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AUSTRALIAN  
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# Review of High Performance Pathways in Australian Basketball

Innovation and Best Practice  
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Reviewer: Jackie Fairweather





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## Executive Summary and Key Recommendations

Basketball in Australia is highly regarded for its domestic programs and as a sport that has enjoyed success at international level, including the highlight of the Women's World Title win in 2006. The key factors in its success to date are:

- a strong base of young players around the country
- long standing national league competitions
- and delivery of a wide range of good quality development and high performance programs.

The challenge for Basketball is to sustain the excellence of its programs in an increasingly competitive environment, both nationally and internationally, and subsequently to enhance the success of its teams at Olympic Games and World Championships.

Two major issues were constantly identified throughout this review:

1. That of strategic leadership
2. And resourcing of the high performance programs and pathways.

Basketball supports a wide range of programs and opportunities for younger players to experience and excel in the sport. In doing so however, the clarity of both overall direction and of ultimate priorities is often clouded. In order to fulfil its noble aims of both broad development and excellence at the highest level, the sport as a whole needs to confirm and communicate its aims and then clearly prioritise available resources to support these aims.

There were eight overall key recommendations as a result of this review. Sub recommendations or 'Operational Points' are also included to clarify, add detail or direction to the key recommendations and parts of the pathway.

The recommendations and concepts in this report build on the existing strong high performance structure. If Basketball is successful in implementing these recommendations, the base of talented young players receiving quality instruction and guidance should become even broader. This in turn will allow some of the existing programs (including NITCP and SIS/SAS) to become more focused and effective in developing the very best players. Support from an enhanced competition structure and better overall strategic coordination of the high performance pathways, will assist in 'filling the gap' in the development of athletes that currently exist between national junior level and senior national teams. A thoroughly researched and implemented (and regularly reviewed and updated) National Player Development Framework, including

identification of daily training environment needs and measurable competency levels, for all stages of the pathway, will facilitate the whole process.

The recently completed review of the Structure and Governance of Basketball in Australia will undoubtedly have an impact on the way the sport is organised and run in the future. If the recommendation of one unified sport is successful, then there is real opportunity for a stronger overall strategic direction to take the basketball forward and grow the sport in this country. This High Performance review is a template for the future athlete and coach pathways of a sport that is continually striving to do things better and remain at the forefront of international basketball.

### **Key Recommendations:**

- 1. As a result of the findings in this review, redefine the overall 'vision', aims and objectives of the high performance pathway, with sustained success of the Boomers and Opals as the pinnacle aim. Ensure resources are prioritised in line with these aims and objectives.**
- 2. The key position of 'National Performance Director' reporting to the CEO, be created within a revised management structure, to lead and drive the high performance program as a whole.**
- 3. Using the existing curriculums of the NITCP and AIS as a starting point, create a National Player Development Framework to direct the development progression for both male and female athletes, from entry level through to senior national teams.**
- 4. Create a system of 'Accredited Delivery' Centres, engaging and involving relevant partners throughout the country (high schools, basketball Associations and National League Clubs, etc) to deliver the National Player Development Framework.**
- 5. Review the competition structure to support the overall aims and objectives of the national high performance program, including as key outcomes:**
  - (i). standardising and optimising the operations of the NBL and WNBL; and**
  - (ii). creating a strong 2<sup>nd</sup> tier underpinning league for the men.**

- 6. Establish a coordinated system of case management, communication and tracking of all national squad athletes, as well as similarly case managing, advising and tracking talented young athletes to optimise their overseas playing opportunities and experiences.**
- 7. As part of the national high performance strategy, look to create opportunities for quality full time coaches within the WNBL.**
- 8. Build on current initiatives to strengthen a sport wide emphasis on coaching and officiating, including engaging the pool of knowledgeable and experienced coaches and officials to actively contribute to the system. As part of this, reignite a Coaches Commission with well defined roles and responsibilities.**





## The Review Process

In late 2006 Basketball Australia (BA) approached the Australian Sports Commission (ASC) requesting a review of its high performance pathways. With current pathways having been in existence for 15 years and resulting in the women's national team recently being crowned World Champions and Australia officially ranked number two in the world overall, the review's aim was to independently examine pathways to ensure what currently exists will continue to meet the needs of the future. The aims and terms of reference for the review are attached at Appendix A.

The review began in late 2006 with background information gathered on the sport including plans, results and statistics. An announcement was made about the Review to the basketball community on 18<sup>th</sup> December 2006 along with an open invitation to complete a questionnaire or make a submission. A direct invitation to submit to the review was emailed to over 100 stakeholders. The review methodology included Gap Analysis and the Program Logic model (see Appendix E).

Between the 16<sup>th</sup> January and 15<sup>th</sup> March 2007, 76 interviews were conducted with a total of 84 individuals. Most were face to face, but some were by teleconference (including with overseas based coaches). In total 20 written submissions were received. Many of those interviewed used the questionnaire to provoke thoughts but did not actually submit a completed version. During this process views were obtained from a wide range of stakeholders including players, coaches, administrators, sports medicine staff and representatives of Associations, schools, National Intensive Training Centre Programs (NITCP), leagues, states, Institutes, as well as relevant BA staff.

After a delay due to the initiation of a structure and governance review of the sport, on 26-27 July 2007 a two day High Performance Advisory Panel (HPAP) was conducted in Sydney. The panel, chaired by the CEO of the ASC, Mark Peters, consisted of a diverse group of 25 people from both within and outside of basketball (List of attendees are at Appendix B). The aim of the HPAP was to discuss the findings of the background information, interviews and written submissions and to suggest strategies for the future of the high performance pathways in Australian basketball. The input from key high performance people from outside of basketball was invaluable to the process (these included: Don Knapp, CEO Australian University sport and former CEO Australian Baseball; Bob Crudgington, High Performance Manager Australian Softball and Wes Battams, CEO South Australian Institute of Sport and Chair of the National Elite Sports Council).

Following the HPAP, all the information from the review has been collated to form this report, with recommendations for the future direction of the High Performance Pathways in Australian basketball. The report was finalised after the release of the structure and governance review findings.



## Introduction

Basketball Australia's high-performance pathway and programs is the envy of most Australian Olympic sports. They have successful elite teams; successful junior teams; a professional national men's league (NBL); semi-professional national women's league (WNBL); an internationally regarded national intensive training centre program (NITCP) for 14 to 17 year olds (men and women); support of the State Institute and Academy (SIS/SAS) network; and a strong Australian Institute of Sport (AIS) development program for men and women; as well as healthy underpinning state programs and competitions.

According to the 2006 Participation in Exercise Recreation and Sport Survey, Basketball is Australia's 11<sup>th</sup> ranked participant activity and ranks 7<sup>th</sup> in number of people playing it as an organised sport. It lags in participant popularity behind such sports as golf, tennis, netball, football (soccer) Australian Rules Football and swimming. It also lags behind Australian Rules, Rugby League and Union, football, cricket and swimming in media profile and public interest.

Australian basketball is very well regarded internationally. The Australian women's team, the 'Opals', are the current world champions (2006) and have medalled at every World Championship or Olympic Games since 1996. As a nation, Australia (senior and junior men and women) is ranked number two in the world behind the USA. The senior men ('Boomers') are consistently in the top 10 in the world, but despite medals at under 19 and under 21 world championships, they are yet to win a medal at world or Olympic level. A summary of national team results is at Appendix C.

The sport of basketball is played in 213 countries worldwide and is enjoying booming popularity in both Europe and Asia. Australia gained a head start 15-20 years ago in developing organised, structured programs – which was particularly unique for women's basketball internationally at the time. The rest of the world, however, is now catching up and many nations have implemented programs (often using ideas from the Australian structure) and injected high levels of funding into the sport. Australia's challenge is to stay ahead. There is a sense that programs in Australian basketball are becoming static and/or outdated and are under-resourced. It is time to reassess the high-performance structure and programs, and ensure that they optimise Australia's opportunities for success into the future.

One of the biggest challenges that the sport has been facing is that of resources – financial, human and tangible resources. There is a pressing need to source and/or prioritise adequate resources to fund all of the key programs. Over the last few years as costs have increased faster than income, Basketball Australia has been seen as 'trying to do everything' but not having the resources to do so adequately. BA is reliant

on the ASC for approximately 90% of the total budget for High Performance (National Pathways). Other opportunities to secure resources to optimally deliver programs need to be explored.

Another major issue, identified prior to the review, is the misalignment between the athlete pathway and the competition structure. This is exemplified in the sub-optimal relationship between BA and the NBL. They are currently separate bodies with very different objectives and not necessarily working together for the betterment of the sport and optimal international results. Throughout this review a commonly expressed view was that BA and the NBL should merge under a single national basketball structure, to enable a unified approach to delivering and coordinating the sport in Australia. Recent failed attempts at bringing the two bodies together (One Basketball Review 2001) have left many less than optimistic that it will ever happen. Subsequent to the commencement of this review the NBL, BA and the ASC initiated a review of the structure and governance of basketball in Australia to definitively address the relationship between BA and the NBL. As this latter review will obviously impact on the high performance pathway it was completed in consultation with, but with primacy over, the high performance review. The structure and governance review has now been completed and the process has begun to marry the NBL and BA as one organisation.

The aim of this review is to provide recommendations for the optimisation of the high performance pathway, with the examination of 'high performance' for the scope of this review, defined as starting from NITCP level. The national high performance pathway takes into account athlete, competition, coach and official pathways, separately and together, as making up the pathway. (For the full terms of reference, see Appendix A).

A SWOT analysis of the current high performance pathway was compiled from stakeholder consultations and information gathered in the review process. This SWOT analysis is at Appendix D and was used in both the HPAP workshop and in the writing of the report, as a background for forming recommendations.

