



Technical Director of High Performance

August 2012 Report London Olympics

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Preparations Up Until Departure

Following the Pan American Games success in 2011, a program designed to play teams in the top 8 in the world was scheduled. Thirty two (32) matches were finally played going into London. Financial constraints did not permit an 8 game European Tour in May to play Germany, Great Britain and Holland. This was replaced with a 4 Test series with Canada in Vancouver. The plan was to play around 40 games of preparation when preparations began at the end of 2011 with a 5 test series against Great Britain in Chula Vista.

The themes in preparation revolved significantly around finishing, set piece execution and skill execution under varying levels of pressure.

Player Depth, Availability and Players' Physical Well Being

The player depth continues to increase. We had several significant injuries throughout the build up. In the end only Carrie Lingo was ruled unavailable for selection into the 2012 Olympic squad from the 28 member squad.

Although we had several players who had significant time out through injury, our medical staff very capably had all players available for all major tournament matches. Testament to the medical staff ability was to have Katelyn Falkowski, Amy Swenson and Kayla Bashore Smedley available to play in the London Olympics.

The availability of a full contingent of college players was again testament to the strong relationship with the NCAA programs. We continue to strive to have players available for the Olympic Games and World Cups *without* taking the full year away from their education programs.

The culture of high-performance behaviors continued to grow throughout the group. The international know-how of play, under considerable pressure, was still fragile.

USA has conquered the perennial issues associated with playing against Argentina and Great Britain. The ability to achieve the same mentality against several of the other world's top nations is still developing.

Playing Style and Training

The playing style of the team revolved around playing 3 defenders, 4 midfielders and a pressing strike group. The mentality associated with playing with full pressure reflected the best performances of the USA team. The difficulty of being able to reproduce these high-intensity performances was a high risk strategy going into London.

Strategies for each opponent were put in place leading up to departure. Although very limited with playing resources the coaching staff endeavoured to simulate opponents.

The video referral system was also simulated in all practice matches including those international games where our opponent agreed.

Positioning of the Team by the Head Coach

Lee was very keen to provide a platform where the players believed they had every opportunity of success in London. This was driven via the aura that was created in Guadalajara with success over Argentina. History clearly indicated the mental fragility when the USA had to make the play rather than just have a dour defense. This was seen as

important in providing the offensive unit with the belief of success. Enormous effort was injected into providing training circumstances that enhanced the squad's ability to attack. Encouragement and belief messages were consistently sent through a variety of mediums with a growing expectation of success in London.

PET

A major psychological component was embedded in the preparation program with USOC psychologist Peter Haberl being utilized in conjunction with a continuation in programming with the Navy Seals. This program was particularly well executed.

The program enlisted the oversight by Carmichael Training Systems for the physiological specifics focussing heavily on a stronger aerobic base component. Major controls were placed inside the system in quantifying distances, speeds and heart rates of athletes. A concerted effort was made and implemented in the area of nutrition with significant gains being made with many, but not all, players.

OTC Environment

The pitch in Chula Vista, although extremely accessible and void of distraction, was extremely hard on the athletes and this became more evident following each trip out of the environment for tours. The Chula Vista surface has no underlay and is extremely taxing on the body with the continuous 'pounding' endured in the training environment.

The on site USOC sports science assistance continued to be extremely limited and is an area of concern moving forward.

Our staffing situation was significantly enhanced with a full time assistant coach, Nick Conway. Unfortunately the administrative arm was again very limited with Katelyn Nerbonne doing much more than the work of one person's role.

Issues where roles were filled using piece-meal solutions is not conducive to providing high performance outcomes.

Media

The London Olympics had significant media interest given the Pan Am result and the series with Argentina immediately prior to London departure emphasized this. The management of player commitments in this area created frustration on many occasions.

London Preparation

Lead Up Time Frame in London

No issues arose from the days in London prior to the first match. Training time on the main playing surface was limited but sufficient.

