

Gymnastics NZ Coach Development Framework Project.

Research Phase

Amy Nield, Gymnastics NZ



Aim

Driven from Sport New Zealand Initiatives and the Independent Review, Gymnastics New Zealand intends to create a Coach Development Framework to make sure that Gymnastics NZ coaches are well-equipped to meet the coaching needs of today's tamariki and rangitahi.

The Coach Development Framework will build on our existing coach accreditation pathway to meet the needs of our coaches and their athletes. This will focus on encompassing the concept of hauora (health and wellbeing) as well as their needs specific to their gymnastics sport.

Background: The Coach Development Framework project needs to contribute to:

The goals of the Coach Development Manager

- To develop and implement a coach development structure that identifies and meets the needs of gymnastics coaches in New Zealand.
- Ensure that the differing needs of tamariki and rangatahi athletes and coaches at different stages are emphasised and incorporated within coach development opportunities.
- Through research, focus groups and interviews, map coach development needs and identify gaps and opportunities.

Sport NZ Community Support Outcomes, through the GNZ Coach Development Project

- Analysis of current coach development needs.
- Identify sport-specific and general development opportunities to begin addressing coach development needs for recreation and competitive coaches.

GNZ Independent Review

- Draw from the 2019 Athlete Wellbeing Survey and canvas, as separate groups, judges, coaches and parents to best understand the desires and needs of the community for gymnastic-specific future education. Ensure this education not only addresses the areas raised in this report's themes and other specific recommendations; but also addresses soft skills, personal development, lifestyle factors and optimises the human being behind the individual role.
- Look to collaborate with other sports and guidance from SNZ as to ways and means of delivering education courses on child development, human behaviour and an understanding of the human stress response for all coaches.

Key Stages

There are three key stages planned for developing the Coach Development Framework Project:

1. Research
2. Framework Development
3. Framework Implementation

This document focuses on work-to-date on the first stage: **Research.**



Research Objectives

Gymnastics New Zealand needs to:

- Understand *what* today's tamariki and rangatahi, who currently participate in gymnastics, need their coaches to be skilled at (coaching needs).
- Determine the *capability* of current Gymnastics NZ coaches to meet the coaching needs of today's tamariki and rangatahi.
- Identify the *gaps* in the capability of current Gymnastics NZ coaches to meet the coaching needs of today's tamariki and rangatahi.
- Determine the best ways to *fill* the gaps in the capability of current Gymnastics NZ coaches to meet the coaching needs of today's tamariki and rangatahi.

Research Approach – Work to date

The following sources of information have been drawn on:

Secondary research

- Review of existing domestic and international literature.

Analysis of athlete survey data

- Survey undertaken as part of Project 2020.
- Online survey of current and past athletes.
- Census sampling approach.
- Distributed via email.
- 537 responses received.

Qualitative research with athletes

- Three one-on-one in-depth interviews were undertaken with Gymnastics New Zealand athletes.
- The respondents were experienced athletes from throughout New Zealand.
- The interviews took an average of 45 minutes to conduct.
- A semi-structured interview guide was used to focus the discussions.
- All interviews were recorded (for researcher use only).
- The interviews were undertaken by Amy Nield.

Qualitative research with coaches

- 10 one-on-one in-depth interviews were undertaken with Gymnastics New Zealand coaches.
- The respondents included new and experienced coaches from throughout New Zealand.
- The interviews took an average of 45 minutes to conduct.
- A semi-structured interview guide was used to focus the discussions.
- All interviews were recorded (for researcher use only).
- The interviews were undertaken by Amy Nield.

Secondary Research

*See the Appendix for a list of references

Key Themes

Four common themes that were apparent in the secondary research specifically about the skills coaches require (beyond skill specific coaching):

- Athlete Centred Coaching
- Athlete Development
- Athlete Wellbeing
- Nutrition - fuelling the athlete