## Findings and Recommendations

### Leadership of the High Performance Program

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With so many aspects to the high performance program and a number of stakeholders involved, one of the major issues identified in the review, was that of coordination, direction and leadership. There is a lack of clarity in the overall direction, aims and objectives. The purpose(s) of many aspects of the high performance program are currently not clearly articulated, linked or communicated throughout the sport. It is felt that there is a lack of longer term, strategic planning and sense of coordinated direction. Across the basketball community, there is inconsistency in understanding and knowledge of the pathway from entry level through to elite. Subsequently there is a strong sense that opportunities are being lost and/or priorities are not clear.

Even during the HPAP workshop, the group had difficulty in clearly identifying the overall aim of the high-performance program. It was agreed that success of the Opals and Boomers is the pinnacle and the target is **'consistently winning medals at World Championships and Olympic Games'**. Subsequently all other aspects of the high performance program should have short and long term objectives aligned with this ultimate aim. Priorities and resourcing of the programs also needs to reflect this overarching aim.

From an overall structure and management perspective, many aspects of the high performance program are separately managed. For example the NBL is run separately from BA and all other competitions and essentially sits outside the pathway. The 'High Performance' area deals exclusively with national teams and competitions and is managed/ administered separately from 'the pathway': NITCP, athlete and coach development programs. Further, staff responsible for major aspects of the high performance programs have huge portfolios and subsequently are stretched in their ability to deliver a quality product.

The consensus is that high performance is administered, not led, by BA. The roles of state bodies, associations, and other partners and their links with the national program are not clearly defined. There are a few people doing a lot, and a lot of people doing a bit, but no one person pulling it all together. A number of those interviewed made the comment 'who asks the difficult questions?' and who is accountable for the outcomes of the program? For example there was much debate as to what is the 'Australian style' of play, but no obvious coordination, communication or unity on the issue. There is no one person with the time, expertise or the mandate to think strategically about the direction of the high performance program. A leadership role must be created to set standards and strategic direction, to communicate and coordinate the various aspects of the pathway, to hold accountable and to be accountable.

It is noted that the recent Structure and Governance Review will result in changes in leadership and management roles within the sport. From a High Performance Program perspective, it is considered essential that a high performance leadership role be created to lead and drive the following areas:

- Overall coordination and direction of the high performance pathway.
- Creating quality relationships and liaising with partners to deliver a quality national high performance program.
- Ensuring the aim and strategic direction of the high performance program is well communicated and understood throughout the broader Australian basketball community.
- Strategy and alignment of national teams and competitions as part of the high performance pathway. This includes liaison, support and involvement of coaches and officials across these programs; and coordinating and communicating of the 'Australian style of play'.
- Setting strategy and criteria for team selections (players, coaches and officials).
- Overseeing the coach development area, including setting the direction of the coach pathway.
- Overseeing (with national team coaches) case management, tracking and support of national team and potential national team players.
- Facilitating involvement, connection, communication and sharing of ideas of top coaches, officials and other key stakeholders in the system.
- Setting priorities and ensuring the relevance, appropriateness and quality of the various program elements of the national pathway (state programs, NITCP, AIS, competitions, etc).

A true high performance division under this leadership role should be part of a management re-structure and include the areas of:

- National Teams.
- National Competitions and Leagues
- Coaching and officiating – high performance identification and development (not education).
- High performance development pathways, including NITCP, Institutes and other programs.

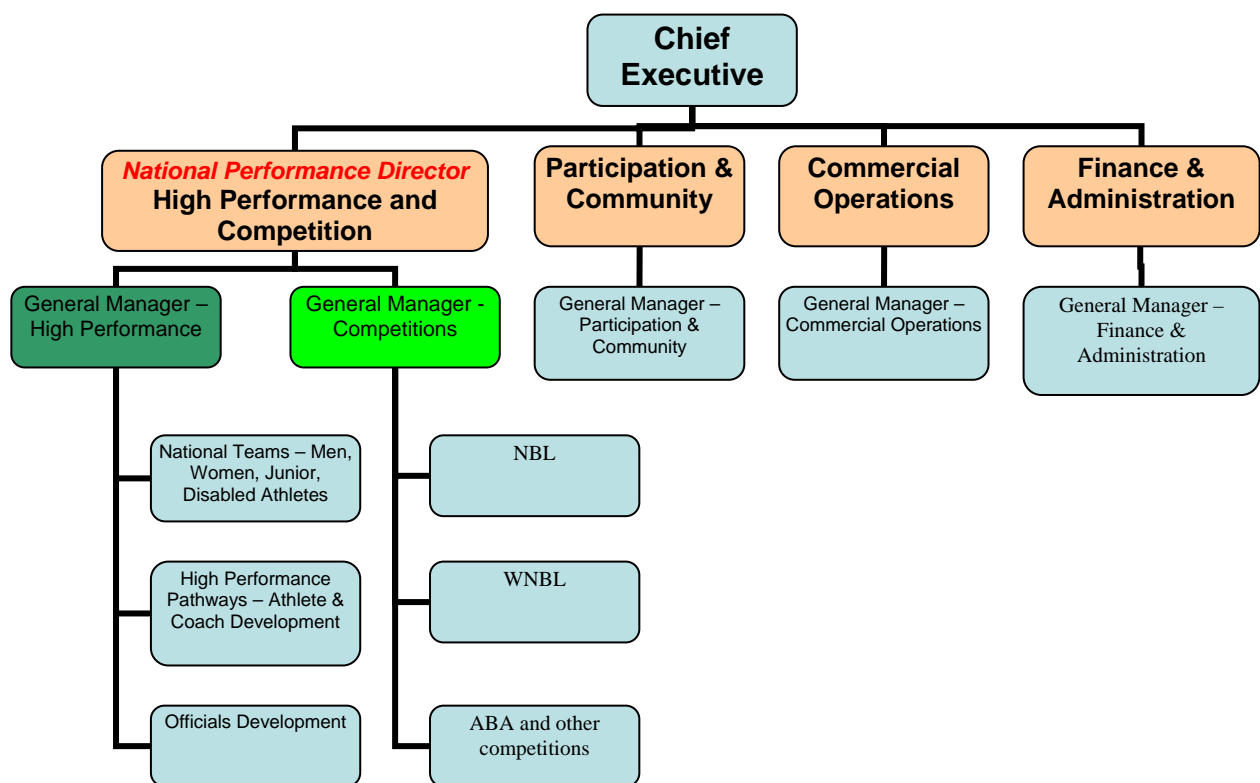
**Recommendations:**

- 1. As a result of the findings in this review, redefine the overall 'vision', aims and objectives of the high performance pathway, with sustained success of the Boomers and Opals as the pinnacle aim. Ensure resources are prioritised in line with these aims and objectives..**
- 2. The key position of 'National Performance Director' reporting to the CEO, be created within a revised management structure, to lead and drive the high performance program as a whole.**

**Operational Points:**

- The redefining of the aims and objectives will result from the findings of this review.
- A job description for the ‘National Performance Director’ (or similar title) should have the roles as outlined above and have the following suggested attributes:
  - Respect within the basketball industry.
  - Strong vision and ability to think strategically, ‘big picture’, long term, be innovative, strong yet objective and flexible.
  - Strong leadership skills, to coordinate and lead the high performance program including the ability to lead a high performance team of people with complementary skills.
  - Excellent communication skills, including the ability to engage and work inclusively with all athletes and coaches (and officials), and take responsibility for directing a case management approach as appropriate.
  - Broad experience and strong technical and tactical knowledge of the game both domestically and internationally.
  - Ability to create trust and remain impartial and objective.
- Suggested management structure, incorporating the National Performance Director role is as follows in Fig 1:

Fig 1. Suggested Management Structure



## High Performance Athlete Pathway

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The athlete pathway for Australian Basketball is certainly more comprehensive than most. Athletes start playing and training at club or Association level, progress to state development programs and teams at various age levels, and/or into the NITCP which is the nationally driven program for 14 to 17 year olds with national team 'potential'. In most states the State Institutes and Academies of Sport (SIS/SAS) also support the NITCP. The AIS program caters for the very best athletes around the ages of 16 to 19 with the underlying aim of producing future 'Opals' and 'Boomers'. The AIS program generally forms the basis of each under 19 World Championship team (male and female) and enables these teams to train and compete together in domestic leagues and on international tours. After the AIS program, the pathway relies heavily on competition opportunities - options include the state-based 'ABA' competition, NBL and WNBL, USA colleges, or overseas leagues. The pinnacle of the pathway is the national senior team (Opals and Boomers) – and winning World and Olympic medals.

The current athlete pathway as depicted by Basketball Australia is attached as Appendix F. It is noteworthy that there are a lot of programs and entry points to the pathway below National Junior Teams, but a significant 'leap' has to be made between the AIS and/or national junior team and the national senior team, with no formal support programs in place.

In most Australian Olympic sports, 'development' pathways underpinning national teams, struggle to find adequate resourcing and a nationally coordinated focus. In Basketball, the nationally driven NITCP does an admirable job of addressing this issue, coming in at a relatively low level in the pathway (14-17 year olds). The challenge at this level is coordination of the various demands on young players (school, club, representative) and limited funding and resources to impact on all the possible talent. In contrast, further along the pathway beyond junior level, the biggest challenge is providing opportunities to support and prepare athletes for optimal success in the sport.

