

BC Athletics Director for Zone 6 Report

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Vancouver Island T&F clubs reacted to the COVID-19 pandemic in a collaborative way. Our clubs have been in regular communication as the health crisis has evolved. There was a sense of relief when our sport followed others and shut down activities earlier this Spring. The leadership from BC Athletics was appreciated. The action simplified decision making for clubs in what was a quickly changing environment.

JD Programs

As the pandemic spread and government protocols pushed change further into the sporting calendar, there was resignation that Junior Development programs would be lost for the season. With safety being a priority, clubs were not chafing at the restrictions being imposed. Adapting to this new world was going to be everyone's work for some time.

Older/High Performance Athletes

Clubs/coaches with higher performing athletes found the lockdown challenging. Some (athletes and coaches) felt that the protocols put in place were overly restrictive. They went beyond guidance from government in several ways and may have had the effect of introducing more risk to athletes than reducing it.

With COVID-19 likely to persist it would be appropriate to review the protocols put in place, along with the experiences of athletes and coaches, to see if there is an opportunity to improve on them if further lock-downs are required.

BC Athletics Membership Fees

There was early hope from Island clubs that their sport organization would support a change in organizational practice and offer refunds of BC Athletics membership fees with both training and competition opportunities being shut down. Of particular priority for clubs were Junior Development memberships. Most clubs had yet to have athletes step on track for a single practice before things were shut down. In a short season (3 months for the vast majority of Island JDs) that was finally lost in its entirety, no one felt good about taking money for services not rendered.

When BC Athletics announced its determination on the subject of membership fees, a large majority of clubs in the zone felt betrayed. Most clubs had felt duty bound to make their members whole during this public health crisis. They refunded the full amount of their members fees; both the club portion and the BC Athletics portion.

The decision by BC Athletics seemed like a money grab on the part of the organization; one that didn't reflect the values being practiced by the clubs. This perception was amplified as BC Athletics had initially been encouraging clubs to continue to register new members while the organization was in the process of shutting down the sport in early Spring.

Some Island clubs are choosing to pursue the issue, withholding any unpaid invoices to BC Athletics and possibly letting their club memberships conclude at the end of the season. Other clubs feel trapped by BC Athletics decision and are begrudgingly trying to move past the

episode. They feel wronged, but don't feel they are in a position to protest the decision without further damaging their club or impairing opportunities for their members.

The optics and the impact have not been good and clubs, now seeing their provincial sport organization in a new light, will change their registration practices going forward. Beyond the minimum registration requirements that clubs need to meet at the beginning of each new calendar year, actual registration of the majority of members will be delayed until programs are set to actually get underway on track. That means no early registrations in the Fall and holding out until spring before processing the bulk of their JD memberships for the season. They will be more protective of their funds and less trusting of BC Athletics.

Return-to-Play

Each club is reacting to Return-to-Play in their own way. JD programs are mostly concluded for the year, though some clubs are finding heightened demand for Track & Field at a time when other sports still haven't started back up again. Training has adapted and kids are enjoying being back out doing the things they are passionate about and being with their friends. While heightened levels of paranoia and awareness of risk are part of the trade-off for being allowed to gather again, they are outweighed by the camaraderie and good feelings that come from being back out doing what we love.

Return-to-Competition

For older, high performance athletes a return to any form of competition has been a welcome, motivating step. I haven't heard any clubs eager to pursue competitive opportunities for their JD aged athletes this year. The feeling is that the JD season was lost and clubs will wait until next year to see where things stand with the health crisis and react accordingly.

Major challenges will exist regarding competition as long as COVID persists. Club size and money are likely to become even more dramatic differentiators of opportunity...particularly on the tack. The cost of electronic timing systems and their availability will mean that fewer athletes have the chance to record recognized performances than ever before.