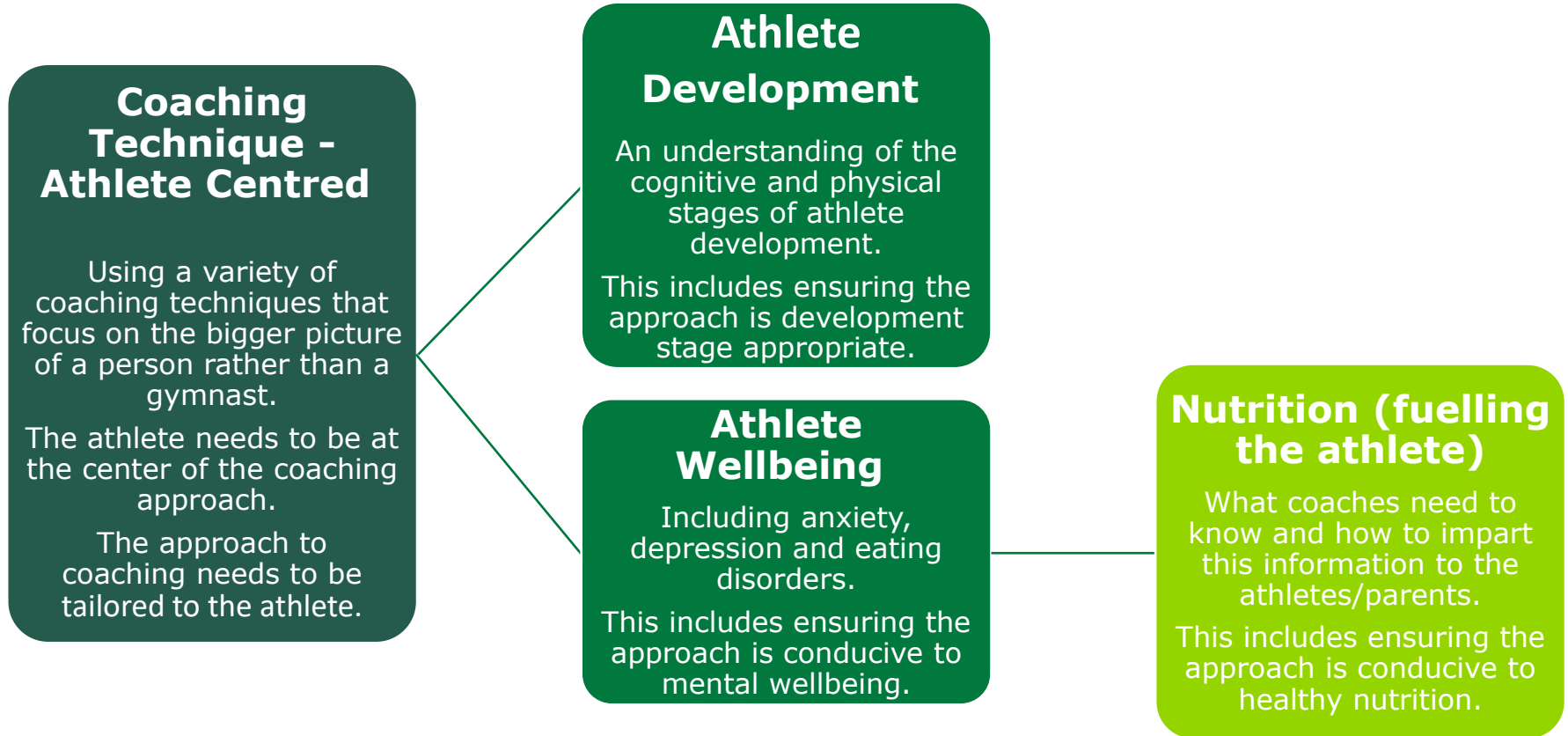
The overarching theme is the need for an Athlete Centred Coaching Technique – the other three themes become a component of this.

Developed on the basis of the secondary research findings and validated via the other research sources. This structure underpins this document.

These themes create the insight structure shown on the next slide.



Insights Structure



Coaching Techniques (Athlete Centered)

Insights

- Sports need to remain a fun, safe and positive environment for all.
- There is a clear link between the happiness and health of a young person and their ability to learn, engage and achieve more in their sport.

Implications

- Coaches need to coach people not sport – focusing on developing a person, rather than winning, will leave a bigger impact on a young person's life.
- Coaches need to utilise character or values within coaching and a growth mindset so that success becomes internally driven.

Athlete Development

Insights

- Athlete development is more than physical skills – coaches also need to understand mental wellbeing, behaviours, physical development, nutrition and their links to development.
- New research shows that how we coach young girls (especially around puberty) has the potential to impact development and the risk of eating disorders, RED-S (relative energy deficiency in sport), LEA (low energy availability).
- Energy demands for a young female increase hugely due to puberty and growth. Menstrual cycle is a key indicator of female health.
- That there is a need for coaches to have a greater understanding of the common growth injuries that can occur during development and how to prevent these.

Implications

- Coaches need to understand the physical and cognitive changes that occur at different life stages.
- Coaches need to understand nutritional needs at different life stages.
- Once there is good understanding of this, coaches can cater their programmes, language and interactions at the appropriate level.
- Coaches need to balance the training needs of the sport with the growing needs of the athlete to avoid overuse injuries during high growth phases.

Mental Wellbeing

Insights

- Sport offers a great opportunity to open conversations around mental health.
- Coaches may have a good understanding of depression, anxiety and eating disorders but are not necessarily equipped to recognise signs/symptoms and diagnose.
- That coaches can hold a 'powerful' position around imparting information in this area.
- Coaches/athletes/parents often don't know where to go for help.
- Athletes can be hesitant to share these issues with coaches so as not to appear weak or be ostracised.
- There are strong links between sport and the severe psychological and physical stress that can be amplified in individuals struggling with depression, anxiety and perfectionism.
- Eating disorders fall under mental wellbeing (but are considered separately in this review because of their high relevance to gymnastics).

Implications

- Coaches need to learn about the 'power' they can have around imparting information in this area.
- Coaches need to know the signs and symptoms of a loss of mental wellbeing.
- Coaches/athletes and parents need to know where to go for help.
- Athletes need to know who they can share with.
- Coaches need to know how to support an athlete that shares with them.