In summary the overall objective of the athlete pathway, starting with good numbers of players involved in the sport from a young age, is simply to give them the best possible opportunities to develop their basketball skills and ability, and ultimately produce a high quality pool of players capable of ensuring Australia is competitive at World and Olympic level. Basketball has done this well with the resources available so far. Into the future, in order to sustain success, more resources need to be found and gaps in the pathway must be addressed. The key issues relating to the above objective, and the pathway 'gaps' identified in this review, are:



- Lack of reliable membership data. There is no truly national membership database, therefore it is impossible to accurately measure the number and ages of players coming into and leaving the sport; whether or not (and where) membership numbers are growing; exactly what size ‘the pool’ of athletes is; and thus no clear idea of what it needs to be.
- No real talent identification program. There is a feeling that ‘we know how to develop players once they're in the sport but we do nothing to recruit them to the sport’.
- Most states lack the resources (human and financial) to provide development programs for athletes (and coaches) outside of the NITCP.
- The system relies on the NITCP, which in turn struggles to deliver a quality service to an optimum quantity and quality of athletes. (Spread too thin; Issues of resources, geographic spread, coach quality and availability and coordination).
- Difficulty in case-managing the load and heavy demands on talented school-age players.
- Blurring of the pathway and loss of control over player’s development needs and daily training environment once they are out of juniors (under 19) and/or the AIS program.
- Difficulty in matching and controlling athlete development levels with appropriate available competition.
- Inability to calculate, control and coordinate the optimal daily training environment for promising athletes at various levels (local association right through to national team).
- Bringing players together as part of a senior national team having had very little control over their preparation (short and long-term).

*The challenge is to find ways to ensure the maximum number of talented players, right around the country, gain access to the highest quality development opportunities (both competition and training), appropriate to their age and stage of development.*

An essential starting point for any athlete development pathway is a reliable and accurate national database for measuring and monitoring the raw number of athletes from which to develop talented players. It is outside the scope of this ‘High Performance Review’ to make recommendations on this, but it is understood BA and the State bodies are currently working toward this objective. Similarly out of scope are any specific recommendations on membership growth, talent recruitment or talent identification programs. This area is, however, an important strategic component in the development of the sport and is high on the agenda with most stakeholders (both state and national bodies).

Once athletes are involved in the sport, the key questions to be answered with regards to optimising the athlete pathway are:

- ***What are the development needs of the athletes at various stages of the pathway?***

- ***What combination of competition and daily training environment is needed to deliver these needs at each stage of development?***
- ***What resources are available to deliver the appropriate development environment?***
- ***How do we maximise those resources and ensure highest quality delivery?***

These questions underpin the design and delivery of the high performance pathway. Even though there are very good programs in place within Basketball, there is not a clear understanding of the answers to these questions for the *entire pathway*. As a result, there are not clear links, coordination and ease of progression along the pathway from entry to elite, at local to national level.

Within the NITCP and AIS programs there is a clearer definition and parameters around the day to day development needs of the athletes involved. The NITCP is based around a regularly revised curriculum of skills and physical development, which is delivered within a theoretical ‘daily training environment’ (DTE) framework. An optimal DTE consists of a holistic program of training needs, skills development, physical preparation and support services. In reality athletes undertake 2-3 NITCP sessions weekly, with school or club programs making up the ‘daily’ training. The actual delivery varies depending upon the commitments of the athlete and the logistics of the delivering the program within each state.

At all levels of ‘development’, team success is often the priority over long term, optimal development of each player. The NITCP is designed to address this issue and employs coaches specifically to develop long term basketball skills, without emphasis on the immediate competitive ability of the athlete. A weakness of the system is that individual skill level is not always able to be matched with appropriate competition experience (for various reasons including age-based competition and the variable depth and/or structure of the competition in each state or region). Additionally, there are rarely good links between coaches involved in skills taught in the NITCP sessions, and feedback on their application or relevance within the competition program (usually involving a different coach) for each athlete.

The AIS program has a very well structured and coordinated DTE, providing the best concentrated training environment, with sport science and medicine backing, for developing basketball talent. It is also linked to a competition program to support development objectives. The AIS is arguably the only program where there is an optimal DTE with sport science support, including strength and conditioning adequately provided for each athlete. Despite the NITCP curriculum including sport science and strength training elements, access to and monitoring of sport science support is a significant challenge outside of a true ‘daily’ training environment. For these reasons the AIS program is a key element in the development pathway for aspiring national team players. The main limitation of the AIS program is the quality of the preparation of the athletes for the demands of the program and the number of scholarships possible.

Outside of the NITCP and AIS, the DTE of promising Australian basketballers (from entry through to elite level) is ill-defined, ad hoc and outside of the control of the BA high performance program. Even within the national league programs (NBL, WNBL and ABA) the DTE of each athlete can vary markedly depending on the team and the status of the athlete within the team.

In short the DTE is defined for the AIS program and within the curriculum of the NITCP. It is not defined for the entire athlete pathway and therefore the development of an athlete throughout that pathway. Nor is it optimally linked to the competition pathway. Further, BA does not currently have the resources or the influence to provide it as broadly as is desired. Unless an athlete is in 'the right' program(s) throughout his or her development, their day to day development and link with competition experience is unstructured and ad hoc. There is a clear need to support, enhance and expand on the models of the NITCP and AIS programs to create a National Player Development Framework for entry level through to elite players, male and female. This will more clearly identify athlete needs and then form the basis of *what* and *how* to deliver optimal athlete development and support right throughout the pathway. The aim is to build on the current strengths of the pathway, *engaging partners* to spread the reach of the many effective elements of the pathway so that development can be delivered more thoroughly, effectively and efficiently.

**Recommendation:**

- 3. Using the existing curriculums of the NITCP and AIS as a starting point, create a National Player Development Framework to direct the development progression for both male and female athletes, from entry level through to senior national teams.**

**Operational Points:**

The National Player Development Framework should include:

- A curriculum of skills and competencies for on and off court development (basic skills, techniques, game tactics, physical development, sport science and medicine, etc)
- Identification and definition of the 'ideal' daily training environment needs for the stages of development, with appropriate competition links.
- Measurable tiers or stages for each component of the curriculum so that athletes can achieve progression from one stage to the next at their own rate, in each component.
- Consideration of educational needs of the athletes

## Deliverers of the High Performance Athlete Pathway

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### NITCP (and High School aged Athletes)

The NITCP is generally considered a strength of the current system and indeed many other Olympic sports desire to create the same kind of national development program. The NITCP began 15 years ago and at the time was world leading. While most stakeholders agree that it is an essential part of the high performance pathway and its structure and philosophy underpins the development of potential National League and Australian team members, there is also a wide spread view that it is 'tired' and in need of revitalisation.

The major (inter-related) issues for the NITCP are:

- Clear identification and recognition of its role within the pathway
- Its ability to effectively deliver its outcomes to an 'optimal' number of athletes
- The level of resourcing available to run the program.

The ASC provides BA a budget of approximately \$800,000 per year specifically for the NITCP development program. Resources for this program have increased little if any over the years, which is putting pressure on the quality of the service – especially with regards to attracting and retaining quality coaches. The program partners with state bodies and/or SIS/SAS programs to employ 10 full time coach/ coordinators around the country to deliver a skills-based curriculum to young players deemed to have 'potential'. The NITCP is a nationally driven and coordinated program, delivered at local (state) level. The curriculum is designed to supplement local club, competition-based training. The program caters for approximately 400 players nationally per year (equal numbers of males and females). In theory players remain in the program for three years from age 14 to 17. Athletes pay a nominal fee to be involved, which varies from state to state (maximum of around \$400/yr).

The actual delivery of the program varies from state to state. In the smaller states NITCP head coaches are able to gather their squads for regular practice sessions. In states of high population density or where NITCP players are more geographically spread, head coaches may only be able to visit players once every couple of weeks. At the same time the talent and depth is greater in the bigger cities. The program relies heavily on a network of volunteer coaches to assist in delivery of the program curriculum. Most of the head coaches provide dual roles within their states, also overseeing coach development and/or education. The NITCP structure has become Basketball's primary vehicle for coach development and sharing of ideas, under the leadership of the head of the program: the 'BA Manager, National Player and Coach Development'.

The exact aims, objectives and deliverables of the NITCP are not well understood or communicated throughout the broader basketball community. *A major question was whether the aim of the program is to develop as many talented, 'potential' players as possible or to focus on case managing those athletes with true national team potential.* In reality it tries to do both but lacks the resources (human and financial) to fully and effectively do either. There is certainly a need for nourishing a broad base of talent and then providing targeted high level development for the very best talent. The NITCP is a National program about potential National team players and the challenge for the future is to ensure this is the focus. At the same time the NITCP concept is a basis for working to extend and maximise resources available for the sport as a whole to fulfil the key aim of providing development opportunities for a broad base.

Part of the solution to this problem may lie in better utilisation of the schools system. Although the school system varies from state to state, there are a significant number of well funded high school basketball programs, employing highly credentialed full time coaches and boasting excellent basketball facilities. Realising the resource the school system provides has the potential to increase the number of athletes receiving a quality daily training environment with exposure to the NITCP skills curriculum and/or broader National Player Development Framework. It would also alleviate the problem of how to case manage talented athletes trying to fit in NITCP training with school commitments.

Local Basketball Associations as well as clubs and other providers (such as SIS/SAS and League Clubs) are also a resource to include in the pathway to assist in the overall objective of providing maximum opportunities for talented players to gain access to the national curriculum. If coaches are available at Association level and have the knowledge and skill to deliver the National Player Development Framework and provide the DTE, then the advantage would be that the athletes get access to an “NITCP style” program in their home club environment and linked with local competition. Some large Associations are already linked with the NITCP and have the coaches in place who are familiar with the system.

