



**A Review of the Irish Boxing
team's performance at the 2016
Rio Olympic Games**

November 2016

Prepared by



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1. EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

1.1 Introduction

Boxing has been, by far, the most successful Irish Olympic sport and has delivered over 50% of all medals won by Irish athletes (16 out of 31) in the Summer Games. Ireland sent arguably its strongest ever boxing team to the 2016 Rio Olympic Games. They returned empty handed with no medals. Whilst the challenge of winning medals at the Olympic Games continues to get harder, this outcome was a shock to all.

Was this a blip in an otherwise outstanding success story or was the Rio result symptomatic of underlying failings in the High Performance programme? The answer is unequivocally the latter. There are fundamental weaknesses that have been exposed by the Rio outcome. However, the potential exists to restore the programme to its former status as the best and most productive (in medal terms) Irish sports programme. Key changes are required to make this happen. This review highlights the core issues that need to be addressed and calls on those in leadership positions within the IABA and other key stakeholders to work together to implement the reforms required. Senior personnel within the IABA including the CEO, Chairman and President are all in agreement that fundamental change is required.

The simple analysis would suggest that the failings in Rio were brought about by a combination of the departure of Billy Walsh as Head Coach to the programme and a string of unfortunate events including questionable judging decisions, a positive drugs test, and a loss of confidence during the Games as results started to go against the team. This would mask the real root causes.

There is no question that the loss of the Head Coach to the programme was a major blow and was, in our opinion, a factor in the subsequent outcome in Rio. However, the fault lines in the programme were present well before his departure. Also, at least one of the Irish boxers was defeated, in the view of most neutral observers, in a bizarre judging verdict. Again to allow this become part of the narrative distracts from the core reasons.

The areas that need to be addressed include:

- The absence of a dedicated High Performance Director since the departure of Gary Keegan in 2008;
- An over stretching of Head Coaches expected to perform dual roles of coaching and leading the programme;
- A lack of autonomy for decision making within the High Performance Programme;
- The slippage of boxer discipline and a commitment to the culture of high performance within the programme;
- The maintenance of accurate records of key boxer data within the programme;
- The need to expedite the move into state of the art facilities in Abbottstown;
- Access to high quality, well co-ordinated support service providers challenged to continually improve in the service of the boxers;
- A focus on developing more high performance coaches throughout the system and the introduction of past HP athletes into coaching roles;
- Embracing the changed landscape of boxing especially with the emergence of WSB franchises.

Irish boxing is potentially at a crossroads. A number of senior boxers have left the programme post Rio and will be replaced by a new wave of athletes. This has always been the case in Olympic cycles. The conveyor belt of talent exists, as evidenced by the continued success of the youth programmes internationally. If the key issues identified in this review are addressed and significant changes implemented, then the High Performance Programme can recover its status with the new batch of boxers. However, if the opportunity for change is not grasped now, then the decline evidenced by Rio and identified previously by the coaches in 2013 will continue.

2. METHODOLOGY

2.1 Review Scope

Kotinos Partners was commissioned by the Irish Amateur Boxing Association (IABA) to carry out a review of the Irish Boxing Team's performance at the 2016 Rio Olympic Games. The brief for this review was to:

- Provide an independent, evidence-based review report to the IABA on their high performance programme, their preparation for, and performance at the Rio Games;
- Gather and report data and insight based on the review framework provided by Sport Ireland to all National Governing Bodies (NGBs) participating at the Rio Games;
- Make recommendations to the IABA based on all findings and conclusions from the review process.

2.2 Review Process

The key inputs to this review process were:

1. Pre-Games assessment document completed by the IABA and submitted to Sport Ireland in advance of the Rio Games;
2. Post-Games online survey of athletes, coaching/support staff, performance director/lead, CEO/Board completed after the Rio Games;
3. Various documents relating to the planning and preparation by the IABA for the Rio Games including internal planning documents, High Performance reports, and reviews of the High Performance programme;
4. One-to-one interviews conducted with key personnel involved in the High Performance cycle from London 2012 to Rio 2016¹.

This report is an independent review written by Brian MacNeice, Managing Director Kotinos Partners and was submitted simultaneously by him to the IABA and Sport Ireland on the 11th November.

¹ A full list of those interviewed as part of the review process is included in Appendix 1.

3. RIO 2016 QUALIFICATION AND PERFORMANCE

3.1 Rio 2016 Qualification Process

The qualification process for boxers for the Games has become more complex with multiple qualification options through the AIBA Open Boxing (AOB), World Series of Boxing (WSB) and AIBA Pro Boxing (ABP). Ireland qualified 8 boxers for the Rio Games, one of the largest teams it has ever sent to an Olympic Games.

The first boxers to qualify were Paddy Barnes and Michael Conlan in April 2015 as a result of finishing in the top two of their respective weight divisions in the World Series of Boxing (WSB). In October 2015, Joe Ward's Silver medal at the World Championships in Doha secured his qualification. Michael Conlan won Gold at these championships and this opened up the possibility of another boxer qualifying through the WSB route. Steven Donnelly produced impressive results in the WSB and had finished just outside of the qualifying positions. However, his performances at WSB put him in line for qualification after two Russian Welterweights had to box-off for one spot. The vacant qualification place was then confirmed to Steven Donnelly in December 2015.

The next qualification event was the European Boxing Olympic Qualification Tournament held in Samsun, Turkey in April 2016. To qualify male boxers needed to finish in the top 3 in their weight division and the female boxers in the top 2. Brendan Irvine secured qualification with a Bronze medal, winning his Olympic box-off bout with a Bulgarian opponent. Likewise, David Oliver Joyce also won Bronze at these championships, defeating his Turkish opponent in the crucial Olympic box-off fight. No other Irish boxer qualified for Rio at this event with Dean Walsh (Round of 16), Michael O'Reilly (Round of 16), Darren O'Neill (Quarter Final), Ceire Smith (Quarter Final), Katie Taylor (Bronze Medal), and Christina Desmond (Quarter Final) all falling short.

Katie Taylor secured her qualification at the Women's World Championships in Astana in May 2016 where she won a Bronze Medal. Ceire Smith and Christina Desmond missed out on qualification at these championships. Kellie Harrington won a Silver Medal in the LightWelter Weight category delivering an outstanding performance. However, with only 3 weight divisions in the Rio Olympics for Women and with Katie Taylor's qualification also secured, the available position went to the London 2012 Gold Medallist.

The final opportunity for qualification came at the World Qualification Event in Baku in June 2016. Michael O'Reilly won the Gold Medal at this event and became the 8th and final Irish qualifier for Rio. Dean Gardiner claimed the Silver Medal losing out in the Final bout to his Italian opponent. As there was only one qualification position available in the Super Heavyweight Division, he just missed out on Rio qualification. Darren O'Neill lost out in his Round of 16 bout and Dean Walsh lost in the Round of 32 stage.

The final make-up of the 8-person team included an Olympic Champion, two-time Olympic medallist, reigning World Champion and a group of talented boxers all with potential to perform well and/or medal. This was arguably the most talented squad Ireland has ever sent to an Olympic Games and is the largest team since qualification began in 1992.

