



## The Golden Goose: A multidisciplinary team approach to athlete preparation

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## Introduction

- Why use Aesop's fable?
  - Rowing Australia (RA) created centers for categories in the years preceding the Olympic Games.
  - Western Australian Institute of Sport (WAIS) was invited to prepare the Lightweight (Men) category.
  - Created a multidisciplinary team around the Lightweight (Men) Olympic preparation.
  - Athletes experience and strong leadership of the Head Coach.
  - The fable had immediate relevance to the 2008 LM 4-.

## 2004 Athens Olympic Games LM4- Final



## Starting Point...

- Previous Lightweight Results:
  - Olympics
    - '96: 6<sup>th</sup> (introduction to the Olympic Games program)
    - '00: Silver (AE)
    - '04: Silver (AE, BC)
  - World Championships
    - 05:4<sup>th</sup> (TS)
    - 06:5<sup>th</sup> (BC,TS)
    - 07:7<sup>th</sup> (AE, BC, RC, TS)
- '08 Olympic Crew: (AE, BC, RC, TS)

## The opportunity as we saw it...

- Why use a multidisciplinary (MD) team?
  - Legacy of success.
  - The athletes had the capacity to be successful.
  - The group had a heterogeneous background in high performance training, varying levels of competition success, and limited cohesion.
  - The areas for improvements in the crew corresponded to our skill set, expertise, experience, and rapport with the group.

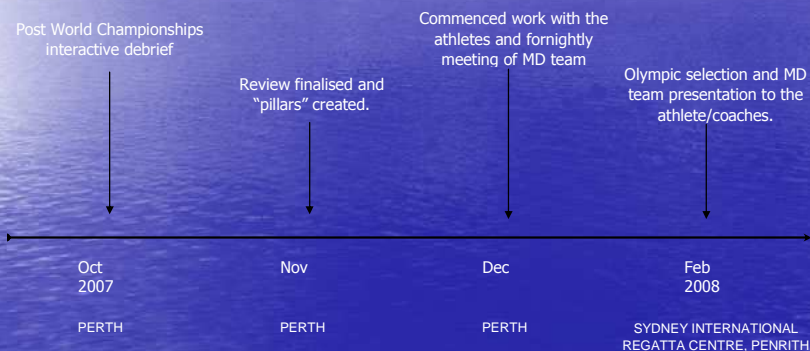
## Multidisciplinary team our perspective

- Structure versus interactive and dynamic process.
  - The model of elite sport creates services (inputs) which demonstrate a positive impact on sport performance.
  - WAIS provides a group of staff with high levels of skill and commitment.
  - The human resources are required to have contact with a large number of athletes and coaches.
  - Focus – selection of (individual) WA athletes to National team.
  - Multidisciplinary environment compared to multidisciplinary team.

## Multidisciplinary team our perspective

- Lightweight men: The Beijing Olympic approach.
  - Service providers invited to lead their area of expertise.
  - Interactive meetings held between service providers.
  - Expertise challenged for the benefit of the athlete preparation.
  - The Head coach encouraged the service providers to create momentum in the preparation from their area of expertise.
  - Focus – preparation of a crew with the attributes to secure a medal at the Olympic Games.

## MD team commenced



## MD team commenced

- Oct 2007 (Perth): Major meeting(s) and performance review process commenced.
  - Post World Championships interactive debrief
  - Each member of the MD team complete within discipline review
  - Open environment created
  - Challenged preceding method
- Nov 2007 (Perth)
  - Review finalised and “pillars” created.
  - Pillars were the areas for crew (and individual athlete) performance which required improvement.
  - The pillars had input from all relevant areas on the MD team. This departs from typical planning which is usually with in discipline in a MD environment.
  - Some level of methodology developed and explored with in the MD team.

## MD team continued

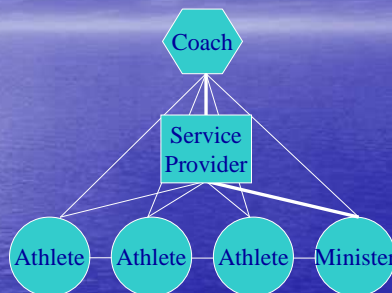
- Dec 2007 (Perth)
  - Commenced work with the athletes based on the outcomes obtained through the review process.
  - Regular weekly/fortnightly meetings of the MD team.
- Feb 2008 (Penrith, Western Sydney)
  - Starting point of formal preparation for Beijing Olympic Games.
  - SWOT analysis completed with the (recently) selected athletes.
  - MD team leads presentation of pillars to the athletes.
  - Limited and initial exploration of methodology for achievement of pillars completed with all relevant stakeholders (e.g. athletes, coaches).