The biggest issues in using the schools and local bodies as deliverers of the NITCP curriculum, are:

- quality control of the delivery of the program and ensuring a standard of excellence in that athletes involved are catered for and challenged at an appropriate level
- availability and quality of coaches
- capacity and willingness of each school/ association to provide the necessary elements for curriculum delivery
- the philosophical emphasis on winning now Vs optimal player development for the future.

If these issues can be overcome there is huge potential for the sport to provide very high quality development by expanding, tiering and essentially 'franchising' the NITCP concept of individual skill

development, using the National Player Development Framework and tapping into resources at school, local, state and national level. This in turn would potentially allow the NITCP to 'move up the pathway' and focus resources more on the top tier junior players feeding into the AIS. This would have a flow on effect up the pathway. To facilitate this, it is important to involve the states to a higher degree by having them as the link, and quality control agent, with schools, Associations and others at state level. The concept and National Player Development Framework should also be applied at National League level (ABA, WNBL and NBL) and used to engage National League Clubs as accredited providers of the national program for their athletes.

Developing a model of delivery with accreditation and rating of delivery centres would bring expansion, understanding, stronger relationships, broader buy-in and credibility, and wider access (number and age range) to player development. It would ensure consistently higher quality involvement and opportunities to more athletes and alleviate the currently perceived issue of 'cutting players out of the pathway' early. The model could also potentially be expanded to provide a framework for Associations and Clubs to enhance their operations with standards set for facilities, coach accreditation levels, access to strength and conditioning, etc. Models should be developed with 'best practice' Association, Club and schools programs, right through to NBL and WNBL Clubs, setting the standard for the highest rating and the rating system providing a pathway for smaller providers to grow and deliver a better service to all members.

**Recommendations:**

- 4. Create a system of 'Accredited Delivery' Centres, engaging and involving relevant partners throughout the country (high schools, basketball Associations and National League Clubs, etc) to deliver the National Player Development Framework.**

**Roles of deliverers**

The role and branding of the NITCP must be considered in the context of an expanded system of accredited deliverers. What does the term 'National Intensive Training Centre Program' mean to the basketball community? Consideration needs to be given to whether or not the NITCP title is retained and used to acknowledge accredited deliverers - e.g. 'Knox Basketball NITCP', 'Newington Basketball NITCP'; or whether the structure becomes local, state and national Intensive Training Centre (ITC) programs - e.g. 'Knox Basketball ITC', 'Basketball Queensland ITC'; or whether the branding of the accredited delivery system changes completely. It is understood that work is being done on branding of the sport as a whole

and that any re-branding of the NITCP and expanded system of accredited deliverers, would be considered in the context of overall branding.

The role of the NITCP and head coaches must also be reconsidered within the context of most effective use of resources. It is important to retain the valuable role of the current NITCP system unless and until such time as there are alternative resources in place to deliver the same outcomes. As however, an effective model for, and network of, accredited deliverers is expanded, the role and resources of the NITCP (as well as other providers) may be freed up to focus on a smaller number of 'blue chip' athletes and/or spreading quality coach development.

Among a group of relevant stakeholders, the current NITCP system and personnel are pivotal in providing the knowledge and expertise for: creating a model and curriculum for a new National Player Development Framework, linking to providers and state bodies, ideas on providing the necessary quality control for Accredited Delivery centres. The NITCP head coaches already are linked to the state bodies and have knowledge of, and connections with, schools and associations through both the players in the program and the local coaches engaged in the program. They also know what infrastructure is needed to provide the necessary DTE. The subtle shift in emphasis is having the NITCP head coaches teaching more coaches in order to multiply the effect of the NITCP athlete development concept. Obviously BA needs to invest some initial additional resources to establish the system and to support its NITCP personnel to ensure the program can still run effectively during any times of additional demands on NITCP staff.

Once an effective system of accredited deliverers is established, and within the context of the overall aims and objectives of the high performance program, roles and responsibilities of state bodies and of the national body within the high performance athlete pathway, should be redefined. The system should allow the states to take a stronger leadership role, providing accreditation and quality control for school and association programs to deliver their part of the National Player Development Framework. State level squads and camps would take on increased significance in bringing together the best athletes from the state, and/or case managing support for talented players who may not have an established link to an accredited training centre.

If the NITCP curriculum is successfully expanded using the National Player Development Framework and delivered at school, local and state level, there would be a flow on effect with regards the roles of other providers to the pathway. There would be the opportunity to redefine actual *National Intensive Training Centre Program* to deliver a focused, high quality service to the very best 'blue chip' athletes, possibly with more of a national camps focus to underpin national junior teams and the AIS program, and even case managing development at a higher level beyond the AIS.

In turn the role of the SIS/SAS in each state will need to be redefined to best support the pathway and maximise use of the valuable resource potential there. Basketball enjoys strong support from SIS/SAS, which generally supports the NITCP in most states, but the pointy end of an even broader, clearer development pathway may result in enhanced support. Changes in development and competition support for athletes older than the current NITCP target group as a result of this review, may also provide an opportunity for the support of SIS/SAS in the pathway. NSWIS for example tries to fill the gap in the pathway *after* the NITCP and AIS programs and is linking with the Sydney Flames WNBL team. If the gap in both competition and daily training environment (possibly linked with education opportunities) after the AIS stage of development was addressed, this may be a more relevant model for SIS/SAS in other states as well. The best fit for SIS/SAS in most states will be supporting NITCP in preparing true national potential athletes for the intensive two years at the AIS, as well as support for athletes after AIS, while transitioning to full support within a National League team (WNBL or NBL).

#### **Operational Points:**

- Involve relevant stakeholders, including NITCP staff to develop a ‘best practice’ model of delivery as the basis for implementing the system of Accredited Deliverers.
- State bodies take an increased role, working with Accredited Delivery Centres (and those working towards being so) and providing quality control. State squad and team camps as the possible link between all state level athletes involved in pathway.
- NITCP evolves to focus on smaller number of ‘blue chip’, genuinely national team potential athletes. This builds on the current system of identification and camps for the pre-AIS and National Junior Team group (including both athletes and coaches).
- Utilise NITCP head coaches in the role of teaching more coaches, to multiply the effect of the NITCP athlete development concept.
- Review the branding of the ‘National Intensive Training Centre Program’ and system of Accredited Deliverers of the National Player Development Framework to ensure it is relevant and connected.
- Refocus the SIS/SAS to provide support to the ‘blue chip’ NITCP athletes – with particular emphasis on preparation for the AIS and possible support post-AIS.



## **Australian Institute of Sport**

The AIS program is very highly regarded within Australian basketball and is seen as a vital step in development of future national team players. In the 2006 World Championship winning women's team, all but one of the players had been an AIS scholarship holder. Since the inception of the AIS Basketball program (in 1981), approximately 45% of the men's team members and 70% of the women's team members have been former AIS scholarship holders. At junior (under 19) level, 85% of both teams over the years have been AIS scholarship holders. It is difficult to judge the merit of these statistics, as there are no comparable bench marks in terms of other sports where the AIS has played a similar development role for such a long period of time. Factors that would influence transition from the AIS to the national team are: the programs and support of each athlete after the AIS program; number of positions available in the national team; the time taken to make the transition from AIS to senior national team; and possibly the 'relative age effect' – i.e. the fact that a higher percentage of athletes born in the first half of the year tend to be selected for squads and teams, particularly at younger ages.

The appropriateness of the age group and age range for AIS scholarship holders was canvassed throughout the review. The program currently takes players aged 16-19 years fitting in with the biannual U19 World Championship but with a focus of developing future Boomers and Opals. Within the current pathway structure, the consensus was that by the age of 16-17, potential national team players were in need of the level of concentrated physical, technical and tactical development that only the AIS has the DTE to provide. The majority view from those canvassed during this review was that the AIS is believed to be at the appropriate level within the current pathway for both men and women, but with the caveats that athletes should not be taken 'too young', that there should be some flexibility as to when it is appropriate for individuals, and that educational needs should be given stronger consideration for each individual.

A concern highlighted for both men and women was that young athletes of the current generation are less physically (and mentally/ toughness) prepared for the demands of the AIS program when they first arrive, which in turn affects their level of development out the other side. It takes the first six months on average for them to develop the physical strength required to cope with the demand of the daily training. It is however agreed that even though this conditioning phase takes away from the daily training, it is in fact a very necessary part of the overall development as an athlete at this age and stage.

For Basketball the AIS is the best environment for delivering strength and conditioning, supported by other sports medicine and science professionals. Preparing athletes before the AIS is a challenge with difficulties in: cost, access, delivery and adherence to adequate strength and conditioning through the NITCP and state programs. AIS and NITCP staff have been working on initiatives to address this issue and it is an essential

element to be included within the National Player Development Framework (e.g. basic strength programs and benchmarks). As outlined above, the SIS/SAS should (and in some cases already do) play a valuable role in supporting the NITCP to prepare the 'blue chip' athletes for the AIS. Additionally, if strength and conditioning can be provided adequately through the Accredited Deliverer system and incorporated as part of the National Player Development Framework at all levels, it will have a significant effect on the long term development of athletes and will allow the AIS Program to have even more impact.

It is generally believed that for the women the AIS program works well. Due in part to the earlier physical maturation of females, they are ready for introduction as a group to WNBL level competition by age 16-18. After the AIS, most of the women move either into another WNBL team and/or a team in an international league. The best of the female AIS graduates are almost ready for the senior national team.