Conditions

Following prolonged wet weather, the conditions in London proved to be conducive to playing our sport at the highest level.

Facilities

The main playing surface had some grain and was bouncy in one direction. The hockey stadium was outstanding and a credit to the organizers.

Olympic Village

The Olympic village was compact and extremely efficient. Once again, kudos to the organizers. The village was a 15 minute walk from the Olympic hockey venue.

P Accredited Athletes

Our two P accredited athletes stayed inside the Olympic village but not in the same accommodation as the team.

Technology

Unfortunately we had issues with the in game audio communication. This was pre-empted but the solution was somewhat frustrating. "Press to talk" audio had the potential to become frustrating for the coaching staff. The computer technology and software worked seamlessly.

Practice Game Preparation

Only one practice game in the Olympic setting against Netherlands was utilized prior to the tournament commencing.

Olympic Performance

Game 1 v Germany

Our 1st match was played at 9:15 PM. The anxious 1st game on the big stage was certainly handled better by the very experienced opponent. Several players were awe struck in the 1st part of this contest. Very little pressure was exerted from USA in the 1st half and 2 extremely well executed goals from Germany had a 0-2 score line at halftime.

A much more energized strategy in the 2nd half applied major pressure to the German defense. Only one goal was conceded by Germany although many opportunities were created by the USA.

A significant element in this victory for the Germans was based around their international playing experience and ability to control key moments.

This game clearly should have yielded 1 point for USA, arguably 3. Statistically USA dominated the match. There was major disappointment in the result of the match but this was combined with the satisfaction of the performance level reached in the 2nd half of play.

Game 2 v Argentina

This 7pm game was seen almost as a replay of the Pan-American final from 2011. The 1-0 winning score line for the USA clearly questioned the ascendancy of Argentina in the Pan-American region. The team has achieved a mentality against this opponent which promotes all the elements of self belief. Although, statistically, the opponent had the ascendancy, USA found a way to win. This has been an enormous growth area for this team in recent

times. USA had 3 points and the pre-tournament goal of playing for a place in the final 4 was alive.

Game 3 v Australia

The 10.45am match was crucial in stabilizing the position of the team within the tournament.

A clear missed chance early in the game followed by an Australian defender playing the ball high in the air without any USA player utilizing the video referral system completed a micro-cycle of the game when the team needed reward. The game was even but USA was unable to make any concerted opportunities from many attacking 25 yard penetrations.

Even with that deficiency this was clearly the best performance the USA team had brought to the Australians over the last 12 months.

Then a penalty stroke resulting from a penalty corner was a huge opportunity for reward. A save and only 7 minutes to half time. Australia earned a corner with only 3 minutes remaining to half time. A conversion and the belief of the team was questioned without a core group of experience being able to stabilize the situation.

The 2nd half had both sides creating penetration but the USA was able to make few goal chances of major significance. With 8 minutes remaining a reverse stick shot and the rebound created danger –surely a penalty corner. But no, again a key moment –the ability to recognize and utilize the moment by the offensive players let a major opportunity slip. However, with 7 minutes remaining a quality chance was created – but again the high percentage scoring chance was wasted.

The game finished 0-1 and the pre tournament objective was fading. The processes of performance were being overtaken by outcome driven thoughts. Physiologically the team looked below it's sharp and aggressive best.

The outcome was very disappointing but the pool positions were still in the melting pot going into round 4 against New Zealand.

Game 4 v New Zealand

This 7pm contest had major ramifications for both teams. The USA had turned their performance back to being process driven. The game was evenly shared through the midfield and up to the 25, but the USA again had problems moving the ball from inside 25 to create scoring chances. The fast, open contest saw the USA creating only two goalscoring opportunities along with 1 penalty corner in the 1st half. New Zealand created 8 goal shots and 3 penalty corners. USA converted twice from these 3 opportunities while New Zealand scored two of their three penalty corners. A half time score line 2-2 had USA displaying their best performance against this opponent in the last 12 months.