Nutrition(fuelling the athlete)

Insights

- There are huge risks associated with eating disorders, including low bone density.
- Early warning signs of eating disorders are key, and coaches need to know what these are.
- A well fueled athlete will perform better, be less prone to injury and be more mentally well.
- Messaging around nutrition needs to be done in a mindful way.

Implications

- Coaches need to know the signs and symptoms of eating disorders and what to do once they have identified them.
- Coaches need to know how to deliver messaging around nutrition in a meaningful way.
- Coaches need to know the fuelling requirements for athletes doing the high number of training hours that gymnasts typically do - often during puberty - so that they can give the right messages.

Quantitative Research With Athletes

An athlete wellbeing and outreach survey was conducted as part of Gymnastics New Zealand's Project 2020. This was to determine the thoughts of the athletes around areas such as physical impact, emotional and mental wellbeing, balance, coach approaches to their sport and them as an athlete.

Four themes became apparent for athletes – joy, challenges, training enablers and training inhibitors.

Quantitative Research With Athletes

"Everything - it's fun, get to make friends, it's helped me with my confidence. It challenges me. Teaches me that if I want to get something I have to work hard". AER athlete

Joy

- Friends/meeting new people/social interactions/being part of a team
- Challenge and learning new skills
- Performing/competing
- Fun
- Being fitter/stronger
- Good coaches (fun, supportive, helpful, believe in you)

Challenges

- Conditioning
- Injuries/being hurt
- Coaches (favouritism, negative feedback, attitudes toward injury, hard on us, being put down, angry, feeling less than worthy)
- Time commitment/balance
- Judging/politics

"I don't like that my coach has favourites. She spends all her time coaching them then just yells at the rest of us." MAG athlete

Training enablers

- Coach (supportive, fun, pushes us, understanding, listens and learns about us, praise, qualified, knowledgeable, dedicated, professional)
- Supportive family and friends
- Teammates
- Training/practices/camps
- Rest/sleep/recovery
- Clear plan, focus/goal setting
- Healthy diet/food/education

"When I have company training and competing since this sport is perceived as an individual sport, but it is the competitiveness amongst us gymnasts that helps push myself to do better but most importantly the encouragement and support from teammates that makes this sport a team sport since I see my gymnastics family more than my actual family. " WAG Athlete

Training inhibitors

- Injuries (and lack of support around these)
- Coaches (favouritism, lack of time, lack of qualifications, mood, pressure, conflict, lack of coaches, negative)
- Muscular exhaustion/fatigue
- Time commitment – harder to do other things/sports/friends/school
- Travelling time to competitions/training
- Cost/expenses

"Time and commitment to other sports and music and not having the ability to have flexible training hours " TRA athlete

Qualitative Research with Coaches

A series of one-on-one interviews were conducted with open-ended questions based on the secondary research.

Non-specific sport skills as identified by coaches.

Coaching Techniques

- Approach to late starters vs early bloomers
- Pedagogy/the art of coaching
- Behaviour management
- General conditioning
- Goal setting
- Prehabilitation/injury prevention

Athlete Development

- Child development
- Teaching of life skills as well as sports skills
- Periodisation
- Goal setting

Mental Wellbeing

- Sports psychology/mental skills/mindfulness/values
- Athlete wellbeing

Nutrition (fuelling the athlete)

- Knowledge of nutrition
- Wellbeing including nutrition and other life skills

Management and planning

- Knowledge of planning and periodisation
- Behaviour management
- Prehabilitation and injury prevention
- Communication with parents

Coaching – Athlete Centered

Context

- Coaches need to create a culture through mentoring and education where athlete centered coaching is normal.
- Coaches need to be involved in the process – but athlete buy in makes a huge difference.
- Athletes, especially teenagers, need to feel they have some control over their training and development.

Challenge/barriers

- Hard for coaches to see the benefit of mindfulness/growth mindset as they can take longer to kick in.
- Often club or national goals make this more difficult (club expectation of winning, early qualifications).
- Coaches often perceive these skills as 'less important' than the technical skills.
- Gymnasts will often perceive their wins/losses in gymnastics as part of them as a person – hard for them to separate themselves from their sport.

"How would you put this into a programme - growth mindset approach - center coaching around drawing the gymnast's attention to their own goals and recognising when I have improved - a focus on progress not the end goal - hard when parents focus on the end goal (often don't mean to - but inadvertently give the kids that message when they are happy, they have done well - coaches can do this too) As a coach you need to moderate your response - be just as proud of a 'bad routine'"
RG Coach

Coaching – Athlete Centered

Opportunities

- Coaches need to utilise a growth mindset approach, including more coach self-reflection.
- Encourage coaches to observe other coaches (including those operating in other codes).
- Ensure club values are also aligned with an athlete centered approach (and national values).
- More focus on process than results.
- Coaches need to spend time working on their why!

Solutions (as offered by coaches)

- Provide more advice/resources for communication with athletes.
- Work with coaches on the language they use for feedback – making sure they specify the skill they are critiquing not the gymnast.
- Re-evaluate the language around what 'winning' is in our gymnastics culture – changing the focus towards process wins.

Athlete Development

Context

- Need to understand the link between correct nutrition/headspace and optimal performance.