## MD team approach extended

- Leadership model (Men's 4-)
  - Our aim was to increase the engagement of the athlete into the daily training environment.
  - Four primary performance areas
    - Technique – Biomechanics / PA.
    - Power – Strength and conditioning
    - Endurance – Physiology
    - Mental skills and culture - Psychology
  - Athlete – Service Provider
    - We valued the skills (expertise) within the athlete group.
    - Create an avenue for the athlete to provide input into the preparation and planning process.
    - We hypothesized that athlete engagement would increase desirable training behaviours.

## MD team approach extended

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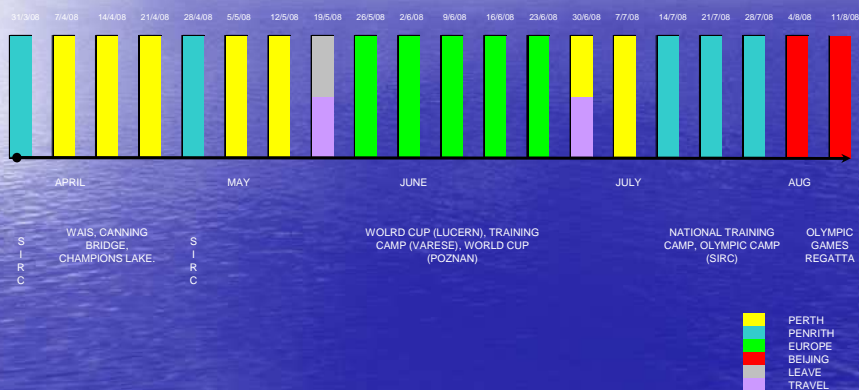


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## ... best laid plans ...

- March-May 2008 (Perth)
  - Weekly planning, monitoring, and training.
  - Appointment of Assistant Coach (not familiar with MD team members).
  - Reduced weeks due to National Championship for Rowing and request for athletes to stay in Sydney for 3-weeks post Olympic selection.
  - Reduced days due to Easter and non-Perth based athletes/coaches seeking contact with family.
  
- June 2008 (Europe)
  - Competition attendance, major lead-up regatta (World Cups).
  - Centralised training with other RA crews.
  - Relied on one member of MD team who was traveling with RA to continue the MD team approach.
  
- July 2008 (Penrith, Western Sydney)
  - Group changed plan to have extended involvement in National Training camp seeking to replicate training competition opportunities achieved while in Europe.
  - MD team remains Perth based, thereby reducing role in this final and important 4-week period prior to the Olympic Games.
  
- August 2008 (Beijing)
  - Olympic Games.

## Crew location during final 18-weeks of preparation



## Results of the MD team approach

- Moderate success of multidisciplinary and athlete leadership model approach.
  - Athlete engagement as minister limited, with one exception.
  - Constructive decision-making within the crew increased with a corresponding decrease in conflict between athlete and coach.
  - Internal formal communication between MD team members and Head Coach was inconsistent.
  - The traditionally autocratic style of the coach may have been overly diluted by the democratic approach.
  - Other communication channels created due to the evolving crew dynamics which occurred in the period from March-Aug 2008.

## What we observed about the MD team approach?

- The MD team approach needs:
  - Time
    - In our case, this requires starting much earlier in the Olympic cycle.
  - Processes (not outcome statements or good intentions)
    - Schedule of meetings
    - Development of team based informal communication and networks.
    - Clear roles for each MD team member.
    - Descriptive and shared plans of how each MD team member will contribute to the stated goals.
    - Process goals or sign posts that the MD team is providing the correct inputs towards achievement of the stated goals.
    - Consistent and honest review of how each MD team member is performing against the method created.
  - Clear and ongoing leadership
    - The MD team approach at it's best complements the existing coach structures.

## What observed from the MD team approach?

- The MD team approach needs...
  - Consistent and regular interaction
    - In sport, this requires significant contact between the MD team and the athletes.
  - Motivation from all stakeholders
    - Altruistic approach from all participants.
  - Realistic expectations
    - The MD team approach is not capable (in and of itself) of creating high performance culture, preparation, planning, and competition outcomes.
    - The MD team approach is one of the methods available to Sport and Head Coaches in their planning and preparation of athlete performance.

## Concluding thoughts...

- Results from the Olympic Games, Beijing 2008:
  - Lightweight (Men) 4-, did not make the final.
- We didn't fatten the goose
- When the ingredients and processes are right the MD team approach may prove capable of bringing together the richness of experts and the unexpected benefits from skilled people working together.