In total there were a possible 13 qualification places available to the Irish team across the various weight divisions – 10 Men and 3 Women. The final qualification tally of 8 was a record return (in the era of qualification), however a number of other nations out-performed Ireland in terms of the number of qualifiers secured. No country managed to qualify a boxer at all 13 available weight divisions. Kazakhstan and Great Britain had 12 qualifiers, Uzbekistan, France, Russia, China, and Azerbaijan had 11 each, Cuba and Morocco 10 (only 8 competed after 2 boxers failed doping tests pre-Games) and Brazil 9. That places Ireland outside the top 10 nations in terms of number of boxers qualified.

Recommendation 1: Set a target for Tokyo 2020 to be within the Top 3 countries in terms of numbers of boxers qualified and set an ambition to qualify a boxer in every available weight category.

3.2 Rio 2016 Performances

The performances of the Irish boxers at the Rio Games are summarised below:

Boxer	Weight Category	Bouts	Result	Finishing Position of Opponent
Paddy Barnes	Light Fly (49kg)	Round of 16 – v Spain	L 1-2	Lost QF Bout
Brendan Irvine	Fly (52 kg)	Round of 32 – v Uzbekistan	L 0-3	Gold Medal
Michael Conlan	Bantam (56 kg)	Round of 16 – v Armenia Quarter Final – v Russia	W 3-0 L 0-3	Bronze Medal
David Oliver Joyce	Light (60 kg)	Round of 32 – v Seychelles Round of 16 – v Azerbaijan	W 3-0 L 0-3	Lost QF Bout
Steven Donnelly	Welter (69 kg)	Round of 32 – v Algeria Round of 16 – v Mongolia Quarter Final – v Morocco	W 3-0 W 2-1 L 1-2	Bronze Medal
Michael O'Reilly	Middle (75 kg)	Failed drug test before Games	DNC	
Joe Ward	Light Heavy (81 kg)	Round of 16 – v Ecuador	L 1-2	Lost QF Bout
Katie Taylor	Light (60 kg)	Quarter Final – v Finland	L 1-2	Bronze Medal

Paddy Barnes

Paddy Barnes was seeded 4th in the LightFly Weight Division and received a first-round bye. His Round of 16 bout was against the Spaniard, Samuel Carmona Heredia a boxer ranked below Paddy. He lost in a split decision and clearly was tiring in the final round. After the bout, Paddy conceded that the struggle to make weight caused him difficulties and left him lacking energy. This is an issue explored in more detail below.

Brendan Irvine

Brendan, the youngest member of the squad at 20, was making his debut at an Olympic Games and arguably was ahead of schedule by qualifying at the European qualifier in Turkey. Drawn against a tough opponent, in the Uzbekistan fighter Shakhobidin Zoirov, he was defeated in a unanimous verdict. His opponent was a classy fighter and went on to win the Gold Medal.

Michael Conlan

As reigning World Champion, Michael was seeded number one and favourite to secure a Gold Medal. He received an opening round bye and his first bout was a Round of 16 contest against the Armenian Aram Avagyan. A polished performance saw Michael secure a comfortable unanimous decision. His quarter-final bout against Russian opponent Vladimir Nikitin was to prove one of the most controversial fights of the Games. The verdict was given to his opponent on a unanimous decision, however virtually all neutral observers were shocked by the decision. This bout, along with others not involving Irish boxers, resulted in an investigation being launched into officiating at the Games. Nikitin was unable to contest his semi-final bout due to injuries suffered in his fight with Michael Conlan and so claimed the Bronze medal.

David Oliver Joyce

David Oliver Joyce fought Andrique Allisop from the Seychelles in the Round of 32 stage. He won a tricky contest by way of unanimous decision. His Round of 16 contest was against the number 2 ranked boxer Albert Selimov from Azerbaijan. This was always going to be a tough battle and despite giving his all he lost out to a unanimous decision.

Steven Donnelly

Steven Donnelly was the first Irish boxer in action at the Games. Ranked 8th in his weight division he had an outside chance of a medal. His opening bout was against the Algerian Zohir Kedache. A strong performance saw him win comfortably on a 3-0 score. His Round of 16 bout versus the Mongolian Tuvshinbat Byamba was a tighter affair. He dug deep to secure a split decision and was one win away from a medal. The quarter-final fight saw him face Gold medal favourite Mohammed Rabii of Morocco. Having fallen behind in the opening two rounds Steven rallied in the final round but ultimately lost to a split decision 1-2. His Moroccan opponent went on to lose his semi-final and come away with a Bronze medal.

Michael O'Reilly

Michael O'Reilly tested positive for a banned substance in a test carried out in Ireland before the Games. As a result, he was disqualified from competing at the Games. This matter is dealt with in more detail below.

Joe Ward

Joe Ward was ranked 4th in the Light Heavyweight Division and as such a genuine medal prospect. He received an opening round bye before facing the Ecuadorean Carlos Andres Mina in the Round of 16 stage. Having received warnings in both the 2nd and 3rd rounds he went on to lose the bout on a split decision 1-2. There is no doubt this was a bout that Joe was capable of winning and a poor loss. His opponent went on to lose in the next round by way of Technical Knock Out.

Katie Taylor

The reigning Olympic champion was seeking to become only the second Irish athlete to retain an Olympic title after the hammer thrower Pat O'Callaghan in 1932. Katie went into the Games as the number one ranked boxer in the division, however on the back of defeats at both the European qualifier and the World Championships. Having received an opening round bye, she was to face Finnish boxer Mira Potkonen. She lost a tight split decision 1-2 and ended her Olympic quest. Katie Taylor has won a staggering 18 gold medals in championship boxing in her career to date.

In total, 19 nations won medals at the Rio Games. The following is the final medal table:

Rank	Nation	No of Boxers Qualified	Gold	Silver	Bronze	Total
1	Uzbekistan	11	3	2	2	7
2	Cuba	10	3	0	3	6
3	France	11	2	2	2	6
4	Kazakhstan	12	1	2	2	5
5	Russia	11	1	1	3	5
6	Great Britain	12	1	1	1	3
	USA	8	1	1	1	3
8	Brazil	9	1	0	0	1
9	China	11	0	1	3	4
10	Azerbaijan	11	0	1	1	2
	Colombia	5	0	1	1	2
12	Netherlands	3	0	1	0	1
13	Croatia	2	0	0	1	1
	Finland	1	0	0	1	1
	Germany	6	0	0	1	1
	Mexico	6	0	0	1	1
	Mongolia	6	0	0	1	1
	Morocco	10	0	0	1	1
	Venezuela	8	0	0	1	1
20	Ireland	8	0	0	0	0

3.3 Rio 2016 Performances vs. Targets

The Pre-Games performance target set out by the High Performance Programme was to improve on the 5th place finish at London 2012 and become the number one boxing nation at the Rio 2016. This target of '5 to 1' was ambitious and would have meant out-performing other nations with greater levels of investment. However, this is exactly the scale of ambition that the most successful high performance programme in Irish sport should be targeting.

At London 2012, Ireland qualified 6 boxers and won 4 medals (1 Gold, 1 Silver, 2 Bronze). For Rio 2016, the number of boxers qualified was 8, one of the largest teams Ireland has ever sent. Going into the Games the performance target for the Team was set as finishing higher in the medals table than the 5th place finish in London.

