produced will bring greater depth and understanding as to their full implications of the topic as opposed to a qualitative number- based approach.

The specific data collection method adopted was a semi-structured interview approach. Semi-structured interviews combine a pre-determined set of open questions with the intent of prompting discussion thus enabling the interviewer the opportunity to explore particular themes or responses further (Hair et al., 2015). One of the major advantages of semi-structured interviews, as Skinner, Edwards, and Corbett (2014) point out, is that they enable the participant to seek further clarification and information where required and also allow researchers to ask additional questions where they feel there is insufficient detail. This approach was deemed appropriate for this exploratory study due to the limited size and comprehensive and diverse knowledge base of the sample population.



### **3.5. Participants**

Due to the small sample size and first-hand knowledge of the potential participants a purposive sampling technique was employed to recruit participants with first-hand knowledge and experience of the research agenda (Camic, Rhodes, & Yardley, 2003). Purposive sampling involves selecting elements of a sample for a specific purpose, with the advantage of convenience, speed and low cost (Hair et al., 2015). Accordingly, the selection criterion was that participants had to be either: a current or former support service provider or strategic advisor within the New Zealand High Performance Sports system. Those identified were contacted by email. This communication described the purpose of the study, detailed what the interview process would entail, outlined the ethical-related rights for participants, and invited them to participate. This resulted in 10 potential participants. Nine of the 10 participants in the sample expressed an interest and were available to participate. The participants were then contacted by a subsequent email to arrange a date and time for the interview. The sample consisted of five male and four female participants who had worked in elite sport for between nine and 43 years ( $M = 21.8$ ,  $SD = 11.4$ ). The broad areas of expertise of the participants included: coaching, medicine, health and wellbeing, physiotherapy and performance therapies, preparation and recovery systems, games-time delivery, operational, strategic and system leadership, sport psychology and strength and conditioning. The interviews ranged in duration from 18 to 36 minutes ( $M = 26$ ,  $SD = 5.60$ ). All interviews were conducted through the Microsoft Teams platform. Following the completion of the interviews, transcripts were then generated through Microsoft Team and quality assured by the researcher. All participants were offered the right to review the interview transcripts.

### **3.6. Interview Development and Design**

An interview guide was developed through selecting the key topic areas identified in the literature review and phrasing questions that would illicit a response relative to the topic area. A complete interview guide was separated into sections with section 1 outlining the purpose of the study, information regarding the interview process, and a clear description of interviewees' ethical-related rights. Specifically, participants will be informed that all personally identifiable information concerning their participation would not be disclosed at any stage of the research process, that only the researcher would have access to their interview data, and that they were

free to withdraw from the study at any point. In section 2, participants were offered the opportunity to clarify their understanding of the study. Section 3 consisted of approximately eight questions broadly exploring the factors that were perceived to influence an athlete preparation for performance at a pinnacle event (example topics areas included physical, psychological, social, environmental, and operational). The interview guide will be used to steer the interviewer on the topics/areas to be covered and information required; however, the interviewer used discretion in the interview itself on how to best phrase questions on the chosen areas, or the order of addressing each to maintain the flow of the interview.

### **3.7. Data Analysis**

To provide a detailed review of the research a thematic analysis of the interview transcripts was conducted. Krippendorff (2004) highlighted that a content analysis can provide new insights into a research area or particular phenomenon via the emergence and interpretation of themes from interview transcripts. Furthermore, incorporating inductive reasoning within these procedures can help to foster innovation (Cassell & Symon, 2004; Gibbs, 2007).

The first stage of the content analysis involved analysing and coding the transcripts and extracting raw-data quotes pertaining to factors perceived to influence performance preparation. Coded data was then organised as suggested by Biddle, Markland, Gilbourne, Chatzisarantis, and Sparkes (2001) into common themes, so that similar units are grouped together into lower order themes and separated away from units with different meaning.

The same process was then repeated with the lower-order themes, which were grouped together into higher-order themes. Higher-order themes were subsequently pieced together into appropriate general dimensions to form a comprehensive picture of the participants' collective experiences. To illustrate how often each theme was mentioned by participants, a frequency analysis was also conducted (Neuendorf, 2002). Although, the formation of themes was not dependent on their frequency of occurrence, but rather each theme's capacity to represent the knowledge captured in the interview.

#### 4. RESULTS AND DATA ANALYSIS

The interview data produced 316 raw data quotes pertaining to factors perceived to influence the preparation of athletes for performance at pinnacle events. Common themes among the raw data quotes were categorised into 16 lower-order themes, six higher-order themes, and two general dimensions: factors related to the pillars of sport performance and factors related to the environment and context of the performance. Pillar related factors were defined as those influencing the physical, psychological, technical, and tactical aspects of the performance. Environment related factors were defined as those that sat outside the physical performance and often supported the process to achieving an optimal performance, these includes themes such as planning, relationships, communication, clarity, needs and gap assessment.

##### 4.1. Performance-Related Factors Perceived to Influence Athlete Preparation

The general dimension of performance-related factors consisted of four higher-order themes: physical, psychological, technical, and tactical.

General Dimension: Performance		
Lower Order Theme		Higher Order Theme
2	Injury Prevention and Management	<b>Physical</b> 30
10	Performance and Development	
18	Physical Health and Maintenance	
1	Awareness and Understanding	<b>Tactical</b> 1
1	Skill Competency	<b>Technical</b> 1
13	Mental Skills Training	<b>Psychological and Mental Skills</b> 37
19	Process and routine	
5	Coping	

In terms of the influence that performance factors could have on an athletes' preparation, the most frequently cited theme were the psychological and mental skills capacities of the athlete and the ability to have clarity on the requirement of the performance in relation to the achievement of the agreed goals. Other common factors that were linked to psychology were related to goal setting, the achievement realistic goals, the ability to manage and cope with high pressure situations and the importance on development of routines.