Challenge/barriers

- How can we make working hard fun?
- Hard for a coach to manage a range of ages in one session
- Common growth injuries are often exacerbated by over training
- Lower-level competitions are often very structured and officiated at a level not suitable for the age of the athletes, and don't include enough fun!

“Can we kick into the hard work post puberty? These older athletes are not just making up numbers - they are winning medals and breaking boundaries. How do we change this conversation for the greater gymnastics' community?”
MAG/WAG Coach

Athlete Development

Opportunities

- The more evidence we can use to show that early specialisation is not the only key to success the better!
- More information needed on the way to coach and how much training time is suitable for each of the ages/stages. (Both cognitive and physical).
- Need more work around how to manage the fast growth stages especially around injuries.
- To create development squads that have more flexible goal posts, to allow time for basics and reduce the load on a growing athlete when required.

Solutions (as provided by coaches)

Provide information and advice on:

- Puberty and how it affects skill acquisition.
- Focusing on the athlete as a person not an athlete.
- The key stages of development.
- Suggested hours for each 'age' of athletes – with evidence as to why it is beneficial.
- Progressions within plans that reflect age and stage of athlete development.
- Periodisation and how to maximise it for the age and stage.

“Why can we not also officiate at a level appropriate to age and stage? AER/TUM Coach

Mental Wellbeing

Context

- Recognising that for competitive gymnasts, their perception of success or failure in life is often linked to their success or failure in the gym.
- The fact that our sport is perfectionist based lends to eating disorders and anxiety.
- The impact an athlete with these issues can have on other athletes in the gym.

Challenge/barriers

- 'Not my job' as a coach to deal with them – needs a professional.
- Lack of knowledge/confidence in recognising signs and symptoms. Not knowing when or how to talk to the athlete/parents.
- As a coach not confident in recognising the signs, but also not sure on what my responsibility is in this space.

"I would worry about coaches becoming false experts or not being aware of how to manage situations correctly (some knowledge can be more dangerous)- misdiagnosis or mishandling of situations" GfA coach

Mental Wellbeing

Opportunities

- Coaches need some simple skills in order to help an athlete deal with gymnastic based anxiety.
- A good relationship with the athlete (and their parents) makes it easier to identify any red flags.
- Changing the culture for athletes – that speaking up will not result in put downs, unfair treatment or being ostracised.
- More upskilling for coaches around mindfulness and using a growth mindset.

Solutions (as provided by coaches)

- Would be good to have a 'protocol' or set of guidelines from NSO as to the best way to deal with these issues. A clear process for clubs and coaches to follow. Including:
 - Training or a resource on common signs/symptoms and the behavioural traits that can lead to these issues.
 - Cheat sheet for identifying signs and symptoms.
 - Clear information for coaches/athletes/parents/clubs on what support systems are available and how to access them.
 - A "where to refer to" guide for coaches/athletes/parents/clubs.
 - Information sheet for families.
- A sports psychologist or the like to do some workshops with athletes on mental resilience etc. Would be good as a coach to know the cause and effect of mental issues – is gymnastics the cause – or making it worse?
- A coaches code of ethics – this could set out the role and responsibility of coaches in this area.

Nutrition (fuelling the athlete)

Context

- Good nutrition is key to good performance.

Challenge/barriers

- So much information is easily available but not necessarily good information.
- A hard topic to breach with athletes so as to get the pitch right – to create healthy eating vs an eating disorder.
- Reluctance as a coach to give this information so it is not taken in the wrong way – could encourage an eating disorder.
- Nutritional advice is often complex and hard for parents/athletes/coaches to understand.

"Not a lot of 'coached knowledge' - conversations are often left due to the history of ED in the sport - don't want to be seen to be 'telling' an athlete what to eat as it could be construed in the wrong way." RG Coach

Nutrition (fuelling the athlete)

Opportunities

- Accurate information is needed for growing bodies which also reflects duration and frequency of training.
- Coaches and athletes need to understand the impact of under fuelling and its ramifications on development and performance.
- Need to change the conversation with gymnasts that a strong body is better than a 'small' body.
- Needs to be framed as fuelling rather than diet or body size issues – it needs to be a positive conversation.
- Using evidence on how much better a 'well-fuelled' gymnast performs – less injuries etc.

Solutions

- A module/workshop run by a professional who has gymnastics knowledge to give basic information with details of where to go for more information. Presentation from someone that has a good understanding of women in sport and nutrition.
- Sport specific tips and hints – relating to the length/timing of training, including specifying breaks in training for adequate fuelling and hydration. Also, specifying the nutritional needs of an athlete to maintain healthy growth during puberty given their training hours.
- A flier or handout with some easy NZ based foods that are good for pre, during and post training/competition.
- A list of experts in nutrition (also physiotherapists, sports doctors, paediatric physios) that have an understanding of gymnastics, the training hours and the stresses on a gymnast's body.

"Don't want to make it an issue - not sure of the right way to go about it.

Don't want to bring it in early or with the wrong focus"
WAG Coach

Qualitative Research with Athletes

A series of one-on-one interviews were conducted with open-ended questions based on the secondary research.