The Rio Games promised much with high hopes for a minimum of 3-4 medals. However, the Irish team came home empty handed. The Games got off to the worst start possible with the news of the Michael O'Reilly positive test for a banned substance. Things got progressively worse with the Paddy Barnes defeat in part due to his struggles to make weight, Joe Ward's defeat in a bout he was capable of winning, the loss of form of Katie Taylor and the highly controversial decision against Michael Conlan. To say that the Rio results were very disappointing is an understatement. Ultimately, a return of zero medals from arguably the best squad we have ever sent to the Games was a disastrous outcome and a nightmare Games for the Irish squad.

There is no question that there are fundamental issues within the high performance programme that need to be addressed, as outlined within this review. However, the ambition levels of the programme should not be toned down based on the outcome of Rio 2016. The original goal of 5th to 1st should be maintained and used as a driver to challenge and question standards in every aspect of the programme. This target is a long-term target and will obviously be dependent on resourcing the programme to achieve this. The reality is that all of the other countries we are competing against both have more financial resource behind them and far larger population bases to work off. It may not be realised by Tokyo 2020, however it should be used as a driving force to aim for in future cycles.

Recommendation 2: Re-commit to the goal of 5th (in London) to 1st in the World in the future and use this to continually challenge every aspect of the High Performance programme to ensure World Class standards apply throughout.

4. THE RIO EXPERIENCE

4.1 Pre-Games

The Irish team departed for Brazil on the 19th July. A pre-Games training camp was set up in a Naval Base on the coast line where the USA and Brazil boxing teams were also scheduled to stay. Upon arrival it was apparent that this location was not adequate. It should be noted that the venue was selected well in advance of the Games by the then Head Coach who visited the site and approved it as part of the preparation phase for the Games. The accommodation facilities were poor with cramped bedding, inadequate access to shower and toilet facilities, poor standards of hygiene, no access to internet and a working naval base with an active runway ensuring broken sleep for everyone involved.

The decision was made immediately to re-locate the team. An alternative option, in the form of a nearby hotel, was quickly secured and this became the accommodation location until the squad moved to the Olympic Village. Once this was addressed, the remainder of the pre-Games training camp went smoothly. The training facilities at the Naval base were fine and the Brazilian and USA teams provided good sparring opportunities for the squad and preparations went well.

The squad moved to the Olympic Village on the 29th July and there were no significant issues encountered with the OCI providing good support to the squad in settling into the Village.

4.2 Issues during the Games

On the 4th August, the day of the draw for the boxing event, and two days before the Irish squad started their Rio campaign, news broke that a boxer within the squad had failed a drugs test in Ireland pre-Games. In our view, this had a major impact on the team and was the worst possible start to the Games. Michael O'Reilly was told of his positive test by Dr. Una May, the Sport Ireland Anti-Doping Manager. As per protocol Michael was not allowed to train nor have any contact with the team. He remained in the Olympic Village until the 9th August an unsatisfactory position given the impact it had on others within the squad. The IABA President, Pat Ryan, who is also Michael's club coach played a pivotal role in advising Michael throughout this period. This was not ideal and the handling of his matter should have been the responsibility of the team management exclusively. Obviously, the decision to remain over this period was made by Michael himself, and was based on his intention to appeal the decision initially, as was his entitlement. Nonetheless, the delay in removing Michael from the Olympic Village added to the disruption of the team.

On the 27th August it was announced that two members of the Irish boxing team and one member of the Team GB boxing team were being investigated for betting during the Rio Games. All three boxers were severely reprimanded by the International Olympic Committee for betting on the boxing competition. The two Irish boxers involved Michael Conlan and Steven Donnelly had like all Irish athletes signed agreements in advance of the Games covering their obligations re betting amongst other areas. The Olympic Council of Ireland was also reprimanded for failing to educate their athletes that they were not allowed to gamble on Olympic events.

Both the OCI and IABA had provided detailed information to the athletes on anti-doping and betting protocols in advance of the Games. No blame can be laid at the door of either organisation for not making the athletes aware of their individual responsibilities.

5. KEY ISSUES IDENTIFIED ACROSS THE HIGH PERFORMANCE PROGRAMME

5.1 Role of High Performance Director

The High Performance Programme was founded in 2003 by the Irish Sports Council (since renamed Sport Ireland) and the IABA. Gary Keegan was appointed Performance Director and was charged with the responsibility of setting the strategy to deliver sustained success in Irish boxing. As Performance Director he was credited with changing the culture of Irish boxing and laying the foundations for success that delivered a large haul of European, World and Olympic medals. After the Beijing Games in 2008, Gary moved on to a new role in the Institute of Sport and Billy Walsh, the Head Coach under Gary Keegan took on the role in an unofficial capacity. In 2010, following an interview process, the then IABA President, Dominic O'Rourke was offered the role of High Performance Director and Billy Walsh was unsuccessful in applying for the role. This prompted the Irish Sports Council to withdraw their funding support for the role. Following the intervention from the Irish Sports Council a compromise position was established which saw Billy Walsh taking on the role of High Performance Coach and Dominic O'Rourke appointed Director of Boxing. After the resignation of Billy Walsh last year, the highly respected Zauri Antia, who has been with the programme since its inception in 2003, was appointed Interim Head Coach.

In reality, since the departure of Gary Keegan in 2008 the High Performance Programme has struggled with fundamental flaws in the leadership structure. The absence of a full time High Performance Director for Ireland's most successful sports programme is unacceptable. From 2010 to 2015, Billy Walsh was in essence carrying out the dual role of Head Coach and High Performance Director. Inevitably, this led to a compromising of standards. It is simply impossible for one individual to perform both roles to the highest possible standard demanded of a boxing programme aspiring to be the best in the world. The programme suffered as a result and some of the underlying faults within the programme were exposed under this arrangement.

Following the departure of Billy Walsh to Team USA in October 2015, Zauri Antia agreed to take on the challenge of performing the role of Interim Head Coach. The, already flawed leadership structure, was weakened further with this. Simply, put Zauri was over stretched. In our view, this placed far too much strain on one individual and despite the appointment of Eddie Bolger and John Conlan as High Performance Coaches, this structure undermined the effectiveness of the programme. It should be noted that the coaches and boxers within the programme were agreed at the time that it would not be appropriate to bring a new person into the programme in a key senior role so close to the Games. Given the proximity to Rio this was probably a sensible decision, however the underlying issue of a lack of a High Performance Director was accentuated as a result. Everyone interviewed as part of this review identified this as a critical issue in the cycle from London to Rio. The absence of a formal High Performance Director with full autonomy for decision making across the programme ensured that both Billy Walsh and subsequently Zauri Antia were working under a model that undermined their effectiveness. As a direct consequence of this, the standards and culture of the programme that helped establish its success in the first instance from 2003 to 2008 were gradually eroded.

The programme still produced medals at International level in spite of this. After the 2013 World Championships in Almaty, when the Irish team won 1 silver, 1 bronze, had 5 fighters reach the quarter-final stages and finished as the 6th best ranked nation an internal review of the programme was carried out in partnership with the Institute of Sport. Billy Walsh, as Head Coach, identified underlying weaknesses in the programme and challenged everyone involved to address some key issues. This self-review identified that the dual role of Head Coach and de facto Performance Director being carried out by Billy Walsh was "impacting on the leadership effectiveness of the Head Coach." Also the review identified that "there had been some slip in the culture of the programme since the London Olympics" as a result of the success of the programme leading to a degree of complacency and the "attention of the Head Coach being divided across too many areas." Actions were identified to address these concerns. A High Performance Operations Manager was appointed. However, the core issue of over-stretching the Head Coach was never adequately addressed. Simply put, in spite of the continued success in medal terms of the programme up to Rio, until

a dedicated High Performance Director is appointed in addition to the role of Head Coach, the programme will continue to be undermined.