The following quotes illustrate how two participants suggest that to enhance performance preparation it is important to understand the multi-faceted psychological requirements of training, competition, and the environment when developing preparation plans for athletes:

*“I think ultimately, for most athletes when you get to the elite level, the physical preparation looks reasonably similar and largely the key determinant of success at the end of the day its being able to perform under pressure and that's generally the top two inches. In terms of psychological preparation, that's really going to enable you to deliver on the day. For me the psychological aspect of preparation is probably the one that's most overlooked but makes the biggest difference when it actually counts” (Participant 3).*

*“Often, it's not the most talented ones that handle the pressure and perform to their best on the day. So, I think the mental prep and making sure that you're healthy and confident in your own body and that you can go into the competition thinking, well, on this day I can give it 100%” (Participant 1).*

The participants also perceived that a number of physical factors were important in the preparation of athletes for elite performance. More specifically, several participants discussed the importance of understanding the current health and injury status of the athlete and the training load, volume and periodization of the athlete in the build-up to the event. In relation to performance preparation, the participants believed that specific emphasis should be placed on understanding the current state of the athlete in relation to the physical requirements to perform coupled with any pre-existing health or injury concerns were critically important to ensuring the athlete would receive the right advice, guidance, and direction in developing an impactful preparation plan. Alongside the current health and injury status of the athlete, the participants spoke about the importance of understanding the physical requirements of the performance and ensuring these were being effectively addressed in the planning and implementation of the training plan. This specifically related to the periodized plan of the athlete and the current training load and volume.

The following quote illustrates how one participant suggests that it is important to understand the physical requirements of the performance and the ability to have an impact when designing and delivering an optimal performance preparation plan:

*“It would be important to understand the physical components, the training load, intensity, volume, the timing of the load and how it fits into the overall plan. If you have a short period of time, I would be zoning in on the things that I know that the group around that athlete can actually improve or impact the most” (Participant 4).*

In addition to the physical requirement of the performance, it was stressed that an understanding of the nutritional requirements relating to the training and performance environment were important to consider, as were the technical and tactical elements of the sport.

#### 4.2. Environmental-Related Factors Perceived to Influence Athlete Preparation

The general dimension of environmental-related factors consisted of four higher-order themes: planning and organization, relationships and collaboration, the context of the athlete and campaign and mental and physical well-being.

General Dimension: Environment	
Lower Order Theme	Higher Order Theme
45 Monitoring and Assessment	<b>Planning and Organisation</b> 84
3 Learning and Improvement	
35 Role Clarity and Alignment	
1 Impact	
40 Interpersonal Dynamics	<b>Relationship and Collaboration</b> 77
6 Collaboration	
31 Knowledge and Expertise	
12 Aspirations and Success	<b>Mental and Physical Well-being</b> 44
16 Well-being and Balance	
16 Psychological Aspects	
3 Opportunities and Barriers	<b>Context</b> 42
15 Situational Awareness	
24 Support and Networks	

In terms of the influence that environmental factors could have on an athletes' preparation, the most frequently cited themes were related to planning and organisations and specifically

referenced the requirement for adequate monitoring and assessment practices, role clarity and alignment of expectations.

*“I think, having that really clear road map of what you're trying to achieve is important for the athlete, but it also helps to make sure that anyone who exists in the tight team around the athlete knows what the plan is and is clear on their respective roles and where they can have impact” (Participant 4).*

Other common factors that were linked to planning and organisation were having strong philosophies of learning and improvement and understanding the ability to have an impact on an outcome when implementing an athletes' preparation plan.

The participants also perceived that a number of factors related to relationships and collaboration important in the preparation of athletes for elite performance. More specifically, several participants discussed the importance of interpersonal dynamics and knowledge and expertise. Supported by the vast experience base of the participants it was strongly emphasised that to have an effective performance preparation plan the team around the athletes needed to include experts in their relative fields with strong collaboration and good interpersonal dynamics. More specifically related to interpersonal dynamics were the requirement for those in the athletes' inner circle to operate from a position of honesty, trust, flexibility, influence, and with a view to mitigating and minimizing any unneeded noise or distractions within the campaign.

*“Because invariably during the preparation phase, this is the time when you're right on the edge, and over and over it's the time people get injured. So, it's trying to just make sure that actually this is within acceptable limits. And so that's where your relationships become critical because that's when you start to have that influence that might actually make the difference” (Participant 1).*

*“How little noise can we make in that project? Especially depending on if that runway's really, short. You don't want to make a whole lot of*

*changes or get an athlete stressed out about something that's not working properly right before a major competition" (Participant 1).*

The context of the athlete and campaign were also perceived to have an influence on performance in respect to the opportunities that were available, barriers to performance, support and networks available and also the overall situational awareness of those involved in key decision making. The support and networks theme is a key consideration to factor into performance preparation and largely revolves around the concept of the inter-disciplinary team that supports the athlete and coach in the preparation planning. This team can consist of technical experts in fields important to the athlete and performance. For example, coaching, strength and conditioning, physiology, physiotherapy, performance analysis, sports psychology, health, and well-being. The constant theme running through the general theme of environmental considerations is that of situational awareness and role clarity within the inter-disciplinary team.

*"It's not about how specialist, how expert you are or all the experience or knowledge that you bring. It's actually how you apply it into the environment to the individual and how you're able to engage and communicate with the sport, the coach, the athlete and the support team. They don't need to know everything you know; they just need to know what will make them better" (Participant 2).*

*"They (the support provider) can talk and connect with who has high EQ and high situational awareness so that they can read the room, read the athlete, and adjust. Whether they need a reality check, whether they need a morale booster, whether they need to have a directive that this is what you need to focus on right now. If you try to grow a tree, you need sun and water. You need to be aware of the situation and adapt your approach to suit and in line with your role" (Participant 3).*

The fourth lower-order theme represented within the general dimension of environment was that relating to the mental and physical well-being of the athlete. Sub factors within this included

aspirations, definition of success, balance and the psychological concepts of confidence, identity, mindset, motivation, and purpose.

