

2012 LONDON OLYMPICS AND BRITISH JUDO

If there is one thing the BJA must get right it is the preparation of the British Olympic squad when the Olympics is to be held in Britain but recent sackings of three key people have made it much more likely that it will be a **fiasco** for Britain and British judo not just for now but for some time to come. We know that competitors often do better in front of a home crowd and help bring back medals which helps funding for future years. So it is a vitally important event for us.

From what I can glean from people who are familiar with the situation plus anonymous communications, emails, forums and websites with dribbles of information in them is that:

British international successes in Olympic qualifying Grand Slams/ Grand Prix/ World & European Championships etc) in the last two years have been poor which mean that very few Brits will actually qualify to take part although the host nation is usually allotted extra places. Of course there were some good results but it is who ranks where that determines Olympic qualification. This trend became increasingly obvious in the twenty four month period before the London Olympics. In one of my website articles two years ago I discussed this and suggested that there was just about time (2 years) to make some possible progress towards the Olympic medals. I wrote that the BJA was in the last chance saloon and needed to cull those well paid administrators, managers, judo politicians and directors who clutter up our dojos and use money that could be better spent.

The BJA eventually responded with less than a year to go to the Olympics and called Stop/Yame! to three people (Margaret Hicks, Jane Bridge & Frenchman Patrick Roux. Much too late though and I now get the feeling that there is **No plan B**.

Patrick Roux was in charge of the men's squad but it has been recently suggested on the internet that it was important for him to be based in Dartford because it was nearer France hence Bath got the chop and Roux could get back home at weekends. Sounds incredible enough to be true.

A four year gap between Olympics gives enough quality time perhaps but a two year window of opportunity is not so long and a single year is laughable. You might just as well have left the sacked trio where they were, smacked their wrists and told them to try harder. In theory it is possible to get fitter and stronger in the remaining ten months but in practice some competitors might run into weight problems and the extra fitness and strength might not blend that easily with the competitors' technique patterns. It is often said that quick progress can be made with counter throws and groundwork but recent rule changes have made this more difficult. I remember how Graeme Randall from Scotland won a world championships with a narrow technical focus so maybe he or somebody like him should be roped in.

Anything else? From forums etc I learned that Daniel Lascau of Romania/Germany has been appointed to take over from Roux. (He is an ex world champion – who did a similar job for Germany some time ago and trained up a number of competitors at short notice but important details of this are lacking (what results, when, where, how long ago, what base they started from etc). Lascau also serves on the EJU committee along with Densign White which should in theory make him just as busy as Densign but Densign has come under criticism for spending more time on European affairs and not British ones. (It seems that it is still who you know that gets you appointed! See my Archives article on A Coach's Career). Also see **The decision-making trio** below.

To protect itself the BJA should make sure that Lascau is on a tight contract that is depends on results and check that he is not committed to any other judo work in Europe and that he should be working virtually every weekend (prime squad training time) in the UK and up to the Olympics.

Bath University did a lot of work on advanced coaching courses for the EJU and I noted the expertise there. Let's give our British coaching system a shot in the arm and think about our future coaches. They certainly cannot do much worse than the situation we find ourselves in now. We have appointed foreigners before to run the top squad but I do not recall that the results were that significant.

Chain of command. Most importantly for the long term future we need to have somebody in charge of the Olympic team who if the worst happens can sack and who can be sacked in good time and not leave it to the last moment. It should be obvious to all where the buck stops. Personally I think it has to be the Chairman of the Board of Directors

(currently Densign White) where the buck stops (unfortunately for him but who else is there who can be blamed). The CEO I don't think so since he has no judo contest experience. The chairman of the Board of Directors not only hosts meetings of the Board but should be breathing down everyone's neck. Currently Densign seems occupied with his work in the EJU as Sports Director (and goodness knows what other positions) and spends his time travelling around Europe. On the evidence before us these extra-curricular activities are not in the best interests of British judo. If they were we would have plenty of Olympic qualifiers & medal potential. Perhaps it suits somebody in the BOA that Densign occupies all his high profile (unpaid?) posts.