The situation is a little more complicated on the men's side due, both to their later maturation and to broader external opportunities. The reality is that men before the age of 19 or 20 are rarely ready to get game time in the NBL. The appropriate level of competition for AIS men has been an area of debate, reflecting the broader 'gap' in competition for talented males in the 17-21 years age range. When the appropriateness of the AIS playing in the NBL was canvassed in an AIS feasibility study, it was found that they are not strong, skilled or competitive enough for the NBL (individually or as a group); it would not be best for the quality of the NBL competition; and it was not going to be financially viable for the AIS.

It has been proposed that the men's entry age into the AIS should be later to enable transition into the NBL. However, taking athletes at 19 or 20 would mean delaying the valuable development opportunity that they are ready for at 16-17, and is not currently provided in a DTE outside of the AIS. It would also have an adverse affect on the quality and preparation of our U19 national men's team. And an even larger issue is that once they are out of that U19 age group there is both less reason for them to stay together as a group in Australia and more potential of losing our best young athletes to USA Colleges and other overseas opportunities before they are ready, and with less input into their development. The AIS men's team currently play in the SEABL League, where they are competitive. There are also plans to make use of the AIS Hub in Varese, Italy to give players exposure to European competition.

The real issue, on the men's side in particular, is how to manage their development *after* the AIS. Competition options need to be assessed for the development pathway as a whole, however there is an opportunity with recent increased flexibility in the AIS program, to support future national team players on a case managed basis. With changes at international level in the junior world championships (under 19 now every two years, as well as the introduction of under 17 and cessation of the under 21 championships), the AIS program has changed to a staggered intake, allowing more scholarship holders and the flexibility to vary

the timing and duration of scholarships. This provides the opportunity to bring likely future national team players back into the AIS for short periods of time to fulfil specific needs.

Many of the criticisms tendered in recent times about the AIS regarding athlete numbers, flexibility of scholarships and case management of our best young athletes are already being answered within the program. There is a need to better promote what the AIS is doing for the broader basketball community. The review found there is a desire for more information about the AIS and wider dissemination of 'cutting edge' information from the AIS (especially sport science and medicine), which would assist broader understanding and wider acceptance of the program and this in turn would benefit all parts of the pathway. There may also be benefit in using AIS (and/or SIS/SAS) sport science expertise with national league clubs - especially the WNBL, which has fewer resources in this area.

In summary, unless there are major changes in the pathway underpinning the AIS program, resulting in better *daily* training environment (including strength and conditioning) and more thorough development of athletes up until the end of school age **and** more (competition) incentive for the best athletes to stay in Australia after school age, it is very difficult to argue that the AIS program should support a different core age and stage of development to that it currently fills – for men or women. If the focus of the AIS program is to develop future national team players then taking into account all aspects of the pathway, it should retain its current role, but also include flexibility in the program to support future national team players on a case managed, as-needs basis, bridging the gap between junior and senior national team representation.

#### **Operational Points:**

- Confirm and communicate that the aim of the AIS program is to develop future Opals and Boomers. This includes:
  - Continuing to support and promote the AIS as the optimal for the daily training environment for the very best development athletes (i.e. in the context of the entire pathway this remains athletes around the 16-19 year old range).
  - Using the flexibility now available, stagger intakes and support future national team players on a case managed, as-needs basis.
- As part of the National Performance Director's leadership role, explore ways to better connect the AIS Program with the wider high performance basketball community, including improved communication about its programs and activities, dissemination of "cutting edge" information and enhanced links with national teams and leagues.

## Competition Pathway

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Beyond the NITCP, national junior teams and AIS program, player development largely relies on the competition pathway both within Australia and overseas. A point often raised during this review, was that while there are a lot of competition opportunities, the quality and quantity (sometimes too much!) of competition is not always complementary to the development needs of athletes. Additionally, an emphasis on winning competitions can be counter productive to athlete development at all levels of the competition pathway. If the ultimate aim of the high performance pathway is to develop players capable of performing at the highest level for Australian national teams, it is essential to provide a pathway of the highest level competitions alongside, and ideally philosophically aligned to, a DTE that provides excellence in the development of game specific skills and abilities.

The major issues relating to the competition pathway for developing Australian basketball talent have been identified as follows:

- The quality of junior competition varies from state to state. In the larger states there is criticism that competition is inclusive rather than tiered to encourage excellence in the standard of competition. In smaller states and at schools level there is not always the depth and quality of competition required to challenge a talented athlete.
- At the junior level, the relationship between coaching, skills training, and match play instruction and feedback is often disjointed. Skills training in the NITCP program may not be linked to the competition environment. Quality of coaching can be variable.
- The roles of and links between the various state and national leagues are ill-defined.
- At higher levels, the structures of each of the 'national' competitions (ABA, WNBL and NBL) are all different and connections between the competitions are poor.
- The identified 'gap' in the pathway for male athletes aged approximately 18 – 22, between national junior level and national senior leagues and teams.
- Ensuring high quality national leagues, including high level coaching and daily training environment.
- There is criticism that the structure and rules, particularly around the men's competitions, hamper excellence and even encourage mediocrity.
- Overall national coordination - Scheduling and timing of competitions relative to: each other; the broader Australian sporting season; international competitions; and national team commitments.
- Overseas competition opportunities, as a resource for player development, are not well managed.
- Opportunities for the national teams to play as a team are not being optimised.

The issue of linking skills development and competition is addressed in the development of the National Player Development Framework and system of Accredited Deliverers. The key to this is in the education

and development of coaches who are capable of both: coaching the game; and teaching the skills and competencies required - and/or using a combination of coaches. Making sure talented young players are exposed to appropriately challenging levels of competition requires both a network of competent deliverers that are able to case manage the talented athletes, and a cohesive, well coordinated state and national competition structure (including the schools system).

The recent Structure and Governance Review of Basketball in Australia will have an effect on the way competition is structured and managed. An amalgamation of the national body and the NBL will enable the formulation of a unified national strategy involving delivery of all competitions relative to the overall aims of the sport. Under the new structure all national competitions will be managed under one division of the national body, with the National Performance Director overseeing strategy and direction of the entire high performance system. This will allow for common competition structure and logical progression from one level to the next.

The identified 'gap' in the pathway for male athletes aged approximately 18 – 22 is an issue which both the competition pathway and support structure around it needs to address. At this stage of development, promising players need to be in a vigorous *daily* training environment, training and playing against bigger, better, stronger players. Talented women at this age are good enough to be playing in the WNBL. The men, however, are rarely good enough to get court time at NBL level. It is arguable as to whether this is because they have not been developed sufficiently by the system to this stage, whether the NBL doesn't give them enough of a chance, or whether they are just not physically ready. Recent comments regarding our under 19 national men's team at the world championships, were that 'they were boys playing against men'. Whatever the reason, if a promising young Australian male player is not ready for the NBL, the only other option in Australia is the ABA competition. It is generally felt that the standard of play, and particularly of DTE, is not that required for our best young male players. With so many ABA clubs around the country, the standard is spread and perhaps diluted and very few clubs have full time coaches and high quality daily training sessions.

There is a clear need for a strong second tier competition underpinning the NBL in particular. The solution for how to provide it within the current structure and budget is not an easy one. As a result of both this review and the Structural Review, the opportunity is present to review the entire competition structure and alignment, from strategy through to operation, to achieve the aims of the pathways and the players.

A USA College scholarship or playing in another overseas competition is also an attractive option for Australian basketballers (both male and female). With less money in the women's game internationally, the decision of when and where to go tends to be a more practical one. For the men the pathway gap after AIS

and Juniors, as well as the promise of big money and ‘superstardom’ can complicate the choice. Experience in overseas leagues can be very beneficial to a player’s development, but players (particularly those with the potential to be future national team players) should not go somewhere just because there is nowhere else to go. There are coaches around the country offering good advice and direction on college choices, however there is a need to consolidate the advice and provide support and education to players from earlier in their careers. The high performance pathway should be such that it develops players to the point where if they want to go overseas they are ready for it and it is facilitated so that players gain maximum benefit from the experience. If managed well international experiences for our players can be a valuable part of our pathway and ultimately a real positive for the national teams.

#### **Recommendations:**

- 5. Review the competition structure to support the overall aims and objectives of the national high performance program, including as key outcomes:
  - (i). standardising and optimising the operations of the NBL and WNBL; and**
  - (ii). creating a strong 2<sup>nd</sup> tier underpinning league for the men.****
- 6. Establish a coordinated system of case management, communication and tracking of all national squad athletes, as well as similarly case managing, advising and tracking talented young athletes to optimise their overseas playing opportunities and experiences.**

#### **Operational Points:**

- Subsequent to the structure and governance review, revise both management and strategy of competitions, linking closely to High Performance leadership and aligned to the overall aims of the sport. Include in this process:
  - Long term planning and coordination of national team activities and all related competition structures.
  - A thorough and transparent analysis of timing of national league seasons, including consideration of the overall competition schedule, the international season, player commitments, optimal national team preparation, media and television needs.
  - Clearer tiering of competitions, including a definite 2<sup>nd</sup> tier league for men.
  - Definition of the roles, responsibilities and expectations of various leagues and competitions (from school right through to national league competitions), aligned with each other and with national high performance pathway objectives.

### **Operational Points (cont):**

- A system of coordinated case management should include:
  - Nationally coordinated advice and education on USA College options.
  - Tracking of where Australian athletes are based (all countries).
  - Tracking and publishing of performances of overseas based athletes.
  - Detailed tracking, regular monitoring and communication with all National Squad players – including results, injury status and support for strength and conditioning and/or other areas of physical preparation, support for overall player development and national team preparation.