*“So, part of my role is helping them sort out a definition of what success is going to look like, what’s realistic. And it’s critical because win, lose or draw you know they are still going to have value and be loved and be the same person. I personally think that we’re in the business of creating better people not just better athletes and that wider perspective of making sure they’ve got plans post the event and post sport is vitally important.” (Participant 3).*

*“I think one of the learnings in the last couple of decades for me is that we need to be always empowering the individual to make good decisions. It’s about making informed choices about their health and wellbeing” (Participant 2).*

*I think, these days, making sure that we’ve got good mental health support. Beyond, 15 to 20 years ago, mental health was a topic, but it was very small. It was all about mental skills. It was all about motivation and focus and all these skills that you can build. But it was largely making an assumption that athletes are all mentally capable and that they they’ve got no mental health concerns and we know that wasn’t to be the truth and so I think for me, these days the mental health side of things has become much more an important focus as we prepare for pinnacle events than it ever has in the past” (Participant 1).*



## 5. DISCUSSION

The evolution of elite level sport development has transformed performance success at a pinnacle event into a complex venture that no longer relies solely on an athlete, but also on how effectively his or her preparation for the event is planned, implemented, and executed. In view of the important role preparation plays in influencing performance of athletes, this study provides an insight into the factors which are perceived to influence the preparation of an athlete and how these may be influenced by limited resource (time, finance, expertise). These factors are organised into two general dimensions: performance-related factors (i.e., physical, psychological, and mental skills, technical and tactical) and environment-related factors (i.e., planning and organization, relationships and collaboration, mental and physical well-being and the context of the campaign. It is neither the performance nor the environment alone, however, which shapes how effective preparation of an athlete occurs, rather it is the interaction between the two. This observation is somewhat synergistic with Lewin (1935) expression (Arnold et al., 2015) for human behaviour of  $B = f(P \times E)$ , whereby behaviour is a function of the interaction between a person and the environment.

### 5.1. Performance-Related Factors Perceived to Influence Athlete Preparation

Discussing first the performance-related factors identified in this study, these perceived performance influences relate to the pillars of sport performance and consist of four higher-order themes. The first of these are psychological and mental skills. This pillar addresses the psychological skills and mental resilience of athletes. It is widely understood that athletes need to develop mental toughness, focus, concentration, confidence, and emotional control to perform optimally under pressure. Mental and psychological development equip athletes with the tools to manage stress, handle setbacks, and maintain a positive mindset. Psychologists, in an attempt to better support athletes, have to date tended to focus their research efforts on the mental skills that athletes require on the sport field, such as decision making (Baker, Côte, & Abernethy, 2003) and communication (Jones & Lavallee, 2009).

The findings of the present study extend sport psychology research by examining skills within the performance preparation context, and specifically the skills that athletes are required to possess and develop to optimally prepare for elite performance. Specific psychological and

mental skills that were discussed by the participants include: decision making, process and routine, communication, coping in high pressure situations, the ability to focus and having high levels of clarity relating to the performance requirements. It is pivotal that athletes develop such skills because research has shown that communication (Joshi, 2009), decision making (Kunc & Morecroft, 2010) and clarity (Sengul, Gimeno, & Dial, 2012) can influence performance preparation across various contexts.

In addition to the psychological and mental skills, the physical skills relative to the requirements of the performance were also identified as having an impact on performance preparation of athletes. This pillar focuses on enhancing an athlete's physical abilities, including strength, endurance, speed, flexibility, and agility. Optimal performance requires athletes to be in peak physical condition, and a well-designed training program can help them develop the necessary physical attributes. It is important to note that the physical preparation required should be tailored and focused on the requirements of the sport, event, and competition parameters. This position is supported through the work completed by Greenleaf, Gould & Dieffenbach (2001) when interviewing Atlanta and Nagano Olympians on the factors perceived to have positively and/or negatively influenced their performance. Major factors perceived to have positively influenced performance included physical preparation, mental skills development, attitude towards the Olympics, support services and facilitation, multifaceted preparation, and coaching. Major factors perceived to have negatively influenced performance included departing from normal routine, media distractions, coach issues, overtraining, and injury.

Following on from high-order themes of physical skills and psychological and mental skills, the technical and tactical skills of the athlete were raised as key factors to take into consideration when preparing an athlete for performance at a major event. Technical development and preparation emphasise the acquisition and mastery of sport-specific skills and techniques. Athletes need to develop proper technique, precision, and efficiency in executing the required movements and actions in their sport, development in this area ensures that athletes possess the necessary skills to perform at their best. In reference to tactical development and preparation, this area revolves around the strategic and mental aspects of sport. To compete and be successful at the elite level athletes must understand the tactical nuances of their sport,

including game plans, strategies, and decision-making processes. Tactical development helps athletes analyse situations, make effective decisions, and outperform their opponents through intelligent play.

## **5.2. Environment-Related Factors Perceived to Influence Athlete Preparation**

Turning to the environment-related factors perceived to influence that preparation of athletes, these relate to the context in which the athlete operates and consist of four higher-order themes: planning and organisation, relationships and collaboration, mental and physical well-being and context of the athlete and campaign.

From the higher-order theme of the context of the athlete and campaign is supported by Arnold et al. (2012) who noted that as performance at the elite level is dependent on the context in which the players operate. Athletes and those involved in their preparation must develop contextual awareness of the environment in which they operate in. This involves making an assessment of the state when entering a role, adapting behaviour to support the sport or culture that they are working within, being proactive with change and constantly assessing and reviewing the circumstances. These findings relate to the present study primarily through the lower-order themes of creating and maintaining situational awareness, including the resourcing requirements and constraints of the athlete and campaign. By understanding these factors those involved in the preparation of athletes will be better informed when making decisions and be able to create stronger relationships with their athletes and associated support networks.

The second higher-order theme in this dimension refers to the planning and organisational aspects of the environment in which the athlete is situated. Significant lower-order themes within this construct are those of monitoring, assessment, and alignment. This theme forms an important part of ensuring performance outcomes, as clearly developed plans, defined roles, responsibilities, and boundaries in elite sport can help to enhance team atmosphere, productivity, functioning, and reduce social loafing (Chelladurai, 2007; Reid et al., 2004). If planning functions, roles and responsibilities are not effectively led and managed, individuals can experience role stress, frustration, dissatisfaction, tension, and communication and interpersonal relationship difficulties (Mullins & Christy, 2013). The importance of this dimension should not be underestimated, and those preparing athletes should prioritise time and expertise

to ensure adequate plans are created and implements that clearly define roles and responsibility, monitoring, assessment, and impact.