Coaching – Athlete Centered Coaching

"Had one who was awesome - he was funny, he was engaging, we all respected him so much, suddenly gymnastics became more fun and relaxed – we still worked as hard but we wanted to be there!" WAG Athlete

"A coach needs to not only have the relationship but also the ability to give good feedback and explain why it all went wrong" WAG Athlete

Athlete View

- Allowing an athlete to maintain balance is important.

Athlete Insight

- A coach needs to understand that all athletes bring something different to the table and the more they understand each athlete the better the athlete will perform as the buy in is higher.
- Coaches need to work with/observe coaches from other sports/clubs/codes in order to become aware of a variety of coaching styles and work out what works best for them.
- To be a good coach, they need to know the athlete and know the sport so they can give quality feedback in a way that makes sense to the athlete.

"Due to high training hours my coach was almost as important as my mother in shaping me into who I am today – as a coach you need to know the power you have and that as a coach you are doing the right things " RG Athlete

Athlete Development

Athlete View

- Those who develop more slowly are sometimes 'praised' for having a good gymnast body, whereas curvier girls are not.
- There are a lack of conversations around growth and how it could impact on performance/skill development.
- Athletes may not feel comfortable discussing menstruation/puberty with their coaches.

"How could a coach approach the subject of puberty with an athlete - I don't know if as an athlete I would want them to - I feel it is covered enough by parents/school, in regard to the impact on your sport - I am not sure how a coach could do this - it didn't happen to us in our club we were not talked to about how a growth spurt or puberty could be impacting our training/progressions" RG Athlete

Athlete Development

Athlete Insight

"Exciting to see the vibe of gymnastics changing and that gymnasts are staying around for longer and having more fun!" WAG Athlete

- Recognition and management of each of the athlete development stages will mean happier athletes that stay in the sport for longer.
- Puberty/Menstruation – coaches need to have a good understanding of what is happening to their athletes and how it could impact/affect them – this doesn't necessarily need to be a conversation with the athlete, but with good planning in order to manage these stages would be beneficial.
- Conversations about growth/puberty/menstruation can be beneficial coming from a coach, but they need to have a good relationship with the athlete first – more of an individualised conversation.
- A coach needs to know how to manage behaviour at each of these stages so that the athletes get a better experience.

"Was lucky and had one excellent coach around puberty who had good knowledge about how to build muscles especially around body changes" MAG Athlete

Mental Wellbeing

"As an athlete - mental wellbeing was not at all acknowledged - but it was still an issue it just was not addressed" WAG athlete

Athlete View

- Anxiety at competitions from pressure and expectation (both internal and external) to win is more manageable for athletes when they are winning.
- Stress is a bigger issue for athletes than anxiety or depression.
- There is more pressure on athletes now.
- Athletes would have liked more work on how to cope with emotions and stress.
- Athletes found in-house training around how to cope with flight/fight as part of nationals training to be of benefit.
- Mental wellbeing did not used to be acknowledged or dealt with.

Mental Wellbeing

Athlete Insight

- Coach skills in this space varies widely.
- Coaches need to have education in how to talk to parents/athletes about mental wellbeing issues and how to deal with them. Coaches need to know what to look out for.
- A coach needs to understand how to manage an athlete when gymnastics gets hard/scary, or life becomes too much.
- It is the responsibility of the coach to not let mental wellbeing fly under the radar.
- Open communication is the key.

"Coaches should be - checking in mainly, being able to recognise when an athlete is having issues - pulling them aside and asking how they are, what they can do." RG Athlete

Nutrition (fuelling the athlete)

Athlete View

- An important part of a bigger picture (good nutrition means better mood, less sickness, injury etc).

Athlete Insight

- A coach should be giving guidelines but more about appropriate fuelling rather than to lose weight.
- Having this backed up by a nutritionist (with an understanding of our sport/requirements/hours/training) would be good.
- Athletes feel more information about what foods to eat and why would have been beneficial.
- Would have been good to have more/better hydration/fuelling breaks in training.

“ A coach needs to be educated on what to say and the why - the why needs to be the key - what are the benefits and for how long should I be doing these 'nutritional' things” WAG Athlete

Summary

The following slides summarise the needs, capabilities, gaps and insights.

Needs

Understand *what* today's tamariki and rangatahi, who currently participate in gymnastics, need their coaches to be skilled at (coaching needs)

Keeping abreast with the needs of today's gymnasts is critical in delivering coaching that enables joy and athlete performance

Gymnasts tell us that a key factor in enjoying their sport and enabling their progression is the coaching they receive:

- Coaching that enables their enjoyment and training is:
 - Fun, supportive, helpful, personal, positive, qualified/knowledgeable and dedicated.
- Coaching that inhibits their enjoyment and training is:
 - Lack of knowledge or qualifications, favouritism, negativity, too serious, being treated as a gymnast not a person, focus being on winning.

Needs

Understand *what* today's tamariki and rangatahi, who currently participate in gymnastics, need their coaches to be skilled at (coaching needs)

Insights from relevant domestic and international literature into the skills coaches require (beyond technical gymnastic skills) indicates four key areas coaches require strengths in:

- Coaching techniques – athlete centered
- Athlete development
- Mental wellbeing
- Nutrition - fuelling the athlete

The areas evident in the literature also align well with the skill sets coaches spontaneously identified as important (via qualitative research with coaches). Likewise, the four key areas were also validated as important via interviews with athletes and the Athlete Wellbeing Survey.