The High Performance Director must have expertise and experience of high performance sport, ideally in a boxing context, however it is possible that the most qualified candidate may not come from a boxing background and might have experience from another sport.

Recommendation 3: Appoint an experienced and qualified High Performance Director to lead the programme, separate to the role of Head Coach.

5.2 Organisation structure

The lack of a full time Performance Director has led to some confusion within the IABA and across the programme with regard to roles and responsibilities. At present, the Chief Executive, is the 'Performance Lead' and has ultimate responsibility for the programme. However, the role of CEO is a demanding one and cannot give the High Performance Programme the level of time and attention it requires on a daily basis. Some of the responsibilities around planning and operations around the programme fall to the Interim Head Coach. However, the Interim Head Coach is the technical lead and is expected to be 'on the floor' working closely with the boxers in conjunction with the other High Performance coaches. This leads to confusion around this role.

Additionally, the skill sets required to perform the Performance Lead role and that of Head Coach are fundamentally different. It is very difficult for one person to master both. The likelihood of one individual being capable of combining the technical and tactical skills of a World Class Coach with the strategic management capabilities necessary to be a World Class Performance Director are slim. If the programme is to succeed it needs both. The scale and complexity of the programme is simply too large to combine these roles into one.

All those interviewed, were of the view that Zauri Antia is one of the best technical and tactical coaches in the world and his role within the programme since its inception has been a fundamental factor in the success enjoyed within the programme over the last decade. They believe he should be allowed to focus exclusively on his role as Head Coach and not have his impact and effectiveness in this role diminished by the demands of acting as the de facto Performance Director on top of this.

The complexity of the qualification process and the multiple routes to Rio qualification stretched the coaching resources within the programme to the limit. The team of High Performance coaches faced a punishing schedule of travel and training as they attempted to provide the training and competition demands across the programme. This in turn placed a reliance on the pool coaches to provide additional support, especially when some members of the squad were away in competition whilst others continued their training at home.

Recommendation 4: Establish a revised organisation structure for the core High Performance Programme Team. The core team should consist of:

- **Performance Director (with overall responsibility for the vision, strategy, plan and operations of the programme);**
- **Head Coach (with overall responsibility for the lead in terms of technical and tactical coaching across the programme);**
- **High Performance Coaches (working with Senior & Junior Men's and Women's squads)**
- **High Performance Administration Manager (supporting the team on all operational matters across the programme);**
- **The core High Performance team will be supplemented with Pool Coaches based on the demand of the programme at any point in time.**

The Performance Director will have direct line management responsibility for all staff within the programme including the Head Coach, High Performance Coaches, High Performance Administration manager and Pool Coaches. The Performance Director will report directly to the CEO.

5.3 Autonomy of Decision-Making

From the outset in 2003, the High Performance Programme has been plagued with issues of interference from within the structures of the IABA. The leaders of the programme have never had full autonomy for decision making around the areas of budgetary control, selection of boxers for training camps and competitions, and discipline of boxers within the programme. Combined, with the underlying weakness of a lack of a formal High Performance Director, this has de-powered the leaders of the programme and is a major factor hampering the ability of the programme to realise its full potential. The continued success of the programme from 2008 to date has masked this issue. However, Rio 2016 should act as the ultimate wake up call to address this decisively.

It is essential that there is disciplined budgetary oversight to prevent issues, as occurred in 2013 when a €70k budget overrun was incurred on the programme. Nonetheless, decisions on how the High Performance budget is allocated and spent should be the responsibility of the High Performance Director directly with adequate reporting and controlling from an oversight body (see 5.4 below).

Throughout the cycle from London to Rio this issue of autonomy was prevalent. For example, at the European Boxing Olympic Qualification Tournament held in Samsun, Turkey in April 2016, two boxers, Michael O'Reilly and Dean Walsh, were involved in a serious breach of team discipline. Both boxers were sent home from Turkey, fined a significant sum of money and the coaching staff effectively dismissed them from the High Performance Programme. Given the serious nature of the incident this was undoubtedly the right course of action. However, subsequently, following interventions from the IABA Council and others, the boxers were reinstated to the programme by the Interim Head Coach and their sanctions reduced significantly. This undermined the culture of professionalism within the programme and the leadership position of the High Performance coaching staff. Many of the athletes and coaches within the High Performance team interviewed as part of this review were unequivocal in their views that neither boxer should have been reinstated. They felt that the two boxers did not deserve to be included in the subsequent training camp in Azerbaijan where the Interim Head Coach was asked to select the most in form boxers in their weight division for the final qualification event. Michael O'Reilly subsequently secured qualification for Rio at the final opportunity in Baku in June. The subsequent positive drugs test, which may have had a major impact on the team at the Games, may not have been an issue if the sanctions from the incident in Turkey were stricter. Without full autonomy for those charged

with leadership of the programme to make such key decisions, it is inevitable that the culture and standards required of a high performance programme will, at times, be compromised.

In the post London 2012 Review, conducted by independent consultants Knight, Kavanagh & Page, this issue was addressed explicitly. They recommended that “the power of key IABA members or committees to either sanction or change HPP team decisions with regard to athletes selected entering (or not entering) domestic or international competitions is ceded in its entirety to the PD and HPP team.” Further they recommended that “the HPP team is directly and fully responsible and accountable for all HPP funding going forward.” These changes have not been implemented. Action is being taken now to address this. This will require changes to the rules of the IABA and the constitutional rights of IABA committees and work is already underway to propose changes to the rule book of the Association. Absent of making these changes, the programme will always be compromised and this will impact negatively on the ability of the programme to realise its full potential.

Recommendation 5: The High Performance Programme, under the leadership of an experienced and qualified High Performance Director, should have full autonomy for all elements of the programme including management of the Board approved budget and finances assigned to the programme, selection of squads and athletes participating in the programme and disciplinary issues of participants within the programme.

The National Championships play a key role in the identification of potential candidates for selection within the High Performance Programme. The proposed changes to the decision making structures around the programme include autonomy of selection for squads. In these circumstances, it is inappropriate and would represent a conflict of interest for any member of the High Performance coaching team to be in the corner of a boxer in the National Championships. Therefore, it is recommended that this practice is no longer allowed.

Recommendation 6: No member of the High Performance Coaching Team should act in the corner of a boxer in the National Championships.

5.4 Oversight of High Performance Programme

The changes outlined above would create a fit for purpose structure for the High Performance Programme and enable the team working within the programme to operate with accountability and responsibility for the outcomes delivered. This will be further enhanced through the establishment of a High Performance Advisory Board (HPAB) with responsibility for providing support and challenge to the High Performance Programme.

The HPAB would replace the existing oversight committees within the Board and Council structures that currently play a role in High Performance matters. The HPAB would comprise of the following individuals:

- CEO;
- High Performance Director;
- One Nominated member of the IABA Board;
- Two nominated members of the IABA Council;
- Two independent High Performance experts.

