

Report from the Fairlands Valley Spartans Club Coach – 2010

Introduction

Since 2008 the club has seen amazing growth in the level of its membership. In 2009 we had over 350 members and in 2010 we have had more than 400 members! The club has always had an enthusiastic and supportive coaching team who have developed and delivered a comprehensive training programme. The club's growth (and in turn its success) was causing an incredible stretch on the coaching team, which needed to be addressed. Starting from the AGM in 2009 (November), the focus has been on growing the size of the coaching team and ensuring that it was backed up with the range of professional development available so that all training sessions can be delivered safely and to the full breadth of needs of the membership. The club (particularly through the committee) recognised the importance of doing this and has provided the financial support needed. The level of this commitment can be seen in the value of the spending on coaching related activities in the club's accounts.

Achievements

During the year we have used the full range of training opportunities available with the aim of having qualified individuals in the coaching team. In particular,

- 9 attended the UK Athletics Level 1 (assistant coach) course during the year
- 3 attended the UK Athletics Assistant Coach Course (this superseded the previous Level 1 course)
- 5 attended the Leadership in Running and Fitness (LiRF) course. This course ensures that the individuals also have insurance cover to lead groups of runners.
- In addition, we have also benefitted from an individual joining the team who had already attained the UK Athletics Level 2 (coach) qualification. All of the team have at least one recognised coaching qualification, are CRB checked and hold a UK Athletics/England Athletics licence.
- By the end of October 2010, the team had grown to 26 members of which 13 are qualified (and insured) to lead out groups of runners in their own right. The remainder of the team are qualified coaching assistants. Complementing the completion of the UK Athletics/England Athletics courses, experienced coaches have also been mentoring and supporting new members of the team as they gain experience of supporting training sessions. Tony Osborne has also co-ordinated coaching events that have brought together endurance coaches from across the county to share ideas and approaches.
- An additional 10 members of the coaching team attended first aid training (kindly delivered by Jamie Drackford), such that half of the team are now qualified emergency first aiders.
- The growth in the coaching team has enabled the club to consistently have four ability based groups training on each Tuesday night. The aim has been to maintain group sizes at more manageable levels whilst keeping runners in similar paced groups. Our ambition is to enlarge this further so that there are at least five groups being led out each Tuesday so that group sizes are smaller for both personal safety reasons and to improve the coach/assistant coach to runner ratio.

- During 2010 every member of the coaching team was given a running vest that clearly identifies them as a coach and also has their name on the front. This was designed to improve both their visibility within the training group(s) and to ensure that runners were able to get to know more of the much enlarged coaching team.
- Each month during 2010 the team have published their newsletter called 'Catch a Coach' This was designed to complement the material that was available in the 'Catch a Coach' section of the club website. Feedback from members has been positive and there is a growing range of features being included in the newsletter.
- The coaching team have met regularly during 2010 to draft and then finalise the club training schedules and also discuss a range of items that relate to coaching within the club and the development of the coaching team.
- The training programme developed by the coaching team has included the popular Spring Marathon training schedule (with a particular focus on the ever popular London and Edinburgh marathons ó thank you Paul Holgate!) and also half marathon training. Katrina Doyle has continued to lead out a Sunday run that has offered distances of between 5 and 11 miles whilst I have led out groups covering distances of between 10 and 23 miles. As we start to look at the training for the Spring 2011 marathon and a half marathon season, these runs will continue to be a feature so that we cater for runners of all abilities and range of training objectives.
- The team were able to draw on its expertise in both track and field to give training sessions on sprint starts, high jump, long jump, shot and discuss. This supported members taking part in the Club's track and field competition as well as those that were taking part in track and field competitions/activities such as EVAC.
- The coaching team invited members of the Lucozade Sport team to carry out hydration testing and talk to members about sports nutrition. We are hoping that this will be a continued working relationship with Lucozade Sport.
- Members of the coaching team have led regular multistage fitness (bleep) tests. A total of 58 different runners have taken one or more of the tests.

Further steps

During 2009 and 2010 UK Athletics reviewed and amended the coaching development pathway. The first of the new Assistant Coach courses were attended by 3 members of the team. We are currently awaiting the availability of the new endurance/off track Coach module that has superseded the previous Level 2 and Level 3 Coach qualification. A number of the Assistance Coaches within the team have expressed an interest in completing the qualification, an important step in further strengthening the team. In addition, a further 4 members of the team are about to complete the Leadership in Running and Fitness course. The combined effect of this will be that over 75% of the team will be qualified and insured to lead groups of runners in their own right. This continued focus

on the development pathway of the team and maintaining a team as large as we have within the club is critical if we are to ensure the full breadth of training we offer in a safe environment and for the level of membership the club has been enjoying for the last few years.

As a bi-product of the improved size and strength of the team, we will also be looking at the possibility of additional training groups, particularly for Tuesday night, so that the group sizes are smaller to ensure safer environments and a better coach to runner ratio.

The team will also focus on continuing to deliver the wide range of training sessions so that we can meet as many runner needs as possible. The team want to continue to be at the heart of the club and its achievements. Where new, or improved training sessions can be introduced we will do this. We actively encourage feedback from members of the club with regard to the training sessions and any other points on the training/coaching within the club.

I would like to say a big thank you to the commitment of the club (via the committee) for the backing that the coaching team have received in 2010. In turn, I would also like to say a huge thank you to every member of the coaching team for their hard work and commitment in leading/supporting the club training and getting the best for and out of the members of the club. Without you, we would not be Runners World Running Club of the Year 2010!!!

Chris Leigh
Club Coach

November 2010