In the 2nd half New Zealand converted a corner with 7 minutes remaining in what was an extremely intense contest.

NZ dominated the stats but USA was hanging in the contest and played with a kicking full back for the final 6 minutes. Although NZ had chances USA were without any good fortune when the NZ defender played the ball deliberately with the back of the stick adjacent to the goal with minutes on the clock. Surely a penalty stroke! Our lack of gamesmanship let a huge opportunity slip. Again, the control of a key moment – we paid the price.

A 2-3 loss and the inevitable realization– no finals opportunity...the ability to finish in the top 2 of the pool was gone; the pre tournament objective had vanished.

The players' reactions were clear – disappointment and heartbreak.

The continued debilitating aspect of performance was the inability to create opportunities from the front 25 into the scoring zone. Not enough GOALS!

Game 5 v South Africa

This 10.45am contest was preceded by the German v New Zealand contest. The result of this game could create a scenario of playing for any position from 7 to 12 in the London Olympics, depending on the result of this contest with South Africa.

The outcome thinking processes had driven themselves to the forefront of the players thoughts.

A draw resulted. This mean't NZ were through if Argentina could hold Australia to a draw that evening, nothing that USA could control. USA could only play for 9 and 10 – unless of course the unlikely scenario of a greater than 3 goal loss to the South Africans was to be played out. Everything seemed to revolve around the disappointment of the 9/10 position.

The contest began with South Africa bringing their best game and USA struggling both physically and mentally to bring any quality. At the 16 minute mark South Africa converted their 2nd penalty corner following 2 earlier attempts from the USA, both of which had been well saved. Then the performance deteriorated to an unforgivably poor level. By half time South Africa had created 10 goal chances from the field to USA's 0 while the penalty corner count remained at 2 each. South Africa had converted 3 of these field chances by half time and the scoreline of 0-4 was humiliating.

The second half continued with the USA players underperforming at a totally unacceptable level. South Africa accumulated 19 goal shots and 10 penalty corners for the match. They put 3 more goals on the board in the 2nd half.

It must be said, South Africa brought their best game on this day and this is not in any way taking away from their performance. However, that said, this USA performance was a complete anomaly.

There seems little doubt this was driven by the mind far more significantly than anything else. In all my years I have not seen such an occurrence.

This is in some way a reflection of our softness and will no doubt be a memory carrying enormous significance to all. Throwing everything away because the main prize had gone.

Within all of this the final match would now be on the 10th August – not the 8th. What a reality check.

Game 6 v Belgium

This 8.30am game was for 11/12 place. Belgium had been a difficult opponent earlier in the year when in Spain, with their defensive and spoiling tactics.

USA started with a much better mind set than against South Africa and chances were created with a conversion at the 7th minute providing a 1-0 lead. Several further opportunities were created but no conversion.

The resolute defense of the opponent saw the USA's inability to convert exposed once again.

Finally Belgium levelled the score. Then from a scrimmage resulting from a penalty corner their winner resulted. A 2-1 loss to finish in 12th position.

Again, with due respect to Belgium, this was indeed another poor result.

Olympic Observations

The Playing Level

USA has undoubtedly climbed the performance level and is now a formidable opponent to the best in the world. Inconsistency and lack of international tournament intelligence undermines the whole process. Players don't see and experience anywhere near enough quality competition on a regular basis.

Tactical understanding against the best is of a good quality when all is clearly understood and there are no alterations to game strategies. When the requirement is to be the play-maker at the highest level there are clear weaknesses.

Skill levels are inconsistent at the highest level. We still have enormous difficulty passing and receiving under highly pressured situations.

Our penalty corner levels of execution are still inconsistent under pressure. Again the consistency in exposure in these areas is required.