Capability and Gaps

Determine the *capability* of current Gymnastics NZ coaches to meet the coaching needs of today's tamariki and rangatahi.

- Capability among gymnastics coaches is clearly inconsistent, with athletes identifying coaching as being both an enabler and a barrier to their enjoyment and training.

Capability and Gaps

Below are the gaps the coaches perceived they have:

- Coaching techniques – athlete centered:
 - Often hard for coaches to see the benefit of mindfulness/growth mindset as they can take longer to kick in.
 - Often club or national goals make this more difficult (club expectation of winning, early qualifications).
 - Some coaches don't see the benefit in the 'fun' for the athletes.
- Athlete development:
 - Lacking knowledge about what athlete development is and how to utilise it in coaching.
 - Difficulty for a coach managing a range of ages in one session.
 - Lower-level competitions are often very structured and officiated at a level not suitable for the age and don't include enough fun.

Capability and Gaps

Below are the gaps the coaches perceived they have:

- Mental wellbeing:
 - Concerns about lack of knowledge/confidence in recognising signs and symptoms.
 - Not knowing when or how to talk to the athlete/parent.
 - Uncertainty about their role in this space (or doubting this is part of their role).
- Nutrition (fuelling the athlete):
 - A hard topic to breach with athletes to get the pitch right – to create healthy eating vs an eating disorder.
 - Reluctance as a coach to give this information so it is not taken in the wrong way – could encourage an eating disorder.
 - Nutritional advice is often complex and hard for parents/athletes/coaches to understand.

Capability and Gaps

Accumulating the data and research, the below are the gaps determined from the research:

Coaching Techniques – athlete centered:

- A coach's perception of what athlete centered coaching is varies across the board, not many could identify a coaching “why” and then link this into actions and behaviours.
- A lack of teaching around values and reflection to help build better athlete centered coaching practices.

Athlete development:

- A huge and often understood area – while some teaching around this is in our current framework, it is not taken up by coaches or it is not taught at the right time for the benefits to sink in.
- There are no clear guidelines around training protocols, hours of training or what should and shouldn't be done at each developmental stage.

Capability and Gaps

Accumulating the data and research, the below are the gaps determined from the research:

Mental Wellbeing:

- A gap in the knowledge of what the 'red flags' are for signs and symptoms.
- A lack of confidence or process when dealing with these situations.

Nutrition (fuelling the athlete):

- A gap in knowledge – or knowing what is good information.
- A lack of confidence in introducing the subject.

The following slides will draw on the insights gathered through the research phase in order to help Gymnastics NZ determine the best ways to fill the gaps in the capability of current Gymnastics NZ coaches in meet the coaching needs of today's tamariki and rangatahi.



Coaching Techniques – Athlete Centered

Athletes had the following perspectives on coaching in this area:

- A coach needs to understand that all athletes bring something different to the table and the more they understand each athlete the better the athlete will perform as the buy in is higher.
- Coaches need to work with/observe coaches from other sports/clubs/codes in order to become aware of a variety of coaching styles and discover what works best for them.
- To be a good coach, they need to know the athlete and also know the sport so they can give quality feedback in a way that makes sense to the athlete.

Coaches indicated the following opportunities for development:

- We need to utilise a growth mindset approach, including more coach self-reflection.
- Ensure club values are also aligned with an athlete centered approach (and national values).
- More focus on process than results.
- Coaches need to spend time working on their why!

Coaching Techniques – Athlete Centered

Coaches identified the following solutions:

- Provide more advice/resources for communication with athletes.
- It comes down to a culture of coaching from the start, where as much emphasis is on mentorship and mental skills as on the technical.
- Using evidence is crucial to elicit a change in coaching approach.
- More work on self-reflection of coaching practices.

Secondary research indicated that:

- Coaches need to coach people not sport – focusing on developing a person, rather than winning, will leave a bigger impact on a young person's life.
- Coaches need to utilise character or values within coaching and a growth mindset so that success becomes internally driven.

Athlete Development

Athletes had the following perspectives on coaching in this area:

- Recognition and management of each of the athlete development stages will mean happier athletes who stay in the sport for longer.
- Puberty/Menstruation – coaches need to have a good understanding of what is happening to their athletes and how it could impact/affect them. This doesn't necessarily need to be a conversation with the athlete, but good planning in order to manage these stages would be beneficial.
- Conversations about growth/puberty/ menstruation can be beneficial coming from a coach, but they need to have a good relationship with the athlete first – more of an individualised conversation.
- A coach needs to know how to manage behaviour at each of these stages so that the athletes get a better experience.

Coaches indicated the following opportunities for development:

- Need to understand the link between correct nutrition/headspace and optimal performance.
- The more evidence we can use to show that early specialisation is not the only key to success the better!
- More information needed on the way to coach and how much training time is suitable for each of the ages/stages. (Both cognitive and physical).
- Need more work around how to manage the fast growth stages especially around injuries.
- Development squads need to have more flexible goal posts to allow time for basics and reduce the load on a growing athlete when required.