The HPAB would meet on a quarterly basis and the primary function would be to review the strategy, plans, budget and progress of the High Performance Programme. In effect, the HPAB would act as an oversight body across each of these areas, a sounding board for, and provide advice and challenge to the High Performance Director and his/her team. For clarity, and to reinforce Recommendation 5 above, the HPAB would not have a role in vetoing or amending decisions made by the High Performance Programme.

To protect the integrity of this advisory group, all members of the HPAB should avoid any potential conflicts of interest with respect to their role. Examples of such conflicts might include service providers to the programme or personal coaches to boxers within the programme.

The independent High Performance experts should come from outside of the structures of the IABA and may or may not have a background in boxing. However, they should have a strong, recognised level of expertise in world class high performance structures and systems. They should be appointed on the basis of an open application and interview process.

Recommendation 7: Establish a High Performance Advisory Board (HPAB) to act as an oversight body, a sounding board for and to provide advice and challenge to the High Performance Programme. For further detail on the make-up and structure see Section 4.4 above.

5.5 Back to Basics

The original success of the High Performance Programme was undoubtedly rooted in a commitment to high standards of behaviour and culture across the programme. This was established early under the regime of Gary Keegan as HPD. This has gradually slipped in spite of, and in part as a result of, the continued success of the programme. The internal review carried out in 2014 after the 2013 World Championships in Almaty identified this as a key concern. The review highlighted “some slip in the culture of the programme since the London Olympics.” The absence of a dedicated Performance Director resulting in the attention of the then Head Coach, Billy Walsh, being divided across too many areas was also cited as a key contributory factor. This was accentuated following Billy Walsh’s departure and the workload imposed on Zauri Antia as Interim Head Coach. The 2014 review called out explicitly the need to “re-establish the foundations of excellence that had delivered success to date.”

The need for a sharper focus and accountability from coaches and support staff plus greater levels of ownership, responsibility and accountability of the senior boxers around their own preparation and performance were key recommendations arising from the review. A code of conduct for boxers was discussed and it was agreed that this would be formalised and implemented to reinforce this re-commitment to core behaviours. This was never implemented and there is no question that the slide in standards continued up to Rio 2016. Issues in relation to boxers’ attendance at training, adherence to advice from coaches and support staff and a general lack of ‘high performance’ discipline were prevalent.

For example, one area of concern across the programme is the approach to weight management by some of the boxers and the coaching staff. The demands on individual athletes to monitor and control their weight is not trivial and requires significant sacrifices and discipline on behalf of the boxers. A slippage in the underlying culture of the programme accentuates this issue. A policy of maintaining weight within specified limits (e.g. 5% of target weight) on an ongoing basis is a feature of many similar programmes. In some cases, athletes were above this threshold for long periods of time. This was highlighted in the aftermath of the Paddy Barnes defeat at Rio and there is no question that the fact that Paddy never made his target weight from the point of his qualification some 16 months before Rio until the event itself reduced his chances of medalling. This problem was not exclusive to one boxer and led to significant issues in the case of other athletes within the programme. The support services staff and coaches within the programme expressed concerns in this regard, however it would appear that for various reasons the problems

persisted. As a duty of care to athletes and to ensure that they are best prepared to compete and fulfil their potential this area should be tackled in a more pro-active manner and a culture of uncompromising discipline applied to weight management and control.

Recommendation 8: The High Performance Programme should adopt a stricter monitoring and control of weight management across the athletes within the programme. Boxers should be managed in a controlled way to maintain an agreed target weight limit (e.g. within 5% of their fighting weight) on an ongoing basis.

If the programme is to deliver sustained, long-term success these issues need to be addressed. The code of conduct should be implemented and enforced with rigour. Following Rio, the make-up of the High Performance squad has changed with a number of boxers graduating to the professional ranks and a new group of athletes will form the basis of the programme going forward. This represents an opportunity to return to a 'back to basics' philosophy in terms of the underlying culture of the programme. The Interim Head Coach and the other coaches in the programme have identified this as a key short-term priority.

Recommendation 9: Formalise the boxer code of conduct and commit to a 'back to basics' philosophy to re-establish a strong high performance culture and set of behaviours across the programme.

In the event that athletes breach the code of conduct, the High Performance Programme should be empowered to discipline the boxers as they see fit. As part of the code an explicit scale of offences (e.g. Level 1 to 3) should be developed with guidelines in terms of sanctions applicable based on the level of transgression. Sanctions may include the withholding of funding through the carding scheme. In the case of the most serious level of breach, a disciplinary hearing should be conducted by the High Performance Advisory Board and they would be responsible for setting the level of sanction. The rules of the IABA should be amended to facilitate this.

Recommendation 10: The High Performance Programme should develop a scale of disciplinary offences based on the code of conduct and be empowered to discipline boxers for breaches as appropriate. In the case of the most serious level of breach the High Performance Advisory Board will conduct a disciplinary hearing and determine the appropriate sanction.

One symptom of the slippage in standards is the lack of comprehensive recording of key data relating to the boxers. For example, regular records should be kept of training attendance, weight tracking, adherence to training programmes and other essential elements of the programme. Such records have not been maintained through the London to Rio cycle. The programme should keep accurate, up-to-date records for every participant within the programme.

Recommendation 11: Ensure accurate and up-to-date records of key data relating to each boxer in the programme is maintained within the programme.

5.6 Support Services

A range of support service staff are assigned to the programme, mainly on a part-time basis, offering services including physiotherapy, strength and conditioning, nutrition advice, sports psychology, performance analysis, medical expertise and lifestyle advice.

Physiotherapy

The services provided by the physiotherapists on the programme are generally rated well by the coaches and athletes. However, there is an acceptance by service provider, athletes and coaches that the scale of support is inadequate for the needs of the programme. Ideally, a physio should be appointed on a full time basis to the programme and available at all times when the athletes are in training camp and/or in competition. At present this is not the case. This should be rectified.

Recommendation 12: Appoint a full-time physio to the programme and ensure this service is available at all times when the High Performance squad are in training camp or in competition to guarantee immediate access to and increased quality of service to the athletes.

Nutrition

The relationship between the Nutritionist and some boxers within the programme became increasingly strained over the London to Rio cycle. This came to a head when some of the athletes made public comments about the quality of advice available through the programme. It was recognised as part of the internal programme review in 2014 that one reason for this was that “some support staff deliver their expertise in areas that boxers may not find intrinsically enjoyable (e.g. physical conditioning, nutrition and weight management).” In our view, the coaches have a key role to play in addressing this and ensuring that there is a more positive working relationship between service providers and boxers in these areas. The coaches should take a more direct approach to the input of specialist advisors to ensure that they can deliver their service more effectively.

Recommendation 13: Coaches should take a more hands on approach in directing the input of service providers to ensure that they can deliver their service more effectively.

Strength and Conditioning

The programme has access to a full time strength and conditioning expert and this is a key area of support. There are two issues that need to be addressed in this area. The first, is the need to have a more tailored programme to adapt to the individual needs of each boxer. Given the range of weight divisions and the natural difference in physiology of the boxers, it is important that the S&C programme for each athlete is specifically tailored to their individual requirements. In some cases, the athletes and coaches felt that the S&C programmes are too generic. The programme should explore the provision of additional physiological testing, such as the introduction of VO₂, Hydration, and/or CK Tests, to help inform the specific requirements of each athlete.