Our gamesmanship was clearly found wanting. The ability to successfully utilize the video referral system conceivably cost us many points in the London Olympics – situations teams like Holland, Germany New Zealand and Australia excel in manipulating to their best advantage. Often controlling these key moments has little to do with playing skill. It is to do with gamesmanship. Our domestic environment creates precisely the opposite learning environment. It's a huge cultural aspect to break.

Finally our finishing. Enormous efforts have been made in this area of the game. However the reality is this. In the first 4 matches at the London Olympics our main striker had only 1 scoring shot from 5 opportunities. That's right ...the 1 shot was a goal and the other 4 opportunities (over 4 matches!) were frittered away. In these 4 matches we had 46 realistic opportunities to score – but only 19 of those were made into any goalshot of consequence – and only two were converted.

One of the interesting statistical aspects which has evolved through the new rules of self start and the 5m hash line around the circle, is the reduction to about 50% of balls into the 25 yard region accessing the circle – this is of course information sourced from performances of all the teams.

Coaching

Head Coach, Lee Bodimeade, went into the Olympics with a very clear view of creating an atmosphere where the players believed they had every opportunity to be in the medal rounds. This was fanned by the success against Argentina and the players genuinely believed they had a realistic opportunity with good processes in place. Yes, they understood the fragility of many aspects of the team against the world's best – but they did genuinely believe. The Navy Seals experiences continued this whole process.

The glaring weakness was finishing inside the 25 into attack. This aspect was the difference in getting results in the cumulative first 4 matches at the Games....

Our ability to change focus and implement alternative strategies was weak and opportunities to have these implemented were arguably bypassed.

Nick Conway as Assistant Coach has provided much needed assistance in the CTP and without doubt this model must be utilized, at the very minimum, with concerted thought being given to having a 3rd coach in place to enable 'detail' to be implemented. All successful teams at the Olympic Level have at least 2 full-time assistants. This is normally complemented with a specific goalkeeping coach also.

Detail is the key to the next phase of development of this team. This applies to both coaching and playing.

Management

We are now familiar with the Olympic environment and USAFH now is able to effectively cope with the in house management of the team. This does not apply to the highest management from within our USAFH office at the International Level – but more of that later.

Video and Communication Arrangements

Nate Franks provided a high level of efficiency in capturing and coding our competitions, along with those of our competitors. Katelyn Nerbonne provided a huge element in remote coding many contests. This expertise from both roles was essential, but is now part of the base requirements at the highest level.

The technology used included access to video on computer technology at 4 different but simultaneously run stations in the stadium.

It is important to note that the FIH is now endeavouring to control the sharing of our 'in-house' video productions from any FIH Tournament in a far more stringent manner.

The audio requirements, although repeatedly requested from LOCOG, were difficult to secure. Again funding prohibited some of the devices available for audio transmission as we use at every other FIH sanctioned event. The basic difference – push to talk technology does NOT allow simultaneous conversation between coaches. This was not the most appropriate but the coaches made good the use of this technology – but at critical moments frustration was inevitable.

Umpiring Levels

The performance level is improving.

There is a clear direction towards having far more contact than ever before, as long as players are fighting for the ball.

Danger is an area where the umpires are basically allowing everything to occur and ONLY when it is clearly a situation where a player has to avoid being hit, will the whistle be blown.

The self play is still extremely loose and it comes down to gamesmanship as to how much leniency is permitted.

Finally the video referral system. This is extremely frustrating to all concerned. Way too many mistakes are made and there has to be an operational change in implementing this aspect of the game. Without nay doubt the experience in being able to manipulate this element can make major changes to the outcomes of matches. Gamesmanship is again a key aspect to this manipulation.

There are certainly issues with the umpiring review. Germany clearly scored against New Zealand in their final match – who knows what that would have done to in the end, but certainly Germany had the edge in going through to the medal rounds. As it turned out they played for 7th position and New Zealand ended up in the medal round.

It was a huge step for Amy Hassick to be selected to umpire at the London Olympics – and a significant step for USAFH to have an umpire at the Olympic Level.

