



***The following is a recap of the [2013 USSA Club Excellence Conference](#) by Brian Krill, the new Club Development Manager for the USSA. This conference took place May 14-15 in Park City, UT.***

The message was loud and clear from the start, highlighted by the opening address by USSA Executive Vice President of Athletics, Luke Bodensteiner, that the culture of USSA is shifting more and more to one of a “club-based” organization. He explained this would result in the following priorities and initiatives:

1. Clear, consistent approach to athlete development at all phases
2. Optimal coaching at all levels
3. Club performance measured against consistent standards
4. Fun, safe and satisfying development experiences, with opportunities for athletes to reach their full potential
5. Shared culture

The remainder of the conference, through multiple presentations and discussions, focused on the different ways we can all accomplish this. Certainly, the results of the McKinsey and Company study conducted during the past season were referenced throughout the conference, and presented at the conference. The recommendations of that study are pointed at these very objectives. The presentations focused on the opportunities and strategies that both USSA and its member clubs can pursue to offer a better experience, and improve performance for athletes, parents, coaches and clubs.

Tom Kelly, the USSA Vice President of Communications, opened with a discussion of Olympic memories in his presentation “Sochi 2014: Marketing Opportunity for USSA Clubs”. He stressed the fact that we all have an Olympic memory, and our nation truly comes together around the Olympics. Other nations have an advantage in the sense that their snowsport athletes enjoy the fame of our basketball, baseball and football stars year-round, every year – not just during the Olympics. He laid out the importance of using the Olympics this fall and early winter as a marketing boost for recruiting new athletes and creating excitement and engagement with existing athletes, volunteers and families. We are involved in Olympic sports, and we should use that to our advantage.

He suggested that in the run-up to the Olympic Winter Games, clubs get engaged with a fall-to-February marketing campaign that includes partnering with local resort(s), piggybacking with existing special events both locally and internationally, such as [FIS World Snow Day](#) on January 14<sup>th</sup>, 2014. Making visits to local schools and getting local media involved with the Olympic hype will also be a good way to help generate participation and ride on the Olympic excitement. There are other significant opportunities that Tom and USSA will be helping coordinate and offer to all member clubs. USSA has partnered with NBC to broadcast the NBC Gold Map and the NBC website which will be viewed by approximately 200 million and 100 million respectively. This project will map out how kids and parents can get involved with competitive snowsports and drive up participation numbers in your clubs. Also, USSA will be coordinating USSA National Club Day on Saturday, February 15, during the heart of the Olympic competitions. This will be a great time to host an open house, an Olympic broadcast viewing, and a recruitment effort at your club. All member clubs will be receiving a toolkit later this summer and early fall to help capitalize on all these marketing opportunities.

Next we heard from Lester Keller, PhD, the USSA Sport Psychology Coordinator and Alpine Regional Development Director, about “What Parents Want from a Ski & Snowboard Club”. In this presentation, Lester emphasized his and others’ **research**. He went over current research about what parents expect when enrolling their children in our clubs, and he laid out what research says about why kids want to be involved. Children want to have fun and enjoy themselves, get better at some tasks and seek competence, and affiliate with, make friends, and do things together with those friends. Parents act as initiators, instigators, enablers (the good kind), supporters and motivators. Looking at this research together it is apparent that the old saying is true that “when you enroll a kid, you enroll a family”. In this sense, the research supports the concept of the “performance team” which is made up of the athlete, the coach/club and the parent. As we shift to a club-based model, each club is encouraged to also shift to a parent-based model. Parents initiate, motivate, and support their children doing these spots to strengthen their family and its values, and to emphasize the importance of the life skills they teach. In the end, Lester emphasized that one of our advantages is that skiing and snowboarding are lifelong sports, and families can literally participate together in a multi-generational fashion, sharing the love of the sport, visiting resorts, and ultimately feeling like they are good parents. Lester stressed the importance of hosting a parent orientation session, encouraging parent engagement, and better supporting our main “clients” – the parents.

Jina Doyle and Marla Peters with American Specialty Insurance (ASI) spoke regarding how clubs can best assess their insurance needs to ensure that they have enough coverage, but not too much, or coverage that simply is not needed. More importantly, they focused on the fact that the most important aspect of drafting contracts with employees, partner resorts, event organizers, etc. lies in where the liability is pointed – and the fine print. USSA in partnership with ASI will be taking a more active role in helping its member clubs review contracts to be sure that they are not exposed to more liability than they should be.