Secondly, the S&C facilities at the National Stadium are not adequate for a world class high performance programme. The space within the gym for S&C is cramped and the equipment not state of the art. This can and should be addressed by moving the programme on a full time basis to the Institute of Sport facilities in Abbotstown (see 5.7 below).

Recommendation 14: Tailor S&C programmes to the individual needs of each athlete within the programme and expand the range of physiological tests conducted.

Sports Psychology

A sports psychologist has been working with the programme on a part-time basis for several years. Some athletes use this service more than others. By its nature it is a very personal support element of the programme. The sports psychologist was a member of the accredited party at Rio and at some of the qualification events in the lead-up to the Games. Some members of the team do not value this service as highly as others and question whether this is an essential element of the in-competition support team. Ultimately, this should be a decision that is made by the High Performance Director and based on the needs of the squad and the perceived value/priority of support services required competition by competition.

Recommendation 15: The High Performance Director should have ultimate responsibility for deciding on the make-up of the support service providers that travel with the team for each competition based on the perceived value/priority of the team and the available budget within the programme for such services.

Performance Analysis

Over the last 10 years the provision of performance analysis services has been provided through the Institute of Sport. The programme has built up a significant database of analysis on each boxer within the unit and on opponents that is an important element in analysing and setting tactics in competition. It is a service that has been used in virtually every competition over that time. It was decided, due to restrictions on the number of accreditations available for the Games, not to bring a performance analyst as part of the support team for Rio. At previous Games (Beijing and London) the service could be facilitated remotely through access to TV broadcast footage. This service was not available in Rio. This service should be available either remotely or in person in competition mode.

Recommendation 16: Ensure that performance analysis services are available to coaches in competition, either directly or remotely.

In 2015, an exciting potential partnership with a data analytics company was explored which could have provided a ground-breaking level of performance analysis to the programme. The Institute of Sport and Sport Ireland explored this in detail, however ultimately the proposed partnership did not materialise. This is an example of an innovation project that may provide a competitive edge over other nations. If possible, this partnership project should be re-examined by Sport Ireland to assess the feasibility of delivering a world class performance analysis capability to the programme.

Recommendation 17: Explore the possibility of establishing an innovative partnership with a data analytics company to deliver a world-leading performance analysis capability to the High Performance Programme.

Medical Expertise

The High Performance Programme identified the need for specific medical support in relation to the area of cuts after the wearing of head guards was dispensed with. A specialist expert in this discipline was recruited and assigned to the

support staff for the World Championships, European Qualifiers and the Rio Games. This is a niche need, and can play a crucial role in keeping boxers in the ring. The provision of this service should be continued for all major championships.

Recommendation 18: Continue the practice of including a niche medical expert in managing cuts within the support team for all major championships.

Lifestyle Advice

The programme has a responsibility to adopt a whole person approach to athletes within the programme. A lifestyle advisory service is available on a part-time basis to the programme and this role plays a key part in addressing some of the developmental needs of the boxers outside of the ring. It is essential that the IABA take seriously their role in investing in the personal development of their athletes. Various programmes should be offered on a proactive basis in areas such as education, adult literacy, mental health wellbeing and the boxers should be encouraged and facilitated to avail of these opportunities so that their involvement in the programme is a life enhancing experience.

Recommendation 19: Offer, on a proactive basis, a range of development programmes to athletes to maximise their personal development throughout their participation within the High Performance Unit.

Maximising the impact of support services

The provision of support services is a central element of the High Performance Programme. The suite of services provided and the work of service providers should be managed directly by and co-ordinated through the High Performance Director to ensure that they are athlete focused and at all times are challenged to deliver to world class standards. A set of Key Performance Indicators (KPIs) should be agreed between the High Performance Director and the service providers and these should be tracked and monitored closely to ensure high quality of service, delivery of agreed targets and outcomes, and to assess value for money from these services.

Many of the service providers have been with the programme for several years. In the aftermath of the Rio Games, the time is right to re-calibrate the service provision to the programme and challenge each provider to assess their service and how they can improve it heading in the Tokyo cycle. It will be the responsibility of the HPD to ensure that the relationships between the service providers, coaches and athletes are positive and healthy.

Recommendation 20: The High Performance Director should manage directly and co-ordinate the provision of services by all support providers to the programme. An agreed set of KPIs should be established and monitored closely to ensure quality of service, delivery of agreed outcomes and value for money. Each provider should be challenged to assess their service and how it can be improved heading into the Tokyo cycle.

5.7 High Performance Centre

Since inception the High Performance Unit has been based in the gym in the National Stadium. The facilities there are rudimentary and cramped. The establishment of the High Performance Centre at the Institute of Sport in Abbottstown ensures that a world class training facility is now available to the boxing programme. All of the coaches and athletes within the programme are agreed that it is essential that the High Performance Unit moves lock, stock and barrel to this facility.

Recommendation 21: Relocate the High Performance Unit in full to the High Performance Centre at the Institute of Sport in Abbottstown.

Two operational issues have been identified in relation to the re-location of the HP Unit to Abbottstown – catering and accommodation. The National Stadium has a full time caterer on site providing services to the HP Programme when they are in situ. There is no caterer on site at the Sports Institute. An arrangement will need to be put in place to ensure that high quality catering services are sourced for the HP Unit. Arrangements are already in place to address this by the IABA to address this. This should resolve the catering issue.

Recommendation 22: Ensure that adequate catering arrangements are put in place at Abbottstown to service the requirements of the HP Unit.

The accommodation issue is more complex. There is no provision currently for lodging or adequate rest and recovery facilities at Abbottstown. The HP Programme has a long-standing arrangement with the Louis Fitzgerald Hotel at a favourable rate. However, this is not an ideal environment for the boxers within the programme and the travel distance to this hotel from Abbottstown is a concern (the same issue applied to this arrangement when the HP Unit was based at the National Stadium). If possible, alternative accommodation should be sourced closer to Abbottstown, at similar rates to the existing arrangement in the short-term. A more permanent, long-term solution would be to house athletes on site at Abbottstown. There are plans for dormitory style units in subsequent phases of the development on site and this would solve the issue. The National Sports Campus Development Authority have identified a site on campus which could be developed for the exclusive use of the boxing programme and would be capable of housing up to 20 people. This would represent an alternative long-term solution. The IABA have some concerns about this option and have not pursued it with the NSCDA. The IABA should continue to engage with the NSCDA and the Institute of Sport to develop the optimum solution over the long-term for accommodation and rest & recovery facilities on site.

Recommendation 23: Examine alternative options for accommodation closer to Abbottstown in the short-term at a similar cost to the existing arrangement with the IABA hotel provider.

Recommendation 24: Explore the optimum long-term solution to provide on-site accommodation and rest & recovery facilities on site at Abbottstown.

5.8 Role of Team Manager

The role of Team Manager to the boxing team for international events and in particular Olympic Games is becoming an increasingly onerous one. The Rio Games highlighted this with the perfect storm of a failed drugs test, controversial judging decisions, disappointing performances within the squad, and two members of the squad being reprimanded for betting activity ensuring there were many issues to be managed over and above the normal issues encountered at the Games.