Athlete Development

Coaches identified the following solutions:

- Provide information and advice on:
 - Puberty and how it affects skill acquisition.
 - Focusing on the athlete as a person not an athlete.
 - The key stages of development.
 - Suggested hours for each 'age' of athletes – with evidence as to why it is beneficial.
 - Progressions within plans that reflect age and stage of athlete development.
 - Periodisation and how to maximize it for the age and stage.

Secondary research indicated that:

- Coaches need to know and understand the physical and cognitive changes that occur at different life stages.
- Coaches need to know and understand nutritional needs at different life stages.
- Once coaches have a good understanding these things, they can cater their programmes, language and interactions to the appropriate level.

Mental Wellbeing

Athletes had the following perspectives on coaching in this area:

- Coach skills in this space vary widely.
- Coaches need to have education in how to talk to parents/athletes about mental well being issues and how to deal with them. Coaches need to know what to look out for.
- A coach needs to understand how to manage an athlete when gymnastics gets hard/scary, or life becomes too much.
- As a coach it is their responsibility to not let mental wellbeing fly under the radar.
- Open communication is the key.

Coaches indicated the following opportunities for development:

- Coaches need some simple skills in order to help an athlete deal with gymnastic based anxiety.
- A good relationship with the athlete (and their parents) makes it easier to identify any red flags.
- Changing the culture for athletes – that speaking up will not result in put downs, unfair treatment or being ostracised.
- More upskilling for coaches around mindfulness and using a growth mindset.

Mental Wellbeing

Coaches identified the following solutions:

- Would be good to have a 'protocol' or set of guidelines from NSO as to how is best to deal with these issues. A clear process for clubs and coaches to follow. Including:
 - Training or a resource on common signs/symptoms and the behavioural traits that can lead to these issues
 - Cheat sheet for identifying signs and symptoms
 - Clear information for coaches/athletes/parents/clubs on what support systems are available and how to access them.
 - A where to refer to guide for coaches/clubs/athletes/parents.
 - Information sheet for families.
- A sports psychologist to do some workshops with athletes on mental resilience etc. Would be good as a coach to know the cause and effect of mental issues – is gymnastics the cause – or making it worse?
- A coach's code of ethics – this could set out what a coach's role and responsibility is in this area.

Secondary research indicated that:

- Coaches need to learn about the 'power' they can have around imparting information in this area.
- Coaches need to know the signs and symptoms of a loss of mental wellbeing.
- Coaches/athletes and parents need to know where to go to help.
- Athletes need to know who they can share with.
- Coaches need to know how to support an athlete that shares with them.

Nutrition – fuelling the athlete

Athletes had the following perspectives on coaching in this area:

- A coach should be giving guidelines but more about appropriate fuelling rather than to lose weight.
- Having this backed up by a nutritionist (with an understanding of our sport/requirements/hours/training) would be good.
- As an athlete more information about what foods to eat and why would have been beneficial.
- Would have been good to have more/better hydration/fuelling breaks in training.

Coaches indicated the following opportunities for development:

- Accurate information is needed for growing bodies that also reflects the hours of training and duration of training.
- Coaches and athletes need to understand the importance of under fuelling and its ramifications on development and performance.
- Need to change the conversation with gymnasts that a strong body is better than a 'small' body.
- Needs to be framed as fuelling rather than diet or body size issues – it needs to be a positive conversation.
- Using evidence on how much better a 'well-fuelled' gymnast performs – less injuries etc.

Nutrition – fuelling the athlete

Coaches identified the following solutions:

- A module/workshop run by a professional that has gymnastics knowledge to give basic information with details of where to go for more information. Presentation from someone that has a good understanding of women in sport and nutrition.
- Sports specific tips and hints – ones that relate to the length/timing of training. Including specifying breaks in training times for adequate fuelling and hydration. Any specifying the nutrition an athlete needs to maintain growth, puberty given their training hours.
- A flier or handout with some easy NZ based foods that are good for pre-, during and post training/competition.
- A list of experts in nutrition (also physiotherapists, sports doctors, paediatric physios) that have an understanding of gymnastics, the training hours and the stresses on a gymnast's body.

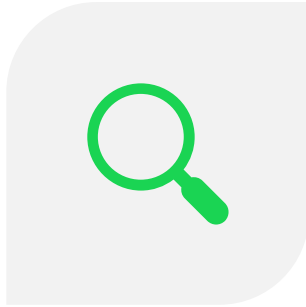
Secondary research indicated that:

- Coaches need to know the signs and symptoms of eating disorders and what to do once they have identified them.
- Coaching need to know how to deliver messaging around nutrition in a meaningful way.
- Coaches need to know the fuelling requirements for athletes doing the high number of training hours that gymnasts typically do and often during puberty so that they can give the right messages.