Following on from the higher-order theme of planning and organisation, the theme of relationships and collaboration is the third environment-related factor perceived to influence the preparation of athletes. While previous research in sport has focussed on athletes' (Hardy & Crace, 1997; Yukelson, 1997) and coaches' (Bloom, Stevens, & Wickwire, 2003; Newin, Bloom, & Loughhead, 2008) perceptions of building a team and culture, the findings from this study provide additional knowledge in this area by adding context received from those involved in the preparation of athletes. Comments received in the study support those outlined by Arnold et al. (2012) and include generating a team philosophy, bringing the team together, creating connections, prioritising role clarity and awareness, listening effectively and communicating and showing respect for all involved to ensure feelings of value and inclusion. Sport psychology literature has to date focused on the potential performance impact of an athlete's relationships and interactions with other athletes (Carron, Colman, Wheeler, & Stevens, 2002), coaches (Jowett & Cockerill, 2002), and parents (Wylleman, De Knop, Ewing, & Cumming, 2000). The present research highlights the perceived influences of a number of other personnel on the preparation of athletes. These personnel include families, friends, partners, elite sport governance agencies, administrative staff, technical staff, coaches, athletes, and national governing bodies.

These findings are important in relation to this research as when drawing parallels to the earlier topic of relationship and collaboration, specifically referencing the skills of communication and decision making, it could be argued that those involved in preparing an athlete for performance may be more effective having a combination of many skills and personality traits which when used in combination will have a better impact on performance than when used in isolation.

Social identity theory suggests that social processes can cause people to adapt their perceptions and behaviours based on the opportunities and restrictions inherent in the interpersonal situation (Haslam, van Knippenberg, Platow, & Ellemers, 2014). As the personnel previously mentioned are perceived to have influence on the preparation of an athlete, this

construct can be linked to the beliefs of social identity theory. Therefore, if those tasked with preparing athletes are mindful to effectively engage and interact with personnel both internal and external to the environment, they will be able to enhance their own role delivery and performance (Agle, Mitchell, & Sonnenfeld, 1999). This relates to the present study by suggesting that if those preparing athletes understand the motivation and expectations of the people they are engaging with, they will be better suited to manage this expectation and therefore create positive win-win relationships and in turn mitigate any potential negative impact on role delivery or performance.

Finally, in addition to the higher-order themes of the context of the athlete and campaign, planning and organisation and relationships and collaboration the participants spoke about taking careful consideration of the mental and physical well-being of the athlete and those that are linked to the campaign.

Well-being is often viewed as a complex, encompassing emotional, psychological, and social functioning (Thompson & Schary, 2021). Athletes with a positive level of overall well-being perform optimally in high-pressure environments, will often overcome obstacles, and enjoy successful careers. Conversely, Poucher et al. (2019) cites stressors which can negatively affect elite athletes' well-being include overtraining, pressures to continuously perform well, and the associated impact of not meeting expectation or potential. Many elite athletes will also face the challenge of developing and fostering an identity outside that of the single-focussed athlete persona. According to Lundqvist, 2011; Tracey & Elcombe, 2004; Wiese-Bjornsal, 2009 this can lead to, high levels of psychosocial stress and competitive anxiety, overtraining and burnout and negative emotional adjustments to sports injuries. These common stressors can eventually lower over-all well-being (Gould et al., 1999). Thus, sports have the potential to influence the well-being of athletes positively or negatively (Lundqvist, 2011). Therefore, when preparing an athlete for elite performance, attaining, and ensuring a healthy state of physical and mental well-being is critical for athletes and will help support them to develop strategies to overcome challenges, improve performance, and enjoy career longevity (Lundqvist, 2011).

### **5.3. Critical Success Factors for Supporting Resource-Poor Athletes to Prepare for Elite Performance**

When filtering the performance and environmental factors perceived to influence performance preparation through the lens of limited resource the key elements that were perceived to be critical to mission success can be described and categorised into the following strategic and operational classifications.

#### **5.3.1. Partnerships and Relationships**

Partnerships are with key organisations such as the NOC, NF and funding bodies. The key determinants to these partnerships are the access to resources that are timely and designed to have an impact on the performance need. Clear and functional relationships are critical between the athlete, coach and those close to the athlete (often referred to as the 'tight team'). The composition of this circle of influence is bespoke to each campaign and can include parents, coaches, mentors, and key support providers such as the physiotherapist or the strength and conditioning provider and will often have a high level of influence on decision making. The relationship within the 'tight team' and the wider multi-disciplinary team which consists of all those that feed into or have a role within delivering the performance interventions designed to address the performance gap needs to operate with the following key principles: high trust, role clarity, ability to have an impact, honesty, flexibility, and with a mindset to mitigating and minimizing any unneeded noise or distractions within the campaign.

#### **5.3.2. Components of Performance**

This area relates to the performance expectations of the campaign which need to be realistic, relevant, measurable, and achievable, and aligned to a detailed understanding of the performance gap. Interventions will then be developed by the multi-disciplinary team that are designed to address the gap and add to overall performance preparation. Campaigns will then prioritise any existing or newly sourced resource to the interventions based on the priorities and decision-making principles of the campaign. Prioritisation of resource is the critical factor in this piece of performance preparation as campaigns low on resource do not have the benefit of being able to use a trial-and-error approach to decision making and will often only get one 'bite at the cherry' when implementing performance preparation strategies.

### **5.3.3.Planning, Expertise and Capability Building**

The importance of effective and detailed planning cannot be underestimated in the overall picture of performance preparation. Specific importance is placed on planning and the ability to effectively prioritise when viewed through the context of limited resource, as plans will often need to be modified based on changes in resource availability. A resource limited campaign will also require specific expertise in the areas relevant to the performance environment, expectation, and gap. Finding experts in the relevant areas that can, and are able to, pass on knowledge and expertise is also critical to resource limited performance preparation as often these skills will not be readily available in the tight team and a resource limited campaign may not have access to skills and expertise in the long term.