Traditionally, the IABA appointed the Team Manager from the volunteer base within the sport. The role, has for many years, rotated between the Provincial Council Chairs and indeed this is written in the IABA rulebook. The origin of this policy is in the spirit of recognising volunteers for their contribution to the sport. Whilst this is laudable, the practice is one that is outdated in the era of high performance.

As Rio proved, the role now demands the expertise of a professional. In future Olympiads (and other key international events) the role of Team Manager should be carried out by the High Performance Director. The High Performance Director will play a central role in the planning and preparation pre-Games and is best placed to deal with and manage the various issues that may arise during the event.

If, for any reason, the High Performance Director is unable to perform the role of Team Manager, then it should be appointed on the basis of capability through a selection process managed by the High Performance Director.

Recommendation 25: The role of Team Manager at Olympic Games and other key international events should be assigned to the High Performance Director. In the event the HPD is unable to perform the role of Team Manager for an event, then the role should be appointed by the HPD.

5.9 Succession planning

Since its inception in 2003 the roll of honour of athletes that have passed through the High Performance Programme has grown. There is now a considerable pool of ex-boxers that have experience of the programme, its culture, training methods and what it takes to be a high performance boxer. Few, if any, of these ex-boxers are actively involved in IABA coaching programmes. This seems like a missed opportunity.

Given the demands on the coaching resources across the programme and the need for additional resources to supplement the programme at key times through 'pool coaches', the option of integrating former High Performance Programme athletes into this pool should be explored. This will obviously be dependent on such individuals committing to developing their coaching qualifications and expertise, however the programme would benefit greatly from the infusion of 'younger blood' into the coaching ranks to supplement the more experienced club and provincial coaches included within the extended panel of coaches currently.

Recommendation 26: Identify past graduates of the High Performance Programme as potential new coaches and focus on their development to attract 'new blood' into the coaching ranks across the HP and provincial programmes.

In addition, the High Performance Programme, should play a role in the education and development of provincial coaches through education masterclasses, inviting provincial coaches to attend and observe High Performance training days, and the mentoring of coaches as appropriate. It is in the long-term interests of the programme to increase the quality of coaching throughout the provincial and club environment. Strategically, it is essential that the

High Performance Programme has a pipeline of coaching talent to draw on as part of a succession planning policy to ensure that the success of the programme is not reliant on one or two key individuals.

Recommendation 27: The High Performance Programme should play a role in the development of provincial coaches through education masterclasses, invitations to attend training days/camps and mentoring of coaches.

5.10 WSB Franchise

The international landscape of amateur boxing has changed dramatically in the last number of years. The introduction of World Series of Boxing (WSB) and AIBA Pro Boxing (APB) has opened up new opportunities for boxers and qualification routes for the Olympic Games. A review of the medallists from Rio highlights the importance of WSB in particular. Across the 10 weight divisions in the male boxing events, 6 of the Gold, 5 of the Silver, and 12 of the Bronze medallists were WSB franchise fighters. That is a total of 23 out of 40 medals (or 57.5% of the medals). Furthermore, a review of the medals table by country shows that 8 of the top 11 in the table have a national WSB franchise. This suggests that Irish boxing is at a disadvantage to other countries as long as it does not have a WSB franchise. Obviously, some members of the Irish squad competed for other franchises in WSB (and qualified for the games as a result). However, the majority of Irish boxers will not be involved in a WSB franchise.

There are many potential advantages to the establishment of an Irish based WSB franchise, including:

- Increased, high quality competitive opportunities for Irish boxers;
- More opportunities to qualify for future Olympic Games;
- A more concentrated programme ensuring that the coaches are not away from the core High Performance squad during the WSB events;
- The opportunity to create a strong team focus and identity around an Irish WSB franchise;
- High quality international competition in Ireland on a more frequent basis to capture the imagination and grow the Irish boxing fan base;
- A platform to build the public profile of an extended group of boxers within the High Performance Programme;
- An opportunity to develop a revitalised brand around the High Performance Programme and attract commercial sponsorship.

If Ireland is serious about the ambition to become the leading boxing nation at future Olympic Games, then it cannot ignore the emergence of WSB. Obviously, the cost of a WSB franchise is a significant obstacle to be overcome. However, a feasibility study should be carried out to determine if an Irish franchise could be established. This will require innovative thinking and a very different approach. We would recommend the exploration of a potential partnership model involving the IABA, Sport Ireland, private investment and a major media organisation. If approached in the right way it could be a new dawn and a major game changer for the High Performance Programme and the IABA.

Recommendation 28: Carry out a feasibility study with a consortium of partners to assess the viability of establishing an Irish based WSB Franchise.

5.11 Commercial Strategy

The High Performance Programme is reliant almost exclusively on state funding through Sport Ireland and Sport Northern Ireland. One of the major failings of the IABA in this regard, has been the inability to raise self-generated commercial income on the back of the success of the programme. Whilst it is accepted that the sponsorship and commercial market is difficult, the bottom line is that boxing has been Ireland's most successful Olympic sport by some distance and this should have been leveraged to raise additional revenues.

The outcome of Rio and the recent controversies associated with the IABA and the High Performance Programme make this a much more difficult sell now. However, the organisation should focus on steps they can take to build confidence in the brand and create a platform for building positive relationships with potential commercial partners.

Recommendation 29: Develop a strategy to build confidence in the IABA and High Performance brand and build positive relationships with potential commercial partners.

6. RECOMMENDATIONS

This is a summary of the recommendations outlined within the review:

Recommendation 1: Set a target for Tokyo 2020 to be within the Top 3 countries in terms of numbers of boxers qualified and set an ambition to qualify a boxer in every available weight category.

Recommendation 2: Re-commit to the goal of 5th (in London) to 1st in the World in the future and use this to continually challenge every aspect of the High Performance programme to ensure World Class standards apply throughout.

Recommendation 3: Appoint an experienced and qualified High Performance Director to lead the programme, separate to the role of Head Coach.

Recommendation 4: Establish a revised organisation structure for the core High Performance Programme Team. The core team should consist of:

- Performance Director (with overall responsibility for the vision, strategy, plan and operations of the programme);
- Head Coach (with overall responsibility for the lead in terms of technical and tactical coaching across the programme);
- High Performance Coaches (working with Senior & Junior Men's and Women's squads)
- High Performance Administration Manager (supporting the team on all operational matters across the programme);
- The core High Performance team will be supplemented with Pool Coaches based on the demand of the programme at any point in time.

The Performance Director will have direct line management responsibility for all staff within the programme including the Head Coach, High Performance Coaches, High Performance Administration manager and Pool Coaches. The Performance Director will report directly to the CEO.

Recommendation 5: The High Performance Programme, under the leadership of an experienced and qualified High Performance Director, should have full autonomy for all elements of the programme including management of the Board approved budget and finances assigned to the programme, selection of squads and athletes participating in the programme and disciplinary issues of participants within the programme.

Recommendation 6: No member of the High Performance Coaching Team should act in the corner of a boxer in the National Championships.

Recommendation 7: Establish a High Performance Advisory Board (HPAB) to act as an oversight body, a sounding board for and to provide advice and challenge to the High Performance Programme. For further detail on the make-up and structure see Section 4.4 above.