### **The NBL**

The NBL is widely acknowledged as the ‘face of basketball in Australia’ and a very important part of both the pathway and the image of the sport in this country. There was however significant criticism both with regards the role it fulfils within the pathway and its links to the rest of the sport. There is certainly a need to review the rules around the NBL and the parameters within which it operates, including:

- The role of the NBL in relation to preparing athletes to represent Australia
- Playing by rules congruent with international standards (complying with FIBA rules)
- Identifying the appropriate ‘style of play’ for Australian basketball needs - including refereeing style
- Inclusion of young Australian players (‘YAPs’) on NBL rosters
- Imports, restricted playing rules and the points system
- Relationships with underpinning leagues and the need for a stronger underpinning development league
- Links with the broader basketball community
- Number and viability of NBL Clubs.

There were strong consensus views on some of these issues, such as the need to standardise rules in line with those of the international game (e.g. 10min quarters), the need for direction of both coaching and refereeing style and the strong desire to use our national leagues to develop promising young players.

One of the challenges of the NBL is how to ensure the highest possible standard in the league but also to provide opportunities for young Australian players and fulfil a national team development role. There was much discussion throughout the consultation process on issues such as import players, the points system, restrictions and acknowledgement of and links back to 'home clubs', as well as recruitment/ identification/ inclusion of young players. The right combination is clearly not easy to come by, but should be designed to meet the agreed upon role of the competition and at the same time, maximise the quality of the competition. The 'YAP' program is currently being trialled within the NBL as an avenue to introduce promising young players into the league. The program mandates that each NBL Club contains at least one 'YAP' (identified player under the age of 24). Its effectiveness will be subject to review over the next two years. Ultimately if the underpinning development pathway, and parallel competition pathway, is fulfilling its role there will be young players of excellent standard exerting pressure to gain a place in the teams anyway, which will in turn ensure the quality of the league.

As a result of both the High Performance and Structural reviews, a full assessment of the NBL is needed to address the issues raised in both reviews. This will include the issues identified above as well as operational issues such as the number of teams, number of games, timing of the season and the countries involved. A strong franchise structure will be developed to underpin the operation of the League. It is essential for the health of the sport that the NBL is not only strong and vibrant, but also intrinsically linked to the entire pathway from grassroots through to national teams.

**Operational Points:**

- Complete the full review of the operations of the NBL league itself, including development of a strong franchise structure for the clubs.
- Under the direction of the National Performance Director, coordinate regular communication and collaboration between national league coaches and referees, alongside national head coaches, to facilitate relevant and appropriate 'Australian' style of play nationally.
- Continue to refine the 'YAP' project to ensure quality opportunities for promising young Australian players, but without compromising the quality of the league.

**The WNBL**

The WNBL is highly regarded internationally for its competition standard and continues to be the breeding ground for Australia's outstanding female players, The league's role is to provide high-level domestic competition for Australia's best female basketball players and to prepare them for the demands of



international competition - both in international leagues and as part of the Australian team. Over the last half dozen years the WNBL has become more of a development league, spring-boarding Australia's best female athletes to play in the USA or Europe where the remuneration is significantly higher and the competition is generally stronger. The pathway for women is quite successful with athletes progressing from state teams and leagues, through the ABA into the WNBL and on to overseas leagues. The result has been women with broad experiences and high-level skills coming together to form a successful national team.

The biggest threat in the women's competition pathway is a potential decline in the quality of the WNBL. The low levels of remuneration for WNBL coaches, as well as the players, is affecting the daily training environment due to the need for both coaches and players to supplement income. Training full-time is difficult for many players. Coaches' time is also limited and there is a threat that coaching quality will decrease if the remuneration issue is not addressed. Given the WNBL is our major national competition and the key development league for the pool of national team players, it is essential that resources are found to support its existence. At a minimum, BA needs to find the strategy and/or resources to ensure WNBL coaches are remunerated sufficiently to be dedicated full-time to providing a quality daily training environment for their teams. This may involve the combining of roles, whereby a WNBL coach may spend the WNBL season coaching in the league and the 'off' season fulfilling another state or national role (e.g. in coach development). The added benefit of this strategy would be ensuring high level coaches in both roles.

#### **Recommendation**

- 7. As part of the national high performance strategy, look to create opportunities for quality full-time coaches within the WNBL.**

#### **Operational Points:**

- Continue to prioritise, revise and optimise the running of the WNBL.
- Use opportunities created through the success of the Opals to promote the women's game.
- Capture the opportunity created through the structural review to strategically revise and align national competitions, to create synergies which enhance the WNBL.

## Coaching Pathway

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It is generally felt that there are a lot of very good coaches in the system. Certainly compared with many other sports, basketball seems to have a high number of very knowledgeable coaches and high performance people. There is criticism however, that good coaches are not being fully utilised and/or appreciated. The major issues raised in the review include:

- There are a lot of good coaches but they are not being engaged in the right areas.
- Coaches are expected to be volunteers – which is affecting the quality and retention of coaches.
- Lack of quality ‘teaching’ coaches at lower levels as most are focused on competitions and/or try to move onto senior leagues in order to earn a living or progress up the pathway.
- Coaches delivering the NITCP curriculum are largely voluntary and vary in experience, skill and ability levels, which affects the delivery of the ‘product’ to the athletes. Many are focused on technical and coaching ‘plays’ rather than being able to teach ‘feel’ and game sense.
- The jump from level 1 to level 2 coach education is large, but the content is not practical.
- There is a need for the best coaches to coach the coaches and this rarely happens. ‘Mentoring’ is under-utilised and the opportunity is being lost to tap into the knowledge and experience of former national level coaches.
- There are limited professional opportunities in Australian and many high quality coaches have found the need to go overseas.
- More full time coaches are needed.
- Progressing up the coaching pathway is perceived to be more about who you know than your competencies – there is lack of transparency around selection for coaching positions.

It is clear that the sport needs to solidify a robust structure of education and support around coaches – at all levels. Delivering high quality development programs to promising athletes from a young age right through to national team members relies on a strong network of skilled coaches around the country. An essential part of the framework and standards around a network of Accredited Deliverers will be having qualified, skilled coaches in place. *The current focus of the high performance program is on developing athletes and hoping the coach is adequate, rather than developing (and retaining) coaches with the knowledge and expertise to optimally develop athletes.*

The NITCP has been relatively successful in engaging coaches to assist in delivery of the program, however the concern over lack of good coaches delivering at the lower levels (including NITCP and ABA level) remains. The role of ‘Director of Coaching’ which existed several years ago, at state and national level, to provide technical leadership in coach development and education has all but disappeared (ceased as a national role in 1999). In many cases the NITCP head coach is expected to fill both athlete and coach

development roles and sometimes coach education (*Note coach development and coach education are two separate and distinct roles*). In the recent past the head of the NITCP (BA Manager, National Player and Coach Development) has also formally lead coach development (not coach education). This program is effective, especially within the NITCP network, with good connections to AIS and national team coaches through camps and information sharing, and also other activities such as the long running biannual international tour. It is necessary to expand this concept, backed by good leadership, to include a wider range of both high level and development coaches. Engaging the best coaches to be part of coach development nationally, tapping into their ideas and expertise and including them across different parts of the pathway has huge potential for the system.

Part of the problem with having enough high quality coaches is the issue of remuneration. If basketball in Australia is to achieve all its aims and wants to stay at the forefront of the game world wide, it needs a larger number of full time coaches to conduct the daily training environment the athletes need in order to progress. Right now full time coaches are needed at NITCP level, ABA level and especially in a second tier men's competition and in the WNBL. NITCP Head Coaches are full time but remuneration that was reasonably good and able to attract high level coaches 15 years ago has not changed and is now really quite inadequate. The only places reasonable basketball coach salaries are available are in the NBL, AIS, high schools with full time basketball programs, and overseas - and of these *only AIS coaches are being used as part of the high performance pathway and system*.

As identified previously, insufficient remuneration of coaches threatens to further erode the quality of the daily training environment in our key development level competitions – the ABA and WNBL. With limited financial resources in the system there are three choices: re-prioritise the resources; find external sources of funding for coaches; or combine resources and roles to make better use of the existing structure. Better use of basketball coaches in schools to deliver a national curriculum is one easy part of the solution. Making better use of NBL and WNBL coaches to contribute as part of the system is also logical. Of course not all senior team coaches make good junior development coaches and vice versa, but currently very few coaches cross over or link to other parts of the pathway and there could be significant benefits and information sharing if this were encouraged. At the HPAP, the idea of combining NITCP and WNBL or ABA head coach roles was raised. Initially the workload seems to be prohibitive, but it is well worth exploring the benefit of having top level coaches paid to both coach and lead/ mentor a network of coaches linked to accredited deliverers.

Remuneration still remains an issue at local association level. Coaches are expected to be volunteers and there is little incentive or even credibility involved, resulting in a problem attracting and retaining good coaches. Basketball as a sport needs to consider more of a user pays system for coaches. Coaches should

be seen as providing a valuable service to their clubs and even to the broader community. Recent detailed market research of the sport found that basketball is not considered to be expensive, but it also found the sport is not always considered good value. In other sports it has been found that paying for experienced, qualified coaching increases the perceived and actual value and quality of the coaching, resulting in a positive cycle of then more coaches attracted to gaining further qualifications and experience. Introducing the structure and concepts recommended in this review should increase both the quality of the product being delivered and standard of the coaches delivering it. People will pay for quality instruction (for themselves and their children) and paid instructors will lead to an overall increase in quality.