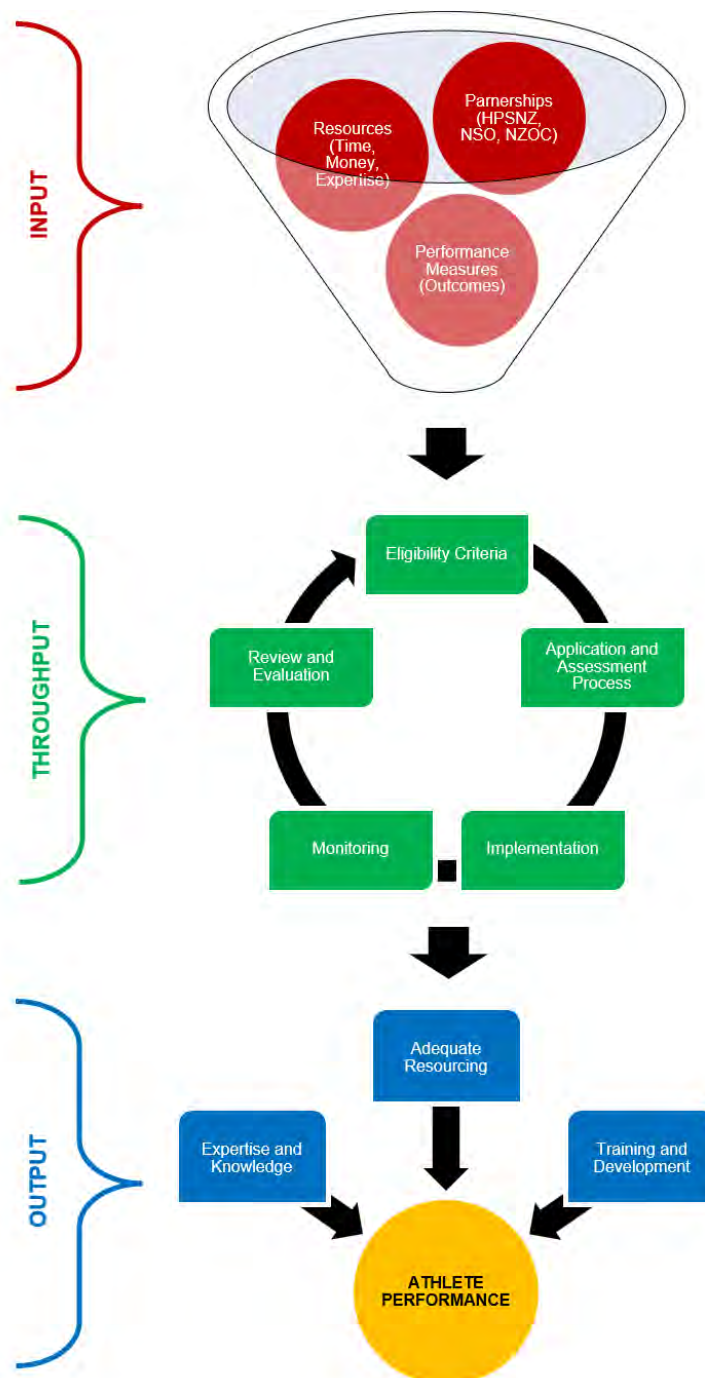
### **5.3.4.Health and Wellbeing – Physical and Mental**

The concepts of health and wellbeing are critical factors to consider when preparing any athlete for performance whether the campaign is constrained for resource or not. A special emphasis should be placed on initial screening and evaluation of athletes as they first engage with dedicated service providers in the areas of physical health and mental wellbeing. The benefit of this is two-fold, to gain a baseline assessment of physical health to then develop physical training plans applicable to the physical capability of the athlete or develop injury management and recovery plans should the athlete be in substandard physical condition and to understanding the psychological capabilities and mental wellbeing of the athlete, this will then provide service providers with the relevant information to develop fit-for-purpose intervention and development plans that will be used to grow and develop the athlete in preparation for performance and outside of sport life situations.

## **5.4. Conceptual Framework for Supporting Resource-Poor Athletes to Prepare for Elite Performance: Input – Throughput – Output**

Drawing on the critical success factors relevant to the preparation of resource poor athletes these can be described via input, throughput, and output processes that can be used to determine a framework for the allocation of resources for performance preparation.

Input is this instance concerns the resource required and available to address the gap and/or opportunity within the campaign and desired performance. Additionally, the partnership between the athlete, the NF, the NOC and funding and support partners are critical to the input stage as are the performance outcomes or measures that are to be achieved through the intervention. These can be medal or non-medal but need to be relevant to the desired performance, and relative to the gap in achieving or attaining the desired performance.





Throughput is related to the decision-making process for the assessment and allocation of resources. To be successful this process will require the establishment of eligibility criteria that are aligned to achieving the performance outcomes defined in the input stage. A simple, clear, and timely application and assessment process to determine the allocation of resource is also required as part of this stage and should include a pre-application process to identify the performance gap, outline strategies to address the gap and how these can be achieved through the provision of additional resource. Those campaigns that are successful through the application process would move to the implementation stage where they would be partnered with a 'relationship manager' that can support them in the allocation of awarded resources, decision making, prioritisation, planning and engagement. A monitoring process will ensure progress is tracked and adjustments can be made if required, this will be followed by a review and evaluation process that will inform refinements and improvements on the process for future iterations.

Output is defined in terms of the campaign being provided timely and adequate resourcing to enable the intervention strategies to have the highest possibility to succeed (funding for success), expertise and knowledge is provided to the campaign that can inform campaign planning, decision making and interventions, and training and development opportunity are provided to those in the inner circle of the campaign that will better prepare them for further periods of preparation activities outside of that supported by this initiative. Collectively these three outputs will contribute to an athlete performance and ideally the achievement of the desired performance outcome.

### **5.5. Strategic Framework for Supporting Resource-Poor Athletes to Prepare for Elite Performance**

Drawing on the critical success factors (4.3) and conceptual framework (4.4) the detail provided in this section outlines a conceptual strategic blueprint for the development of a programme of support that's purpose is to prepare athletes for performance through providing purposeful, targeted and dedicated resource in return for agreed outcomes.

When presenting a high-level strategic plan, blueprint or framework the first areas that are important to confirm and have alignment on are the vision and mission. The vision is a statement that looks forward and creates a mental image of the ideal state that is trying to be achieved. It is inspirational and aspirational and should challenge those attached to its achievement. Whilst the mission articulates the reason for being.





The specific wording for the vision was chosen as it speaks to the aspiration of the programme as opposed to a specific performance outcome. As detailed earlier in this report, critical factors to understand are the expectation of the athlete and realistic performance capability. It is important to manage performance expectation in this environment as putting unrealistic performance outcomes at the top level could result in mismatched and misaligned management or operational principles at lower levels. The mission wording speaks to the reason for being and how the programme will support the achievement of the vision.

Following on from the mission and vision are the core strategic principles that underpin the functions of the programmes. Those developed for the purposes of this blueprint include performance focused, athlete centred, well planned, needs based, expert informed and impactful.