Recommendation 8: The High Performance Programme should adopt a stricter monitoring and control of weight management across the athletes within the programme. Boxers should be managed in a controlled way to maintain an agreed target weight limit (e.g. within 5% of their fighting weight) on an ongoing basis.

Recommendation 9: Formalise the boxer code of conduct and commit to a 'back to basics' philosophy to re-establish a strong high performance culture and set of behaviours across the programme.

Recommendation 10: The High Performance Programme should develop a scale of disciplinary offences based on the code of conduct and be empowered to discipline boxers for breaches as appropriate. In the case of the most serious level of breach the High Performance Advisory Board will conduct a disciplinary hearing and determine the appropriate sanction.

Recommendation 11: Ensure accurate and up-to-date records of key data relating to each boxer in the programme is maintained within the programme.

Recommendation 12: Appoint a full-time physio to the programme and ensure this service is available at all times when the High Performance squad are in training camp or in competition to guarantee immediate access to and increased quality of service to the athletes.

Recommendation 13: Coaches should take a more hands on approach in directing the input of service providers to ensure that they can deliver their service more effectively.

Recommendation 14: Tailor S&C programmes to the individual needs of each athlete within the programme and expand the range of physiological tests conducted.

Recommendation 15: The High Performance Director should have ultimate responsibility for deciding on the make-up of the support service providers that travel with the team for each competition based on the perceived value/priority of the team and the available budget within the programme for such services.

Recommendation 16: Ensure that performance analysis services are available to coaches in competition, either directly or remotely.

Recommendation 17: Explore the possibility of establishing an innovative partnership with a data analytics company to deliver a world-leading performance analysis capability to the High Performance Programme.

Recommendation 18: Continue the practice of including a niche medical expert in managing cuts within the support team for all major championships.

Recommendation 19: Offer, on a proactive basis, a range of development programmes to athletes to maximise their personal development throughout their participation within the High Performance Unit.

Recommendation 20: The High Performance Director should manage directly and co-ordinate the provision of services by all support providers to the programme. An agreed set of KPIs should be established and monitored closely to ensure quality of service, delivery of agreed outcomes and value for money. Each provider should be challenged to assess their service and how it can be improved heading into the Tokyo cycle.

Recommendation 21: Relocate the High Performance Unit in full to the High Performance Centre at the Institute of Sport in Abbottstown.

Recommendation 22: Ensure that adequate catering arrangements are put in place at Abbottstown to service the requirements of the HP Unit.

Recommendation 23: Examine alternative options for accommodation closer to Abbottstown in the short-term at a similar cost to the existing arrangement with the IABA hotel provider.

Recommendation 24: Explore the optimum long-term solution to provide on-site accommodation and rest & recovery facilities on site at Abbottstown.

Recommendation 25: The role of Team Manager at Olympic Games and other key international events should be assigned to the High Performance Director. In the event the HPD is unable to perform the role of Team Manager for an event, then the role should be appointed by the HPD.

Recommendation 26: Identify past graduates of the High Performance Programme as potential new coaches and focus on their development to attract 'new blood' into the coaching ranks across the HP and provincial programmes.

Recommendation 27: The High Performance Programme should play a role in the development of provincial coaches through education masterclasses, invitations to attend training days/camps and mentoring of coaches.

Recommendation 28: Carry out a feasibility study with a consortium of partners to assess the viability of establishing an Irish based WSB Franchise.

Recommendation 29: Develop a strategy to build confidence in the IABA and High Performance brand and build positive relationships with potential commercial partners.

Recommendation 30: The IABA, led by the CEO, should develop a detailed implementation roadmap outlining the critical path and timetable for change as a result of the Rio Review.

7. IMPLEMENTATION

Many of those interviewed as part of this review expressed concerns about the ability of the IABA to implement the changes required to re-invigorate the High Performance Programme. Indeed, several of the recommendations have been highlighted previously in reviews carried out after previous Olympiads and in internal reviews conducted out by the programme itself.

These concerns are well founded, as previous history suggests that organisational change is slow and hard to implement. However, the imperative for reform and decisive action should create an urgency to act. If the lessons learnt in the cycle from London to Rio are ignored the likelihood is that the High Performance Programme will continue to slide and under-achieve.

However, the opportunity exists to use Rio as the fundamental wake-up call required to re-invigorate the programme and establish it once more as the most successful Irish sporting programme and on a par with the best boxing programmes in the world. The talent pool of athletes and coaches is there. The track record of Irish boxers in the Junior ranks shows that clubs across all provinces are capable of producing boxers with the potential to succeed internationally.

Senior personnel within the IABA including the CEO, Chairman and President are all in agreement that fundamental change is required. The coaches within the High Performance Programme want these changes to be implemented to enable them deliver the ambitions they have for their athletes. The key external stakeholders are anxious to see a real commitment to the change process they see as necessary to instil confidence in their investment in the programme. This is a good starting point. Change is difficult and requires strong leadership and a unified determination from all involved to implement and in some cases a leap of faith by people to relinquish power and authority to those tasked with delivery.

The IABA should develop a detailed implementation roadmap outlining the critical path and timetable for change as a result of this review. This should be developed and agreed with the Board by the end of December 2016. Some of the changes outlined within this review have resource implications. As part of the development of the implementation roadmap it will be key to review the budget for High Performance and agree how this will be allocated, if possible, without compromising the ambition of the programme.

Recommendation 30: The IABA, led by the CEO, should develop a detailed implementation roadmap outlining the critical path and timetable for change as a result of the Rio Review.

All parties involved must commit fully to working together to make this happen. It will be a challenging journey. However, as every Olympian will tell you, nothing comes easy and the blood sweat and tears will all be worth it if the Irish Boxing Programme can return to the success it has enjoyed in the past.

Appendix One

List of Interviewees

The following were interviewed on a one-to-one basis as part of this review:

Boxers

Paddy Barnes
Brendan Irvine
Michael Conlan
Dean Walsh
Steven Donnelly
Darren O'Neill
Ceire Smith
Christina Desmond

Boxers invited but not interviewed

David Oliver Joyce
Joe Ward
Dean Gardiner
Michaela Walsh
Katie Taylor

Coaches

Zauri Antia
Eddie Bolger
John Conlan
Dmitry Dmitruk
Billy McClean

IABA Staff and Officers

Fergal Carruth - CEO
Rachel Mulligan - High Performance Operations Officer
John Nangle - Financial Officer
Joe Christle - Chairman
Pat Ryan - President
Joe Hennigan – Team Manager

Support Service Providers

John Cleary – S&C Coach
Sharon Madigan – Nutritionist
Alan Swanton – Analyst
Julianne Ryan – Physio
Gerry Hussey – Sport Psychologist
David McHugh – Personal Development & Lifeskills
Daragh Sheridan – PEP Podium Programme
Jim Clover – Team Doctor

Others

Billy Walsh – Former Head Coach
Emira O'Neill – Former HP Operations Officer
Kenneth Egan – Former Olympic Boxer
Steve Martin – CEO Olympic Council of Ireland
Paul McDermott – Director, High Performance, Sport Ireland
Shaun Ogle – Director of Performance, Sport Northern Ireland
Richard Archibald – Performance Co-ordinator Sports Institute NI
David Conway – Director, NSCDA