**Recommendation:**

- 8. Build on current initiatives to strengthen a sport wide emphasis on coaching and officiating, including engaging the pool of knowledgeable and experienced coaches and officials to actively contribute to the system. As part of this, reignite a Coaches Commission with well defined roles and responsibilities.**

**Operational Points:**

- Ensure the coach pathway is defined and communicated, paralleling the athlete pathway, and supported by a coach mentoring system and information sharing amongst coaches.
- Include expected levels of coach accreditation as part of the requirements for Accredited Delivery Centres and ensure education curriculum supports the pathway.
- Reignite a Coaches Commission bringing together coaches from various areas (national leagues, schools, NITCP, former national coaches, etc) to having input into such issues as:
  - Coach education and development
  - Coach mentoring system
  - Remuneration and resourcing for coaching
  - The high performance pathway and optimal athlete development
  - Coach selection processes
  - The conduct of an annual national coaches forum.

## National Teams

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The pinnacle of the pathway is the men's and women's senior national teams. The women's national team (Opals), having won the world championships in 2006, are justifiably seen as being well managed. The men's team (Boomers), having never placed better than 4<sup>th</sup> with results declining since 2000, although Junior team success had indicated medals are possible for the Boomers. From stakeholders interviewed, there is no doubt that success at the highest level is seen as the highest priority of the high performance pathway and there is a very strong feeling that a 'no compromise' attitude should be taken to striving for success.

With the international competitive environment changing, more and more national team players are based overseas and playing in foreign leagues. Along with long league seasons for men and season clashes for the women, this has created an increasing challenge in finding opportunities to bring the national team(s) together to prepare for major events against quality opposition. In addition, the chance to stage meaningful and high quality international games in Australia is becoming more elusive. Australia needs to be innovative and cultivate excellent international relations to ensure optimal playing opportunities for its national teams. The women's team in particular has been reasonably successful at creating opportunities to fit in national team initiatives and compliment the athletes' international schedules. Options of international competition series should be explored (through FIBA) – e.g. a champions league with Asia, using the AIS Euro-hub in Italy as a base for European competition experiences.

Apart from playing together as a national team, the reality is that a player's competition team environment, whether it be the WNBL, NBL or an overseas based team, is where the majority of the player's preparation occurs. Including league team coaches in national team planning and developing outstanding relationships with team coaches and support staff, is paramount to making sure players are ready and available for national team duty. Case management of each athlete is crucial as outlined earlier in this report. This includes regular communication with athletes and their teams and tracking of training, competition, injuries. Regular communication with Australian players overseas also provides opportunities for scouting of opposition players, coaches and teams. The Australia teams are beginning to do this well, but it must continue to be prioritised as part of a formal strategy for both teams.

The issue of role and employment status of the national team coaches was canvassed during the review. Within the changing international context, BA needs to identify exactly what the job description, time commitments and expectations of the Head Coach role needs to be. Ideally the national team program would be full time with a full program of international games. The reality however is, player availability, the ability to create a full program of quality matches and the cost of doing so, makes this an impossible proposition. In addition, the remuneration required to employ the best possible national team coach in a

full time capacity, regardless of the time commitments involved, is also unrealistic. There is the option of combining the Head Coach role with another high level role within the system and it was certainly the general consensus that national team coaches should have current high level coaching experience. Coaching an NBL or WNBL team however, was generally perceived as a conflict of interest and not conducive to optimal team preparation or dynamics. (This is the case with the current Boomers Head Coach who is also an NBL team coach, with management of perceived or actual conflict of interest an omnipresent issue). The appointment of the National Performance Director role will provide oversight and support to the Head Coach roles.

Ultimately it is essential that the best possible candidate to coach the national team should be selected through a transparent and open selection process. Their clear priority should be to the national team program so they can effectively drive case management of athletes and form the necessary relationships with national and international league team coaches and staff to ensure they are familiar with the status and optimise the preparation of every national squad player.

Throughout the review there was much criticism of the role the national leagues do, or do not play, in assisting player preparedness for national teams. Despite increasing numbers of players based overseas, approximately 80% of the Boomers team members since 1990 have been playing the NBL and not an overseas league. Over the last 8 years the number of athletes playing in overseas leagues has increased slightly. For the Opals, the history of the WNBL is not as long or as well documented, but over the last 8 years as many as 50% of Olympic and World Championship team members have been playing in overseas leagues but most still also play in the WNBL. As outlined elsewhere in this report it is important to ensure the aims of the national league support that of the overall high performance pathway and that the national league coaches are engaged to support the national program.

In addition to the national senior team, BA administers and supports a total of 10 other national teams, including World University, U19, U17 (replacing U21), Wheelchair and Intellectual disability, with Youth Olympics soon to be added. Not all teams are fully funded, but resources for camps, lead up competitions, uniforms, staff and the competitions themselves are a significant item on the BA budget. Certainly in order to achieve the overall high performance program aim of consistently winning medals at World Championships and Olympic Games, there is a need to prioritise limited resources with national senior teams as the first priority followed by a pathway to support achievement of the aim. Looking at World Championship results for Australian teams (Appendix C), success at junior level does not necessarily translate to success at senior level. This is anecdotally true for other nations and indeed other sports. While experience at U19 and U17 level is important (approximately 50% of Australian U19 Team members have gone on to make a national senior World or Olympic Team), it should not be prioritised at the

expense of other parts of the pathway. Consideration needs to be given to the appropriate levels of funding and support (and possibly some athlete levies) for underpinning National teams if necessary.

The senior national team should be the culmination and the unifying element of the national high performance pathway – it should unite the national leagues in purpose, lead public awareness of the sport, define the national style and standard of play, set the culture of the sport with the aura and prestige of being in the national team. It is widely felt that this opportunity is not being exploited, but through enhanced marketing, branding and leadership, the Opals and Boomers can lead the way to a strong future for the popularity and success of the sport in this country. The current climate of introspection, leading to this review and others, has created a valuable opportunity to set the direction for the future of a vibrant, healthy sport, with the aim of consistently winning medals at World Championships and Olympic Games a reality.

**Operational Points:**

- Success of the Boomers and Opals is the pinnacle of the high performance pathway. Marketing, funding and a ‘no compromise’ culture of excellence should be prioritised around our national teams which set the standard for the entire pathway.
- Clearly define the roles, responsibilities and expectations for the Boomers and Opals Head Coaches, including:
  - The ability to effectively pull together athletes and optimise a national team result
  - Drive case management of athletes
  - Form the necessary relationships with national and international league team coaches and staff to track and monitor athlete preparation status
  - Plan and coordinate international matches and campaignsIn reality the roles are probably not full-time by their nature, but Head Coaches may fulfil another role in the pathway (however NBL and WNBL roles are not recommended due to perceived and actual conflict of interest).
- Continue to work with FIBA, the national leagues and other National Federations to explore options for regular, meaningful international competitions.
- Clearly depict, widely communicate, promote and publicise the High Performance Pathway on an ongoing basis.





## APPENDIX A

### **Review of High Performance Pathways in Australian Basketball** **Aims and Terms of Reference**

*This review is being conducted by the Australian Sports Commission in conjunction with Basketball Australia.*

#### **The Aim of the Review:**

To evaluate the effectiveness of:

- the elite development pathways of Basketball in Australia
- national competitions
- national team preparation programs
- the aims and roles and contributions of all the various stakeholders and organisations
- best use of resources across the national system
- both athlete and coach development and how they inter-relate
- the various parts of the program structure nationally and how well they integrate to make up the whole and support the strategic plan of Basketball Australia.

To develop recommendations for optimal use of resources and maximising opportunities for players and coaches in Australian Basketball to achieve international success into the future.

#### **The Terms of Reference for this Review are to:**

- Assess the current pathways of elite development in Basketball in Australia including the structures, systems and long term planning.
- Identify the current *views of “high performance”*, as well as the *aims* and *roles* of the various stake holders in the athlete development pathways:
  - State bodies
  - NBL, WNBL, ABA
  - State Institutes of Sport
  - Australian Institute of Sport
  - Basketball Australia
  - Any other relevant stakeholders / competitions
- Examine the contribution of each of the above organisations to both athlete and coach development pathways; determine how they inter-relate, assess the resources (financial, personal, facilities and infrastructure) that exist across the system nationally for basketball in Australia; and make recommendations for future best use of resources.
- Seek input from players and coaches and other stakeholders on how the current structure has worked for them and how it could be improved.
- Assess the effectiveness and adequacy of talent identification programs and athlete support mechanisms to enhance the elite pathway, including athlete development.
- Assess the role and effectiveness of the AIS program and its unique role in the system.
- Identify any gaps in the system and assess the best way to address the issues.

- Use interviews, state program visits and written submissions to identify key issues and seek solutions for the sport.
- Convene a High Performance workshop, including representatives from the various BA stakeholders as well as relevant experts from sport in Australia or internationally, to examine, discuss, debate key issues and make recommendations for the future.
- Produce a report on the review and High Performance workshop with recommendations for the structure of the High Performance Pathways of Basketball for the future, including:
  - athlete pathways
  - coach pathways
  - competitions
  - national team preparation programs
  - resourcing structures
  - role definitions, and
  - communication and integration of the various organisations and stakeholders.