The core principles above have been outlined through the report and would function as key components of the eligibility and assessment criteria for accessing resources and as principles for the successful implementation of the programme. Programme evaluation and assessment tools can also be developed of these headings as tools to measure the impact and effectiveness of the programme against its stated objectives.

The second section of the plan speaks to the how or operational sectors of the programme. The values of collaborative, purposeful and needs based are provided to influence and steer decision making whilst the four priority areas of resourcing, planning, capability development and collaborative solutions details the business or operational units that will support the key impact streams and articulate how the work will be done and what success looks like.

Framework for Supporting the Performance Preparation of Athletes Outside the National Funding System

<b>VISION</b>		<b>Realising athlete potential</b>			
<b>Mission</b>		To develop athletes with the skills, expertise, and resources to prepare to perform at events that matter			
<b>Performance focused</b>   Performance preparation and improvement is the primary driver	<b>Athlete centred</b>   Interventions are developed with the athlete at the centre	<b>Well planned</b>   Quality planning underpins all decision making	<b>Needs based</b>   Solutions address the needs of the athlete and are designed to close gaps in performance	<b>Expert informed</b>   Technical experts provide advice and guidance on best practice and performance improvement	<b>Impactful</b>   Roles and activities are designed to have an impact on performance preparation
<b>All athletes deserve the opportunity to realise their potential</b>					
<b>Core Values</b>		<b>Collaboration + Purposeful + Needs Based</b>			
Impactful preparation of athletes will be supported through <b>four priority areas</b> :					
					
<b>Resourcing</b>	<b>Planning</b>	<b>Capability Development</b>	<b>Collaborative Solutions</b>		
Timely and adequate to giving athletes security and stability to undertake their performance preparation	Interventions are well planned and purposeful using quality principles and aligned to performance impact	Expertise and knowledge is transferred to the athlete and coach to enable them to own their campaign	Inter-disciplinary teams understand their roles, responsibilities and where they can make an impact		
<b>Enabled by...</b>					
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Impactful strategic investment</li> <li>Intelligence-informed decision making</li> <li>Resourced to succeed</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Clear and aligned planning principles</li> <li>Integrated and holistic athlete development</li> <li>Outcome focussed</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Enabled, empowered and supported coaches</li> <li>Development system capability</li> <li>Workforce development and planning</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Optimised performance support</li> <li>Integrated and aligned multi-disciplinary teams</li> <li>Enhanced daily performance environment</li> </ul>		

## 6. RECOMMENDATIONS

Priority	Recommendation	Action	Lead	Resources	Timescales	Critical success factors
1	Create a support mechanism that supports athletes and campaigns to prepare for event performance by providing resource that can be used to address significant gaps or opportunities over and above those sports that already receive funding.	<p>Confirm funding resource to support the initiative.</p> <p>Create and test the application and access mechanisms.</p> <p>Implement the program</p>	HPSNZ as systems leaders supported by the NZ Olympic Committee	Finances, and people expertise	<p>6 months for scoping and testing.</p> <p>Implementation within 12 months.</p> <p>Potential to time access within 24 months of major games or pinnacle event.</p>	<p>Clear processes and parameters to access.</p> <p>Confirmed funding that will make an impact.</p> <p>Confirmed access to experts.</p> <p>Partnerships with sports to ensure collective buy-in.</p>
2	Develop and implement a standardised process and intervention for assessing mental and physical health and well-being.	<p>Engage with physical and mental health experts to establish and agree assessment and monitoring tools.</p> <p>Secure funding and contract a fit-for-purpose national workforce deliver service.</p>	HPSNZ as system leaders, clear partnerships with Sports Medicine NZ, Performance Psychology and well-being experts	<p>High – time and finances.</p> <p>Limited access to dedicated sports doctors in the regions</p>	24 months + to ensure robust process to develop and agree assessment and monitoring tools	<p>Securing the right providers</p> <p>Quality assurance of service delivery</p> <p>Follow up actions are able to be implemented</p>

Priority	Recommendation	Action	Lead	Resources	Timescales	Critical success factors
3	Develop an 'off the shelf' product that details a step-by-step process for preparing athletes for event performance.	Create project team to scope the project requirements	HPSNZ and subject matter experts	Time from Subject Matter Experts  Funding for design and production	12-24 months	Scalable for constraints of resource: time, finance, expertise
4	Develop best practice guidelines that cover the major domains of athlete preparation	Develop a library of resources that cover the fundamentals of preparing athletes for performance.	HPSNZ and subject matter experts	Time - Low	6-12 months	Covers all domains of preparation.  Sport specific  Age and stage specific  Physical and digital
5	Integrate the principles of athlete preparation into current educational and development offerings.	Engage with capacity and capability departments to determine opportunities for engagement.	HPSNZ capability department	Time - Low	6-12 months	Influences the right people
6	Develop a mechanism to identify and engage with athletes and campaigns early in the preparation phase	Engage with sports to identify athletes in their performance pathways and likely needs regarding performance preparation	HPSNZ Performance Team Leaders	Time - Low	6-12 months	Sports are clear on their athletes.  Sports are clear on their needs.

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## **APPENDICES**

### **Interview Guide**

#### **Research Question**

What are the factors important to an athlete's preparation for performance at a pinnacle event (world championships or major games) and how is this influenced through receipt of dedicated support (funding and/or services)?

#### **Objectives**

This objective of this study is to provide a framework of support that can be tailored to help athletes as they prepare to perform at pinnacle events (world championships or major games).

#### **1 Demographics – personal background and experience**

- 1.1 How long have you been working in the area of preparing athlete for pinnacle events?
- 1.2 Which major games or events have you been involved with?
- 1.3 What positions have you held in the past, specific to high performance sport and preparation for pinnacle events?
- 1.4 What is your current role / position?
- 1.5 Are you currently dedicated to a specific sport, type, or level of athlete?

#### **2 Preparing athletes**

- 2.1 What are the important aspects to consider when preparing an athlete to compete at a pinnacle event?
- 2.2 When building up to a pinnacle event can you tell me about how the preparation for athletes generally works?
- 2.3 When preparing athletes is it generally an individual or team approach, how does this dynamic work and who and why would certain people be involved and how do you balance individual vs team needs?
- 2.4 Are there any factors that are more important than others and why? E.g., mental skills, health, team management, logistics. Which ones are the most important to get right.
- 2.5 What specific responsibilities do you have when preparing athletes to compete at pinnacle events?
- 2.6 How do you ensure all the right areas are covered and progress is heading in the right direction?