FIH Links

Pam Stuper and Laura Darling have made major impacts on the FIH for the USAFH. I am sincere in my view that our Executive Director has had no positive impact in this arena. This has severely affected USAFH's credibility at this level – including the international links that need to be nurtured.

International Links

Very strong International links have been set up with many of the powerful nations and the USA. The USA is now in a position to work very closely with Holland, New Zealand, Great Britain, Germany, Argentina, China, Australia, Japan, Korea, Spain, Belgium and South Africa.

The USA is on the major platform of international hockey. There has been a lot of work done in the background by Pam Stuper, Laura Darling, Kate Reisinger and the coaching staff. The USAFH Board can be well satisfied that very strong relations have been forged between many of the powerhouse countries of the world and USAFH. All countries are now aware that the USA is becoming a major player.

Friends and Family

This has become an issue where players are unnecessarily distracted by the requirements and requests of friends and family. Way too much time is spent in this area of management off the field of play.

Coverage

A wonderful coverage through NBC provided hockey followers across the USA with a great opportunity to follow the Olympics. The team results saw a reduction in direct coverage through the network. Our internal USAFH website provided very little and was a constant cause of consternation within the group.

Review Processes

This is under way but there have been unnecessary glitches.

In an attempt to ensure the Olympics was debriefed, our sports psychologist was engaged to debrief the group. This had to be through the medium of phone hook up. Capacity attendance was capably and effectively facilitated through Peter Haberl.

Some key comments from the players:

- “understand how much tougher we have to be in training and playing opportunities”
- “became without focus, doubts crept in when results took USA away from medal round”
- “the necessity for details to be repeated and absorbed for automated response”
- “not good enough to play without having the components of being a great team”
- “ how daunting the initial moments in the Olympic tournament are for the uninitiated”
- “we must do everything – not think we can”.
- “A very powerful learning tool”
- “Expectations too great”
- “Chula Vista may be too insular and shields away distractions”
- “Trusting ourselves in taking these outcomes forward is critical”

The feedback from the players and staff was an element I was hoping to share with you through this report. Indeed it was the last element needed to complete the report. Unfortunately this is not possible and I apologize for this component not being included.

Debriefs of the coaching staff have been carried out.

The Changing Face of International Qualification

The World League

This competition is now becoming the key event for qualification. Gone are Olympic and World Cup Qualifiers – from now. The World League is a 4 stage competition running over a two year cycle, with stages 1 and 2 running in the even numbered years (Olympic and World Cup – this is where it will evolve to) and stages 3 and 4 in the odd numbered years (along with the Continental Qualifiers -Pan Am Games and Pan Am Cup for us).

The Champions events (Trophy and Challenges) will run in the even years BUT the critical qualification to the World Cup and Olympics is focussed around positioning and rankings in the Level 3 and Level 4 World League Tournaments.

Now our focus must be clearly delineated by these tournaments and their access.

Recommendations and Review

Yes, we are all extremely disappointed with what we put on the table in the last days of competition in London. Indeed our immediate memory revolves totally around those very poor performances. Understandably the public, along with all those following the team, also feel that pain and register the extreme disappointment, frustration and anger regards those final performances. Yes the end result, just like that of victory, is the responsibility of the total program in the United States.

Whilst filtering through the normal processes of review and thought, there is a significant piece within reminding me just how close a consistently positive result really is.

There is little doubt that Lee's driven desire to satisfy the requirements of all with a top 4 finish has brought very specific behaviors and reactions. We must always remember that the fervor for results is driven within all of us, but that outcome is driven from the USOC with greater pressure levels than from anywhere or anyone else. And to an extent I agree; he who pays the bills plays the tune!

However the major piece for me is that we at USAFH understand that although we are now realistically competing with the best, our consistency is undermined by our inconsistency in basic skill execution and our incredibly embryonic understanding of the international hockey culture. Without doubt we are growing; but frustratingly, as an international hockey nation, we don't know what we don't know.