People in the know who are familiar with the situation have told me that there also seems to be a **decision making trio** (not the same as the **sacked trio**) in the BJA consisting of the Chairman of the Board (Densign White), the CEO (Scott McArthy – a non-judo person), and former-banker and Vice-president Davies (English Areas). So who I wonder is keeping an eye on the Olympic squad and who is keeping an eye on the shop. One can see how Densign and Scott McArthy fit into this cabal but I can't see how Davies should fit into it. Don't forget his previous failed attempts to become BJA Chairman. There is a pattern here. Davis had to step down as Budokwai chairman a few years ago mainly because the club membership discovered that he had stopped holding AGMs etc. It's obviously easier running a Board with three people sitting around a table

But why just three of them to run the show? What happened to the rest of the Board? In the past, decisions of the Board had to be majority decisions but nowadays it would seem they rarely are. Currently Board meetings I am told are called at very short notice which make it difficult for other board members to make the meeting in time and perhaps the proxy votes of non-attendees were passed on to those who could attend. Maybe many of these hasty meetings were because Densign was too busy flitting around Europe incl. Baku in Azerbaijan. The way to check this for sure is to go through the past Board minutes of each meeting and check out when they were first called and held, who attended and who held what proxy votes. This needs to be done quickly because the BJA records might go for a walk.

I suspect that the **real problem** is the business model of the BJA which has grown out of all recognition and no longer represents the true interests of the membership. Perhaps CEO Scott McArthy has some views on this – his role, at least, in the BJA must be well defined. Have

all parties scrupulously followed the laws relating to Companies Limited by Guarantee and the BJA Constitution I wonder? Who is checking who?

Perhaps I am unduly pessimistic but I can foresee many more years for the BJA at the bottom of the Olympic greasy pole which took years to climb up from the 1972 Munich Olympics and was so easy to slide down. It is not just one Olympics which is in doubt but many more to come. It will be a very long time before we experience again the level of funding that judo has had this last few years.

By all means look for someone to run the elite squad but don't expect too much – **time is too short** and that can be used as an excuse for poor results. Perhaps though there is somebody out there who can inspire our team and fire them up. Perhaps there is someone out there who has been there, done it and got the T-shirt and who has heard all the excuses and perhaps can inspire the team to do that extra bit more in the small time available. Perhaps, perhaps, perhaps.....As an ex-Olympic competitor myself I feel sad that it has come to this. I know that other fellow British judo Olympians feel the same way.

Personally the **warning signs** for me were the proliferation of all the fancy positions (director of world class performance etc) with their meaningless titles. Somehow the wrong lot got appointed. Is it the judo grading system that does this I wonder. It amazes me how many judo people are hungry for rank, titles and status. Maybe these were the ones who managed to learn the sport management jargon. Or on the other hand maybe British judo just got too soft and directionless. If I suddenly got lumbered with the squad job I think I would first go calling on our army judo friends/SAS and plunge the squad into a long mother of all training regimes including parachute drops and the like. Maybe confidence is that one vital spark which is lacking. Only one way to find out – who is first out of the plane door!

Talking about **Bath University** I was much impressed with their judo set up five years ago and the way Mike Callan organized it. I was amazed when Bath got the chop and when Dartford became the elite training centre. Was it due to the fact that Dartford is nearer to France and more accessible for quick dashes there and weekend breaks. From my own Eurosport experience I know that the French are a pretty clannish lot who prefer their own company and French food. Who is to say that Daniel Lascau is not in the same mould. With the foreigners, language is always a problem especially with the nuances of what is being said. Maybe he will expect weekend breaks as well. But maybe he might be reluctant to

put his EJU/IJF? activities on hold. I have the feeling that there is more to this shambles than meets the eye. How did we come up with Roux in the first place? Densign is being blamed for the fiasco and yet here we are importing another EJU person who is probably just as busy as Densign, if not more so, to rescue us. Bizarre.

1992 was when Britain won its last male Olympic medal (Ray Stevens of the Budokwai) and 1996 was when we had one female win a medal. What has happened since then? Have the last sixteen years or so been a complete waste?

Syd Hoare