Tom Avischious the Field Services Director for USA Swimming delivered the keynote address after a wonderful sit down dinner. His presentation entitled “You Want Me To Do What?” provided a look into the future for what a full-scale club development and recognition program looks like. Over the last ten years, USA Swimming has created what is now a department of five full-time staff who work directly with clubs across the country. Similar to where USSA is going with its club certification, the USA Swimming model assesses four major component areas: business and organizational success, leadership and planning, parent and volunteer development, coach development and education, and athlete development and performance. Taking this approach, USA Swimming has seen numerous benefits to its member clubs and organization – including increased success at the Olympic level. Offshoots of this club development program include highly developed certification and recognition levels for clubs, grants made directly to clubs to recognize performance, and innovative programs such as virtual swim meets and the I.M.Xtreme Challenge. While he was honest about some of the challenges such as the time it takes to complete the certification process, the buy-in, and the cost to the organization to create such a full-scale program, he was clear about the overall success of the program to the extent that similar programs are now being implemented at the level of the local swim committees.

The second day of presentations was kicked off by Zak Pendleton, the Eligibility Coordinator for the University of Utah. In his presentation, “NCAA Eligibility: From High School to College Student-Athlete”, club leaders learned how to better prepare their athletes for eligibility in an NCAA program. Zak explained the basic academic requirements for eligibility, and how to best navigate the hot button issue for many athletes – the receipt of prize money. The presentation also addressed “on-line” schooling and alternative academic programming and how these options may or may not fit the bill when it comes to NCAA eligibility requirements.

Matt Terwillegar, the Sport Manager at the Utah Olympic Park, gave numerous examples about how incorporating a long-term athlete development model into ski and snowboarding programs increases both participation and performance. His presentation, “Incorporating LTAD into Ski and Snowboard Programming”, gave an overview of how the Utah Olympic Park is dedicated to using the advantages of the Olympic legacy to create a healthy pipeline, age-appropriate programming, and innovative facilities.

In the “Clubs Raising the Bar” panel discussion, we heard from four club leaders. Matt Gnoza, of Killington Mountain School, is working on an exciting project to increase trail space and venues for competitive snowsports, as well as expanded facilities that will serve both Killington Mountain School and the Killington Ski Club. John (JC) Cole, Ski and Snowboard Club Vail’s (SSCV) Human Performance Director, walked through how SSCV has been successful using what started as 800 square feet of extra space as a catalyst to create a full-scale weight room and athletic training/testing facility and a new equipment tuning operation for SSCV athletes. Walt Evans, Aspen Valley Ski and Snowboard Club’s Director of Excellence, spoke of the monumental projects going on in Aspen: big air bags, small air bags, and supertramps! Complete with exciting footage of the new apparatus and pictures of current and future plans, it is clear Walt is helping to raise the bar in Aspen. Finally, Whitney Childers spoke on behalf of Bill Kerig about RallyMe, an easy and ready-to-use online fundraising tool that can be used by individual athletes or clubs. Every club should check out this program and its great capacity at [www.rallyme.com](http://www.rallyme.com).

The conference closed with a report from Lynn Dorsey Bleil, Director at McKinsey & Company, which explained the findings and primary recommendations resulting from an critical evaluation of USSA from the perspective of many club leaders, parents, coaches and athletes. The full report can be viewed at on the [USSA website](http://ussa.org). After Lynn’s report Jon Nolting, USSA Sport Education Director, and Brian Krill, USSA Club Development Manger closed in explaining the plans being laid for club and coach support and development. The newly established Club Development Program directly addresses many of the recommendations indicated in the McKinsey study, including a more hands-on approach with the member clubs – building value for member clubs, clear certification and recognition criteria for clubs, and more professional resources and communication flowing directly to clubs.

As a newcomer to USSA (as an employee) it has been both exciting and refreshing to see the direction the organization and its many partners are going. Thanks to all the speakers and presenters who made this conference such a success.

To access the powerpoint slides presented as well as the video recordings from selected presentations, go to <http://ussa.org/global/club-conferences-seminars-and-clinics>.