#### **3 Constraints**

- 3.1 If you were required to prepare an athlete with minimal time and financial resource, how would you establish what support was required and how would you prioritise these?
- 3.2 What are the critical factors to get right when preparing athletes with minimal time and financial resource?
- 3.3 In your view what would the minimum level of support look like?
- 3.4 In your experience of in the NZ HP sports system, are there any gaps in the preparation of athletes or opportunities to better prepare athletes for pinnacle event performance?

#### **4 Closing**

- 4.1 Do you have any questions regarding this research or any further comments you would like to make?

## **Transcript Exemplar**

### **Can you tell us about how long you've been working in the area of preparation or HP Sport. Which games you've been involved with and what your positions have been?**

So with regards pinnacle events in what could be considered performance sports and then in high performance sports are being involved since 1980? 40, 43 years, maybe a bit longer. And it's been for state institutes and academies and the AIS in Australia, but also with regards national sporting organisations in preparation for Commonwealth, Worlds and Olympics and continental championships.

My first experience with an Olympic Games was in preparation for 1984. And then I've worked with diving, Circling and triathlon as a Performance Director for 6 Olympic Games. Must be well and truly 40 World Championships and, you know, four or five Commonwealth Games. Beginning in 1984 through to getting to Rio as a spectator to find out what happens on the other side.

What positions have I held? Of the key positions I've held, Performance Director of the sports I talked about I was the sports performance manager for talent development for the international body, the International Cycling Union, UCI. And I've also coached at a state level, State level for Australian rules football and worked for the South Australian Sports Institute as the coaching coordinator. For seven or eight years.

Current role is classified as a senior performance Team leader. What does it do? It's the conduit between High Performance Sport New Zealand and the NSO in the high performance preparation of their athletes. And also, the performance pathway of their athletes are probably that's the simplest way to do it.

The only dedication to sports that I can actually clearly say I have some idea what they're doing with regards to preparation would be the sports I work with. So currently I'm working with Yachting Equestrian Swimming, Surf Lifesaving, shooting and shooting para. And what type of athlete or level? And we describe this transition from junior or youth world championship level to the world championship, Olympic Games level.

### **So specifically relating to preparing athletes, in your view what are the important aspects to consider when you're preparing an athlete to compete at a pinnacle event?**

Nothing's changed with me with regards the foundation of development or preparation of performance in my 40 years. I look at the pillars of what we call development and performance, which are the physical, mental, technical, tactical and environmental. If I had to say, how would I impact an individual or a campaign or a team, those are sort of things that I would focus in on. I would look at with regards what the outcomes or the vision would be and actually do they have a strategy involved that caters for those areas that I just talked about. The pillars of development in the daily training environment, but also in the international training environment and the domestic and international competition environments. And the key part of that would be ensuring that individuals, campaigns, teams have first of all a good coaching environment. But also which is the key part, key impact or all of those physical mental, technical, tactical and environmental. But also trying to find good people with really good knowledge bases around what you can add to each of those pillars of development. So if you take technical, tactical, which is a coaching area, but the performance, technical analysis, the Physiology and stuff like that, are all parts of that versus the physical would be Physiology, strength and conditioning, nutrition, mental. It is about, what we would consider psychology or performance life. So, utilising all of those resources to ensure that the athlete and coach in combination have what they need to improve. But what they also need to perform?

### **Looking at the process, how does that, how that ordinarily work from your point of view?**

Don't think that's changed much. Let's just say you've got an individual who wants to be the best in the world or to be the best they can be. We need to actually find a plan or a strategy around that individual with steps along the way that can assess what we actually put into place for that individual, such as coaching, such as performance support, such as life support.

Such as the potential for competition. So put those in a system as we need to assess them and look at the progression of that athlete over a cycle or two cycles. And so cycles would be 4 years because we continue to work in Olympic cycles, but each of those cycles have an annual turn and if you didn't even want to work in that annual turn, you could work in a 24 month turn. And that's how I would process through that, making assessments along the way based not only improvement of the athlete or the stability of the athlete, but also looking at the outcomes of that athlete and the combination of coach, athlete and support services.

**And so, are there any factors that are more important than others?**

Depending on the individual, depending on the campaign, depending on the sport, there probably are. But in in most cases what you want to do is, is endeavour to have an athlete that continues to not only survive in his environment but thrive in his environment And for the people who are involved in his tight team, if you want to call it, we use that word. But it's the same for them to be able to have an impact with that athlete, for that to occur, they have to have a connection with that athlete. So that connection is not just about the athlete, that connection is about the person, and then it's transformed into the needs of the person and the athlete. So to me, it's all about the people and the ability of those people to connect and build a relationship with not just the athlete, but those that were impacting the athlete. And potentially, depending on the age of the athlete, those who influence the athlete to ensure that we're all aligned in most cases, even though it's got to be a challenging environment aligned to where we are, where we're going, learning from where we've been, and in being realistic enough to actually have open, honest and challenging conversations.

**Is it generally an individual or a team approach or and how would you balance the need between a Team sport or an individual sport?**

As you would see from my experience, the only team sports I've really been involved with were my brother who coach Australia in basketball and me in Aussie Rules footy and then the rest is all about individuals. Normally individuals or for rowing in pairs or fours and things like that, but I have never been involved with an individual or a pair or a four that hasn't worked in a team environment, in their daily training environment.

Its the difficult part of actually trying to ensure that every individual who's involved in the daily training environment, and that includes those not even on a bike or diving or in triathlon, is ensure that we are all understanding who we are, where we're going and how and when we want to get there. So I don't think individual even exists in the world anymore. Because there's always more than one person involved. So it's a small group and I might float in and out of a bigger group, but you've actually gotta align all of those people inside the small group and when they enlarge into the bigger group. So I'm not sure individuals in my world exist.

In a blinkered way. You know, maybe if we talked about, you know, Hayden Wilde, who is an individual, but he's still got numbers that he needs to train with every now and again and they need to understand his outcomes.