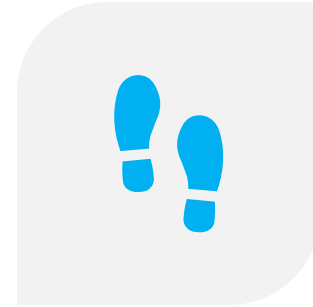
Moving Forward



QUICK WINS



INSIGHT GAPS



NEXT STEPS

Quick Wins

Provide coaches with the following opportunities:

Athlete Centered Coaching:

•Coach Connect Newsletter/ Conference:

- Focusing on the athlete as a person not an athlete – workshop and linked articles.
- The key stages of development – workshop and linked articles.

•Implement within new Junior/Junior Advanced Coach online modules.

- Progressions within plans that reflect age and stage of athlete development.
- Periodisation and how to maximize it for the age and stage.
- Puberty and how it affects skill acquisition.

Mental Wellbeing

•Coach Connect Newsletter/ Conference:

- A sports psychologist or the like to do some workshops with athletes on mental resilience, building mental toughness and overcoming fear.
- Provide a 'protocol' or set of guidelines on how to deal with mental wellbeing issues. A clear process for clubs and coaches to follow. Including:**
 - Training or a resource on common signs/symptoms and the behavioural traits that can lead to these issues.
 - Cheat sheet for identifying signs and symptoms.
 - Clear information for coaches/athletes/parents/clubs on what support systems are available and how to access them.
 - A where to refer to guide for coaches/clubs/athletes/parents.
 - Information sheet for families.

Nutrition

•Coach Connect Newsletter/ Conference:

- Provide a module/workshop run by a professional that has gymnastics knowledge to give basic information with details of where to go for more information. Presentation from someone that has a good understanding of women in sport and nutrition.
- Sports specific tips and hints – ones that relate to the length/timing of training. Including specifying breaks in training times for adequate fuelling and hydration. And specifying the nutrition an athlete needs to maintain growth, puberty given their training hours.
- A flier or handout with some easy NZ based foods that are good for pre-, during and post training/competition.
- A list of experts in nutrition (also physiotherapists, sports doctors, paediatric physios) that understand gymnastics, the training hours and the stresses on a gymnast's body.

Insight gaps:

- We would like to seek further information in these areas:
 - The voice of the parent/caregiver is yet to be heard and is a critical knowledge gap to fill.
 - Further insights from athletes.
 - The ideal role of the coach within 'non skills based' areas:
 - Views on how best to enable athlete centered coaching.
 - Views on the role of coaches in understanding and tailoring their approach to recognise athlete development, mental health and nutrition needs.
- Development of detailed strategy and solutions, these will benefit from ongoing insight from stakeholders (including coaches, athletes and parents).
- Further engagement with the coaching community, for example after the workshops presented at the Coach Connect Conference.

Next Steps

- Develop a Coach Development Framework that addresses the gaps in capability as identified in the research.
 - Ensure that the goals, framework, messaging, programmes, events and resource planning is all ATHLETE CENTRED
 - Formally recognise, prioritise and allocate resources to align with Gymnastics NZ strategy and practices to enable best practice in the areas of:
 - athlete development
 - athlete wellbeing
 - athlete nutrition needs.
- A code of ethics established for coaches – could be part of a coach membership to help pick up gaps in current coaches.
 - Set of expectations for all coaches.
 - Linked in with ongoing development in coaching.
- Utilise the discussions captured during conference workshops and post-conference feedback to develop further resources, and training opportunities in line with the Coach Development Framework.



Appendix

References

<https://balanceisbetter.org.nz>

<https://www.education.govt.nz/our-work/overall-strategies-and-policies/wellbeing-in-education/>

<https://bmjopensem.bmj.com/content/4/1/e000339>

<https://www.abc.net.au/news/2019-11-20/sports-coaches-support-young-people-mental-health/11590472>

<https://jvavolleyball.org/mental-health-guidance-and-resources-for-coaches-athletes-and-parents/>

<https://www.nationaleatingdisorders.org/learn/help/coaches-trainers>

<https://www.ed.org.nz/>

<https://www.eatingdisorderhope.com/recovery/self-help-tools-skills-tips/college-coaches-eating-disorders-what-they-need-to-know>

<https://childyouthwellbeing.govt.nz/https://www.occ.org.nz/our-work/>

<https://positivepsychology.com/coaching-kids/>

<https://ro.uow.edu.au/cgi/viewcontent.cgi?article=1313&context=gsbpapers>

<https://playerdevelopmentproject.com/https://playerdevelopmentproject.com/interview-todd-beane-on-tovo-training/>

<https://wgcoaching.com/category/sports-coaching/>

<https://mentalhealth.org.nz/conditions>

<https://www.healthnavigator.org.nz/healthy-living/m/mental-health-services-for-young-people/>

<https://www.health.govt.nz/your-health/services-and-support/health-care-services/mental-health-services/mental-health-services-where-get-help>

<https://coach.ca/mental-health-sport>

<https://www.scienceforsport.com/coaches-and-adolescent-mental-health-understanding-the-mental-health-of-athletes-is-the-first-step-to-their-development-and-success/>

SSNZ Webinar - <https://www.nzsssc.org.nz/Education/Online-Workshop-Series>

<https://sportnz.org.nz/resources/young-people-profile/>

<https://www.scienceforsport.com/about-us/>