We are now at a crucial stage where the small details are very important.....and the learning environment to equip our playing personnel, at all levels, must be up-scaled in specificity. Yes we have grown. But now the growth for consistent international success is critical. Yes, we could go to the Champion's Challenge and qualify for the Champion's Trophy - we could and that may happen...but it won't help us unless we are willing to now invest in the next really important phase of this whole puzzle.

My view is that there needs to be several components in our system to encourage this growth...some we have already established in part.

1. A league style playing opportunity/ format where the best players in the country can play over a season – may be as short as 12 weeks, but we must implement.
2. We must have a Home of Hockey inside the “heartland of development” for our sport.
3. A slightly modified Centralized Training Program that is grounded in the 'heartland of development' from a geographical standpoint, but operates functionally where the USA youth can see, observe, be involved and can improve almost by osmosis!.
4. A conscious effort for our NCAA structure to embrace excellence of performance with International parameters as drivers rather than domestic.

5. A development and competition program for our 5 to 12 year olds.
6. A coaching platform that develops, educates, exposes, encourages and shares.
7. An umpiring platform that develops, communicates and runs to underpin the development of the game at all levels.
8. An administration that understands the international hockey culture and sets down roots inside that body to ensure USA will always belong. The reality is that the International hockey world has little idea who our Executive Director and what he brings to the table for our sport.
9. The friends and family groups need to be lead to a place resembling what happens on the international scene. USAFH should NOT be responsible for baby sitting the ticketing at the Olympics. This detracts and distracts from USAFH's major role. This is an area where USAFH needs to mature significantly.
10. A funding mechanism which does not rely primarily on the USOC financial network must be a focus. We should develop financially to a place where USOC funding is a bonus to enable a specific program.
11. Within the High performance Program there is a distinct requirement for
 - a) 2nd administrative position within the program to oversee the video analysis component of the program along with assisting with administrative tasks.
 - b) Ability to engage a Goal Keeping specialist coach at different stages through the program

The last thing I wanted to report was anything resembling excuses. What has been achieved over the last 6 to 7 years has been significant. Many of the building blocks have been set in place.

My real torment revolves around the capacity of the USA hockey community to bring the changes - and to work effectively at making a world top 4 placement a reality. The NCAA is a key driver within this process. The changes this would bring to our sport in this country most people cannot comprehend - but those changes would have an incredible impact on everyone in our sport in the USA along with a significant impact on the International hockey community.

Just how close USA is to being consistently very good, no-one really knows. My sense is that it is much closer than most think - particularly at this very impulsive juncture. In London I saw moments in our first 4 games that gave us the opportunity to have derived 8 points - yes, very optimistic I agree, but I saw those opportunities. Once again, the ability to manage the key moments. We finished with 3 points and finally with a barrage of embarrassment. This has not been lost on anyone involved.

Just how much international promise we have we are about to find out! The next two years will tell us a lot....and change will need to be harnessed at different levels within our sport.... It's a matter of retaining that vision in the teeth of adversity. Yes, we are very close.

Appreciation

May I thank the staff of the National Team for all their hard work. A special thank you to Pam Stuper as Chairman of the USAFH Board, along with the USAFH Board for all their support in London.

To Steve Locke as Executive Director, my appreciation to your staff for their consistent efforts and support.

Lee Bodimeade as Head Coach of the program the risks were very high and he took them all. Very close in many areas and his efforts are greatly appreciated. Lee's support staff have earned mention:

Kate Reisinger – Manager

Nick Conway -Assistant Coach

Nate Franks – Video Analysis

Peter Haberl – Sports Psychologist

Katie Kaschub and Dr David Higgins – Medical Staff

Katelyn Nerbonne – Coding Analyst

Many thanks again for your greatly appreciated support.



Terry Walsh
Technical Director of High Performance
2800 Olympic Parkway
Chula Vista. CA 91915
September 2012.