


# The 25<sup>th</sup> North America Central America and Caribbean Track and Field Coaches Association Congress

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31:1/2; 93-95, 2016

## Introduction

“Developing systems in athletics” was the theme of the 25<sup>th</sup> North America Central America and Caribbean Track and Field Coaches Association (NACATFCA) congress, which drew 50 coaches from the region to Santo Domingo, Dominican Republic, from 8 – 1 October, 2015.

A strong line-up of speakers presented on a range of related topics addressing many levels of coaching development, types of training systems and different approaches taken by the Member Federations.

The following sections give the highlights from the main presentations. PDF files of the presentations can be down loaded from <http://www.athleticsnacac.org/nacactfca/>.

## Types of Systems Present in Athletics

### *Richie Mercado (USA)*

Mercado, the Secretary of the NACATFCA, framed the theme of the Congress with an overview of the types of systems allowing for development and success in athletics in the region. These include an individual coach, a school or university setting, a coaching “school”, a training group or club (e.g. Racers Track Club-Jamaica), and the training of individual athletes (e.g. Usain Bolt). Factors influencing the development of these systems are: culture, education, money, federation support, facilities, and others. He pointed out the trend of many successful athletes remaining and



training at home in the islands instead of going to NCAA programmes in the US, which he concluded was linked to the improvement of coaching education over the past 30 years and the positive effects on the development of athletics and sport culture in the NACAC region.

## Progression of the Approach and Take-off in the High Jump and Women in Athletics

### *Sue Humphrey (USA)*

Sue Humphrey, coach of a number of top-class high jumpers, including Olympic champion Charles Austin (USA), presented a progression of the approach and take-off in the high jump in the conference room using one of her athletes and part of a landing pit to demonstrate. During her talk, she explained the importance of a strong foundation based on athleticism, technique, strength, and mental development. She stressed the desirability of finding athletes in other sports like basketball and volleyball and utilising the training aspects of these activities in the development of young

high jumpers. In her second session she presented an historical summary of the growth and development of women's coaching in the United States, from her perspective of having worked her way up through the system to coaching Olympians and becoming the chair of the USATF Women's Track & Field Committee. After years of work in this area it can be said that women in the United States have many opportunities as athletes and coaches on all levels.

## **The Development of Throwers**

### ***Ishmael Lopez (CUB)***

Lopez, who as coached in Trinidad for many years, was the first of four Cubans to present and the country's system was evident in his basic philosophy even though he has also studied in other programmes (CAC, NACAC, and IAAF). He covered the introduction of athletes to the throws through to long-term specialisation, explaining the multifaceted training approach of sprints, jumps, hurdles, weights, and throws in the development of youth and maturing athletes. He discussed training phases of varied percentages of throwing and strength training loads with more advanced throwers. He then gave an overview of the development of throwing in Trinidad, from the very beginning where there was very little infrastructure – neither facilities nor programmes – to the present. Currently the throwing culture is thriving in all disciplines from youth to the international level.

## **The Triple Jump**

### ***Daniel Osorio (CUB)***

Osorio discussed his programme and experience of identifying and developing the 2012 World Junior Champion and the 2013 World Championships silver medalist Pedro Pichardo. The major success factors were the development of better symmetry of strength and coordination, great jumping ability at take-off of the first phase and increased overall velocity. Between the ages of 16 and 22, Pichardo progressed from 15.57m to 18.08m. The presentation included several video examples of drills

stressing balance, coordination, and improved jumping output that were very important in the design of the programmes used by both Pichardo and all the triple jumpers of Cuba.

## **The Pole Vault**

### ***Alexander Navas (CUB)***

Navas detailed the development of the pole vault in Cuba and specifically his work with Olympic silver medallist Yarisley Silva. The discipline is growing in popularity in Cuba, as evidenced by results at both the junior and senior levels and in the combined events. Navas stressed the overall development of the athlete through a long-term multi-faceted training including sprints, jumps, throws, hurdles, strength, gymnastics, and technical training. The details of Silva's programme revealed a skilful progression and interaction of these different training aspects throughout the phases of training and the developmental results of testing and performance over time.

## **Selection of Sport Talents in Cuba**

### ***Raul Calderon (CUB)***

Calderon covered the principles of talent identification and physical and mental development that define the system in Cuba and are the foundation of the country's successful programme for the discus throw, in which he works. Talent detection for youths between the ages of 13 and 14 consists of basic and laboratory tests followed by more specialised testing. He stressed the importance of the athlete's support team (i.e. coaches, physical therapists, psychologists, researchers, and medical personnel) for the long-term development and success of an athlete.

## **Cultural and Systemic Development of Sprinters in Jamaica**

### ***Patrick Dawson (JAM)***

According to Dawson, Jamaica has had history of sprinting success since 1948, but this has exploded in the last decade to the extent that athletics is now a part of the Jamaican



culture and fast becoming its national sport! Youth use it as a vehicle out of poverty and as a means to get a good education. As early as 3 – 6 years of age, they start to compete in various athletic disciplines, with this development being encouraged by primary and prep school competitions. High school coaches often attend prep school meets in order to recruit young talent. The quality of support staff at the high school level (coaches, mentors, organisers, administrators, physical and medical) has increased and alumni play a big role in funding and mentorship, often to helping to pay athletes' expenses. The national athletics federation, the JAAA, has pushed for greater attention to be given to female athletes and, as a result, spectators are now filling the stadiums to watch both genders compete. Also important was Usain Bolt's decision not to go to the US for development, which has led to more local talent remaining in Jamaica after high school and greater support for professional clubs (i.e.,

Stephen Francis, Glen Mills and Racers TC). With total athletic development being a priority, athletes are taught how to compete and develop the confidence in their skills. Respect and rivalry and competition help teach Jamaican athletes to take care of business. Dawson stressed that coaches are at the centre of everything and that coaching education and development is vital to the success of the sport. Even though most coaches at the high school level are not paid, the success of the Jamaican system has encouraged them to improve their abilities resulting in the development of better programmes for athletes. In short they do it for the love of the sport!

*Reported by Richie Mercado*

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