**And so how do you go about ensuring all the right areas are covered and you're heading in the right direction?**

First of all, the communication, the planning, the connection, the involvement are crucial bits along the way and the continuation of that will impact sustained potential or sustained excellence. So I think the first bit would be to ensure that we understand how people want to be communicated with, when they want to be communicated with, and how we bring that all together in in one single pack. It's no different than any relationship with any person ever had

with another human being. Understanding that human being and the needs of that human being and that person in response, understanding how the needs of me or and the things that I need for it to actually work. So If you want one word for it, it would be an elevated communication and connection of the individuals and the group.

**New Zealand has a system that provides support to a whole bunch of athletes in that they have access to this in time, resource and expertise. If you were to support an athlete that wasn't part of the system or didn't have the money or the access to the support, how would you go through a process to establish what they needed and then prioritise?**

So my first point of call is to is to find out who influences the athlete. First of all, find the athlete, have a connection, have a communication with him and then who actually currently influences that athlete in any way shape or form. So it might be mentorship, coaching, brother, sister, mother, financial, you know whatever. So find all those bits and pieces with that athlete. Next point is no different than you would do with any other.

It's like, hang on, why does this have to leave? Want to go? And when do they want to get there? Uh, realistically, and try to come to a realistic picture of what we would call an individual performance plan, but a plan for that individual, whether they be on their own or within a group. And then to ensure that that athlete understood that person's commitments to the plan, the tight team that influence him, so the mentorship type team influence him, their commitment to the plan. And the coach or my commitment to the plan and then work from there?

As we know that there are so many more hurdles to jump. And some of those are really significant hurdles because there's always someone within that group who has an elevated opinion of where that individual is currently. And So what it needs to be is realistic with a realistic timeline. If you can get there before that realistic timeline, well then that's fantastic. You know that the talented athlete, it's got more talent than the original assessment, but patience and time and investment are crucial, Yeah, to a small group of people, because Those that influence, which includes potentially, you know, my role, in a coaches role and a family role and that whoever often derail it before the individual themselves.

**So then for an athlete that a short runway to an event and in minimal funding, what are the real critical factors to ensure that they get to that event in the best possible shape.**

OK, so you go back to your pillars of development, assess where that athlete is with each of those physical, mental, technical, tactical, environmental and then if the short run, let's say three months, you're talking three months, is a short runway or six months. You know, to be real, and look at the reality of what and we can impact. If it's one of the sports that I've been involved with, such as diving, cycling or triathlon. I know that I can impact in some way, shape or form the tight team around the technical requirements in six months for a diver or for a cyclist.

I probably also know that in triathlon would be around the physical components, you know, the training load, the intensity, the load, the timing of the load and stuff like that. So I think if we've got a short period of time with an outcome of a key major pinnacle event, I would be zoning in on the things that I know that the group around that athlete can actually improve or impact the most, which is a completely against the philosophy of 6 to 8 year cycles.

There's very few athletes that we work with currently. Even though they've got no chance of going to Paris, they haven't even got to the test event. They're still thinking about Paris. Well, someone around them still thinking about Paris being selected for Paris and you thinking they're not going to Paris, so that means they've got to extend to what, the world championship, this year's world championship or next year's or something in the shorter term. I feel that with the experience that I have, if I went to, you know, someone in your world right now, a Dylan McCulloch, there's one who you know cause I'm not a water man. You could impact his dry land. With not only the technical things, but the tactical things. But they would have to be aligned with his physical preparation as well.



**What would a minimum level of service look like just to get them to the start line been able to perform?**

A minimum level service is understanding exactly what their training plan is, the influence of anyone within that training environment that can impact that training plan. Being realistic with regards assessment of that, because when you're talking about three to six month over a short period of time if you could improve 1 or 2% in every little bit that needs to be executed on that day in three to six months. Because there's a chance that if you try to impact it, they'll go backwards.

**So, in your experience of the of the New Zealand system and even using other systems as reference, are there any gaps in our system around preparing athletes?**

You know my experience from the Australian system or even the the UCI or other countries that I've had some involvement with we're conservative in our approach and maybe that's why we go. And you can be conservative in your approach if you've got an athlete with an enormous amount of talent. But we don't have a lot of athletes with nan enormous amount of talent. You can count on your one hand individual athletes in New Zealand with an enormous amount of talent and a work ethic that is world class.

So you know, to be honest. We would need to lift our game with regards understanding what our definition of winning is. And understanding the athletes definition of winning, because athletes will say yes, I want to win on the world stage. But in some cases, a win could be defined as getting two top eights and two top eights in some sports would be a win, well and truly above a lot of athletes. So. you know, to be the best in the world or to be the best in any of those international competitions at anytime is an extremely difficult process.

You know that as well as I do. You know a lot in sailing, 160 IQ foilers and you have got 18 races, and to which means that you can delete two. So you've got to be in your top 3, 4, 5, or 6 for 16 races in August. That just doesn't happen with training. You've got to have a natural talent, a natural ability in the technical, tactical space. Which is enhanced by time in those conditions with those foils on the water, stuff like that, so.

We were talking no different if I want to be the best piano player in the world or the best whatever in the world. Hours and hours. So when you say conservative, we don't. We take a wait and see approach I think first of all we don't have a really good idea of how to identify talent right and I mean talent, let's just take the physical and mental part of it and you can't go away from the technical part of the data.

But when you look at people, and take your sport, if you want to be in the top eight, you've actually got some criteria. I've got to be able to swim this speed. I've got to be able to ride this speed and with this wattage, and I've got to be able to technically execute. And then if I can't run sub 30 1/2 / 10 K. I got no chance. So you've got to find instead of saying I'm happy for this to occur, you've got to find people that can impact that. We don't do that. We just don't do that. And we think that the people who are surrounding or we offering to those people are the people that can impact that. First of all, you gotta find the right people, but you know good enough to impact it. Do we have world class people? I don't think we do. We have a number of them. You know, I could rattle off names, but we don't have them in the regions. We have a conservative approach in the regions where I said this the other day, we are actually gold mining. We're looking for a nugget, but you know, but we don't find rough coal and try to shine it. And in pressure it so it turns into a Dimond. We're not prepared to do that and that's not winning at all costs because we have a conversation the people who win or perform in at a in anything.

They don't do it feeling rubbish. They feel it because they're good. Feeling good about themselves, you know? Listen to Hayden on the weekend. You know, he was even surprised about his swim, but he actually feels good about himself. He knows his capabilities, yeah. And

that's unfortunately would probably don't challenge that enough. And we don't have enough pressure on to challenge that.