

AOB item: Track extension

As most of our members will be aware, the track is being redeveloped this summer and at the same time will be extended to an 8-lane 400m track (as opposed to the current 6-lanes with 8-lanes in one straight only). Such an extension has added significant cost to the project (a six-figure sum) but the board of directors and ultimately the States of Guernsey's committee felt that this is clearly an opportunity that is not going to present itself again for a long time. The track was first laid in 1991 and although has been worked upon twice in that period (most recently 2013) this demonstrates that its life can be stretched to almost 30 years...therefore this is the sort of timeframe that it would be for the next chance to extend.

Why is the extension important? Below are some of the points made to Education, Sport & Culture (ESC) by myself when their committee asked for input into the decision:

The primary benefit has to be the increased space in the training setting allowing for more members to have better all-round experiences.

The current numbers of senior and teenage athletes on regular club training nights is not only at capacity but is only manageable based on careful planning and collaboration by club staff and volunteer coaches. However, the solutions are often less than ideal as coaches compromise on what the correct training components should be in order to work within the logistical constraints and health and safety. Whilst this may seem fairly minor, it is worth considering that the club supports paid and volunteer coaches to upskill themselves to be able to deliver the best developmental pathways for the club's young members. Thus then constraining the appropriate delivery of athletic development to our young developing populations is both counter-intuitive and difficult to justify to fee-paying parents.

There are numerous scenarios where the extra two lanes completely change the dynamic of session delivery from the perspective of performance, development and of course health and safety. Examples include the location(s) of hurdles training, proximity of sprinters to endurance athletes traveling at differing speeds, and the ability to teach a younger developing group more finer skills without fear of a senior sprints group sprinting through the midst of a skills-based exercise.

In essence – the options it will allow us as a club are to cater for more athletes, effectively coach bigger groups, create more smaller groups (that are more specific in their delivery), and ultimately provide the most scientifically sound age/stage appropriate delivery of training to developmental athletes. Our numbers at U13 and below are vast and in many cases set the children up for successful long-term participation in other sports due to the good work of our coaches in delivery of various fundamental skills.

There are additional clear benefits such as being in a stronger position to host high level events which will include fields of 8 athletes in the long sprints, and that the wear and tear of the track is likely to be more spread and could aid its longevity.

Due to the escalating cost of the project towards exceeding the £2million mark, ESC asked Guernsey Athletics to contribute towards the project if the extension was to happen. This was agreed and the club will be investing £56,000 towards the project. The funds will be paid over a period of time up to the end of 2021, and the board has budgeted for this phased payment. Through various improvements in its processes, the club has turned a profit in the past couple of years and thus this sort of investment which will directly and positively affect current and future members of various ages is viable.

Though the club has established that it can absorb this outlay – we will be launching a crowdfunding webpage where donations towards this investment would be most welcome and directly contribute to the long-term health of the club.

The board of directors hopes that you will agree that the benefits of the improvements to our primary facility as outlined above represent a sound investment.

Summer 2019:

There have been questions raised regarding what will be happening this summer in terms of both logistics and fees. Things are still relatively uncertain at this stage largely due to the fact the tender process for the project is ongoing – this process is a significant drain on ESC and therefore slows down progress on working with them on logistical solutions for this summer. This is also in part because the contractors will ultimately dictate precise timelines and phases of the project, so any partial access to the track beyond 20th May will not be known until the contractor is appointed.

I am working closely with ESC towards establishing alternative venues. Discussions are ongoing.

The next 10 weeks will see me spend significant time and effort on this project of establishing plans for the summer. This project is more complex and important than some may appreciate as I need to ensure the ongoing health of the club at ALL levels – this will certainly mean that different venues and equipment etc are required for our vastly different demographics. I can categorically advise that more than one venue will be required to cater appropriately for all of our members – it will not be a case of finding a single venue for our whole club to converge on. Arriving at appropriate solutions to adhere to the principles outlined in my annual summary will be a careful process to undertake.

I do appreciate that people are wondering if they will be due to pay Coaching & Facility quarterly fees whilst the track is out of action. However, during this time we will likely be, in fact, paying out more funds towards facilities and not less. This will likely be the case due to the need for multiple venues. We all also need to appreciate that whilst some venues locally are apparently “free” to use on occasion, constant official and formal regular use will require payment by the club to the land-owners (e.g. The States of Guernsey). It is also the case that the quarterly fees in part recompense the coaching input given to groups and allows us to invest in coach development and travel to events (both of which we have increased investment in in recent years).

Tom Druce

Athletics Development Officer