



EXCELLENCE

An Elite Performance Conference for USSA Clubs   

2014 USSA Club Excellence Conference May 13, 2014

The conference opened this year with an optional “Club Development and Certification work session”. This was attended by a large group of almost 40 participants from various clubs and provided an opportunity to simply address questions, concerns and have an open discussion regarding the new USSA club development and certification programs.

This was an informal session. The notes below were captured by Steve Cohan (USSA Club Consultant) and we are providing them here to answer some key questions and provide some explanation and perspective regarding new club programming. Thanks to Steve for taking notes!

Q. What are benefits of becoming club certified?

A.

- USSA.ORG navigate to “Club” tab under every sport.
 - Certification tab – full description of benefits, certification level, process, and resources.
- This paradigm shift of a partnership of USSA and its member clubs is the new direction of USSA. This will take some time to see this program and process as part of the “new” USSA where, yes, standards are set for clubs, and there are different levels of certification, but there is corresponding support for clubs to meet these standards and USSA is playing a more facilitative role in helping all clubs get better.
- Informed National Governing body, advocacy (National Ski Areas Association, Industry affiliation, form strategic win-wins for local clubs)

Q. What other Sport National Governing Bodies do this?

A.

- US Swimming – with 30% of all clubs participating
- German Soccer federation – based on the fact that their National Soccer team was not strong
- Canada – “Club Excellence” program, partner with Sport Club Canada, Canadian Center for excellence in Sport. (includes soccer, football, etc.).
- They offer a tiered level structure that clubs list publically.

Fact. 14 clubs have gone through Cert. process 30 on deck to do it next year. The ultimate goal is to get 50-60 % of all clubs certified in the next 3-5 years.

Q. Are there Best Practices that are emerging?

A. Refer to afternoon session, Top factors that drive club success. One of the big advantages of this program and the hands on nature of working with individual clubs is just that – “we” USSA can identify clubs that are doing certain things really well and that will help to further define best practices at the club level.

Q. What is the biggest challenge of Club certification?

A.

- Assess every aspect of the Organization and providing 35 (or so) submittals, spending a lot of time and resources. Typically in non-profit clubs the BOD becomes engaged, and the tasks are parsed out to multiple parties. “1. How are we going to do this?”, 2. Assemble the right people to manage the tasks,
- Modeled after the independent school accreditation process, but made more appropriate for the USSA ski and snowboard clubs.

Dave- the best programs are really tough on themselves (in terms of self-assessment). The most powerful thing that comes out of the work is a list of improvements that would make their program better in the future.

Brian – One of the intended outcomes is to celebrate all level clubs, “Bronze clubs are still on the podium”. Clubs can use this certification as a tool to promote their clubs, regardless of level. USSA will help provide club-to-club facilitation and exchange. But really having everyone understand this will be a challenge.

Q. Was their talk of offering a basic certified club status as opposed to the current level system?

A.

- At the end of the day we are about performance, and yes there is also a basic level of certification now integrated with club membership
- This is an open process and the 14 clubs that have gone through the session were BETA testers for the process.

Q. Are the levels defining the role of the club as it relates to the US team.

A. Gold does NOT necessarily mean the club is presenting athletes on the National Team. Rather, all levels can be the best at their chosen field. For example, a Gold club can be the best at the U14 program even though they might not put athletes directly on the US team. Business entity, Leadership, parent education, long term athlete development model, planning and other factors are the basis of this accreditation. Educational process, not an athletic performance ranking. Need to celebrate club development. The intent is to give resources to all clubs not just those who produce top level athletes.

Q. Are clubs with limited resources and hill conditions resigned to lower level certification levels.

A. No, As long as the club can achieve the best with the resources they have they can achieve gold level status. USSA wants to help facilitate ways to overcome the shortcomings. Ex. Midwest clubs should be able to send athletes to speed camps in Mountain areas. USSA should be able to connect the Midwest club with other affiliated clubs. This program done well will break down the “us” vs. “you” dichotomy – whether between USSA and clubs or big clubs and small clubs. This program is not just USSA’s judgment of the individual club, it is a review of best principles and practices which are applied to different clubs at different levels.

Q. Isn't this process to be about bringing the club together and build on the program?

A. Absolutely right. Achieve the best results possible with tools and resources, improvement at all levels. Note. High levels of certification come with strings attached. Ongoing improvements are part of the long-term requirements.

Comment. Northstar club has checked off many boxes of the certification process but those that are left unchecked can be seen as club projects and opportunity.

Q. There is a complex reality when it comes to parent interaction; many parents want the big picture items (youth development, safe programs, etc.) but they still want their kid on the podium and think that skiing more gates is the "correct" answer. Can USSA provide tools to help facilitate this different mindset.

A. USSA preaches athlete development, often we recommend less gates than programs are using, more free skiing, development of life skills, because these are the elements of long-term athlete development program building strong people and athletes. The USSA Training Systems poster, for instance, describing the age-level activities is a very useful tool and can often help dispel myths – and this is "our" recommended training system.

Comment (Tony Olin). There is urgency from the parent's perspective for an easy quick fix and they do not want to wait for the long-term benefit. Once fully engaged, the certification process will provide the need benefit.

Comment. Compare ski-coaching comments with other sports. Ex. 8-year-old Hockey players using a large Olympic sized rink is not appropriate. Large rinks are not appropriate, short rinks are better to achieve the age-specific results.

Brian Comment. Most participants in club programs are doing it for reasons other than getting on the US ski team so we need to emphasize doing the best for all kids – this will benefit those on the "elite" pipeline as well as all the kids and members of the club. Further, our research and adherence to a long-term-athlete-development model indicates that we really don't know who is going to be "elite" until later and later stages of development – we need to treat all kids like champions. We need to better educate parents about this reality.

Q. Would the NYSEF have done a self-evaluation had they not participated in the process?

A. Likely not. Comment – To get full buy in, the request for self-evaluation needs to come from an outside party (USSA Club certification process) in order to be taken seriously inside the program.

Comment. That is a good example of how to diversify the leadership structure beyond current parents and have some outside standards. For instance, there is a strong recommendation that no more than 50% of the board is not made up of current parents. Options include, alumni, business people, sports professionals, college athletes, one lawyer (not legal counsel), ski area management, etc.

Comment. 11 or more club consultants are involved in reviewing the process, acting as an additional third party in the room. These people may be offered as resource to assist with club development objectives.

Q. Once the clubs have been assessed. How does the annual update occur?

A. The club must initiate the process to change their rating. USSA will contact the Club to schedule the 4-year full review.

Comment. Snow sports programs typically offer double or triple the one-on-one time athletes spend with coaches and other adults when compared with other sports.

Comment. Part of the process is going to other clubs to participate in their club certification. This will be a huge professional development opportunity moving forward.