***“Do the strengths of the present meet the needs of the future?”***

## APPENDIX B

### HIGH PERFORMANCE ADVISORY PANEL

#### SYDNEY AIRPORT HOLIDAY INN

26-27 July 2007

<b>Mark Peters</b> (Chair)	-	CEO of the Australian Sports Commission
<b>Jackie Fairweather</b> (Project Manager)	-	ASC Senior Sports Consultant for High Performance Improvement; Former AIS Triathlon Head Coach;
<b>Peter Fricker</b>	-	Director, Australian Institute of Sport
<b>Don Cameron</b>	-	Group Sport Manager, Australian Institute of Sport
<b>Martin Roberts</b>	-	Senior Sport Consultant, Australian Sports Commission
<b>Don Knapp</b>	-	CEO Australian University Sport; Former CEO Baseball Australia
<b>Bob Crudgington</b>	-	High Performance Manager, Softball Australia
<b>Zoran Radovic</b>	-	FIBA
<b>Bob Elphinston</b>	-	President FIBA
<b>Scott Derwin</b>	-	CEO Basketball Australia
<b>John Maddock</b>	-	President Basketball Australia
<b>Michael Haynes</b>	-	BA General Manager Community Basketball
<b>Jan Stirling</b>	-	National Women's Team Coach
<b>Adrian Hurley</b>	-	President Basketball NSW; Former National Men's Team Coach
<b>Carrie Graf</b>	-	WNBL coach
<b>Martin Clark</b>	-	AIS Head Coach - Men
<b>Patrick Hunt</b>	-	BA Manager, National Player and Coach Development
<b>Phil Matthews</b>	-	Sports Manager HunterSports HS. Former BA HP/OP Manager
<b>Rex Nottage</b>	-	Newington College Coach; ABA Coach
<b>Ian Stacker</b>	-	Former NBL Coach
<b>Allison Tranquilli</b>	-	Former Elite Player; Player Manager
<b>Andrew Gaze</b>	-	Former Elite Player
<b>David Munns</b>	-	NITCP Coach
<b>Bruce Palmer</b>	-	Qld, Manager Player Development/Former NBL Coach/Nat Team Coach
<b>Andrew Vlahov</b>	-	Former Elite Player; NBL Club Manager
<b>Wes Battams</b>	-	Director SA Institute of Sport
<b>Chuck Harmison</b>	-	NBL General Manager of Operations

## APPENDIX C

### Australian Women's Basketball Results

Olympics	Opals	World Champs	Opals	U21 Worlds	Young Women (Sapphires)	U19 Worlds	Junior Women (Gems)
1956	dnc						
		1957	10th place				
1960	dnc						
1964	dnc						
		1967	10th place				
1968	dnc						
		1971	9th place				
1972	dnc						
		1975	10th place				
1976	dnc						
		1979	4th place				
1980	dnq						
		1983	11th place				
1984	5th place					1985	6th place
		1986	9th place				
1988	4th place					1989	3rd place
		1990	6th place				
1992	dnq					1993	1st- Gold!
		1994	4th place				
1996	3rd place					1997	2nd place
		1998	3rd place				
2000	2nd place					2001	4th place
		2002	3rd place	2003	5th place		
2004	2nd place					2005	7th place
		2006	1st- Gold!				
2008				2007	2nd place	2007	5th place

## Australian Men's Basketball Results

Olympics	Boomers	World Champs	Boomers	U21 Worlds	Young Men (Crocs)	U19 Worlds	Junior Men (Emus)
1956	12th place						
1960	dnq						
		1963	dnq				
1964	9th place						
		1967	dnq				
1968	dnq						
		1970	12th place				
1972	9th place						
		1974	12th place				
1976	8th place						
		1978	7th place				
1980	8th place					1979	9th place
		1982	5th place				
1984	7th place					1983	10th place
		1986	17th place				
1988	4th place					1987	9th place
		1990	7th place				
1992	6th place			1993	8th place	1991	11th place
		1994	5th place				
1996	4th place			1997	1st- Gold!	1995	2nd place
		1998	9th place				
2000	4th place			2001	8th place	1999	5th place
		2002	dnq				
2004	6th place			2005	4th place	2003	1st- Gold!
		2006	tied for 9th				
2008						2007	5th place

## APPENDIX D

### SWOT Analysis

Strengths	Weaknesses
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Passionate and knowledgeable people at all levels.</li> <li>• Relatively high number of very good coaches and other HP contributors.</li> <li>• The sport is well run nationally with solid links between State bodies and National body and also other organizations (AIS, SIS/SAS etc)</li> <li>• Well respected program (and ground breaking) internationally and in Aust. Established and strong NITCP and AIS programs.</li> <li>• Ranked Number 2 Basketball Nation. Strength across all teams.</li> <li>• Clear pathway with many elements and options – for athletes and coaches.</li> <li>• Quality and quantity of athletic talent (esp females).</li> <li>• Professional/ semi-professional domestic leagues.</li> <li>• Identification of players in the system from age 14 and up.</li> <li>• The opportunities Australians have to play in a wide range of international competitions as part of our pathway.</li> <li>• Strong presence in schools (esp private schools).</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Base level of young players – skill, strength, fitness, work ethic.</li> <li>• Number &amp; quality of coaches to teach athletes (in rights areas – esp regional).</li> <li>• Inability to include wider group of athletes. Eliminating athletes from the system too early.</li> <li>• NITCP – stretched too thin. Can't affect enough athletes. HC's can't have the influence needed – on athletes or on coaches.</li> <li>• Difficulty in case managing athletes (competition demands on top kids).</li> <li>• Insufficient concentrated training for best athletes (all levels).</li> <li>• Lack of 'excellence' and progression.</li> <li>• Difficulty in optimising the use of SIS/SAS.</li> <li>• Competition levels inconsistent and don't compliment the athlete pathway (training Vs comp demands).</li> <li>• Development 'gap' for players after U19s.</li> <li>• Accessing and influencing players based overseas.</li> <li>• Lack of resources across all the programs.</li> <li>• Lack of true HP leadership to coordinate, lead technically, challenge, and ensure excellence and accountability.</li> </ul>
Opportunities	Threats
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Better alignment between athlete, coach and competition pathways.</li> <li>• Use of competitions at appropriate levels to develop players.</li> <li>• Utilisation of school system as a resource for developing athletes.</li> <li>• Improved coach support and development focus.</li> <li>• Use of experience and expertise in our system, combined with technology, to improve resources and game development nationally.</li> <li>• Better sharing of information across coaches and coach groups.</li> <li>• Using the success of our teams to grow revenue base.</li> <li>• Possible opportunity to re-think management structure.</li> <li>• Use of USA, Europe and Asia to enhance our players.</li> <li>• Finding innovative ways to deliver SSSM (esp S&amp;C) nationally.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Increasing strength of other countries.</li> <li>• Declining international results. Complacency.</li> <li>• Inability to increase resourcing, resulting in further dilution and decreased quality of programs.</li> <li>• Decreasing standard and 'competitiveness' of our State and National leagues.</li> <li>• Loss of National Leagues.</li> <li>• Further disconnect between NBL and pathway (rules, refereeing, coaching, style of play, culture).</li> <li>• Failing to attract and retain talented athletes.</li> <li>• Loss of AIS and/or SIS/SAS support.</li> <li>• Effect of U/17 World Championship.</li> <li>• Inability to attract and provide a pathway for talented coaches.</li> </ul>

## APPENDIX E - Program Logic Model.

STRATEGIES	ASSUMPTIONS	RESOURCES	ACTIVITIES	(Desired) OUTPUTS	SHORT- AND LONG-TERM OUTCOMES	IMPACT
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Expand network of professional coaches to drive athlete development</li> <li>Utilise external resources to provide for development needs.</li> <li>Define development needs, DTE, Competition needs for all stages.</li> <li>Measurable development standards, stepped stages.</li> <li>Review and refine competition structure.</li> <li>Ensure leadership to tie everything together – strategic and aligned.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Identifying potential athletes and providing them with a quality training environment, will increase the depth of potential National level athletes, ensuring Australia improves or maintains its standing internationally.</li> <li>Employing and providing full-time specialist coaches in each state and territory will improve the quality and quantity of the athlete pool nationally.</li> <li>Increasing the competencies of our coaches will give them greater capacity to facilitate elite player development.</li> <li>That the system can attract and support enough good coaches to deliver development.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Funding - ASC, AIS, SIS/SAS, other</li> <li>Coaches</li> <li>Officials</li> <li>Administrators</li> <li>Other Volunteers</li> <li>Venues - courts, stadiums</li> <li>Clubs, associations, schools</li> <li>National Leagues</li> <li>Overseas Leagues</li> <li>USA College system</li> <li>State bodies</li> <li>Videos, DVD, Books, other</li> <li>NITPC Curriculum</li> <li>SSSM providers (AIS, SIS/SAS &amp; external)</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>AIS Program</li> <li>National Junior camps</li> <li>Support national senior teams - Boomers &amp; Opals</li> <li>Support other national teams (including junior teams, University, disabled)</li> <li>NBL, WNBL, ABA, National Champs (Age) and other state level competitions</li> <li>NITCP</li> <li>SIS/SAS Programs (linked to NITCP)</li> <li>Coach development programs</li> <li>Delivery of support services (SSSM)</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Delivery of high quality specialist support and coaching to national team potential athletes (from age 14 through to making the national team).</li> <li>Appropriate competition opportunities for all levels of development.</li> <li>Provision of SSSM support.</li> <li>Delivery of skills training at club, association, school and state level.</li> <li>Operating, measurable National Player Development Framework.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Improved skills at all levels.</li> <li>System of measurability and accountability for deliverers of skill development.</li> <li>Improved strength and 'athleticism'</li> <li>Increased number and competency of coaches.</li> <li>Improved standards of competitions.</li> <li>More paid coaches (i.e. WNBL).</li> <li>Players better prepared at all levels of the pathway.</li> <li>NITCP freed up to focus more on top juniors – case managed.</li> <li>Reduction of the 'gap' for men after AIS/ U19.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>➤ Increased quality and quantity of players available for national teams</li> <li>➤ Successful national teams (especially Boomers and Opals)</li> <li>➤ Self-funded and sustainable system at school/junior level</li> <li>➤ More coordinated and integrated system</li> <li>➤ Better overall use of resources</li> </ul>

**APPENDIX F BA's Current Athlete Pathway**

