

Field hockey – Scotland has talent and passion to succeed



Dan Coultas (Scotland) fights for a ball against India in a challenge match in England. Pic Nigel Duncan Media

Scotland's inability to see off Australia through a simple but crucial error in decision making and execution in the dying minutes of the 2015 Rugby World Cup quarter-final left a nation deflated.

Compare and contrast that with Scotland in 2017 who beat both our Celtic cousins, Ireland and Wales, in the recent six nations.

The progression shown by the rugby team has made a lasting impression on Andy Tennant, Scottish Hockey's new head of performance, who has been impressed by both the precision and mental toughness shown by Vern Cotter's men.

Tennant believes the progression shown by the rugby team provides an excellent blueprint for other Scottish sporting teams and he hopes to help his coaches bring some of that magic to our hockey teams to ensure they can compete with the same toughness in prestige tournaments.

That will take time, but the former high performance coach of Scottish Cricket firmly believes that Scotland has the raw materials and stable of talented hockey players who can aspire to delivering world class performances on the global stage.

Of course, some would scoff and say he would say that as he has just taken up the job as high performance coach for Scottish Hockey.

But, spending an hour with this engaging and affable former international cricketer, it is easy to see why hockey bosses have handed him such a key role in the sport.

For one thing, Ayrshire-based Tennant knows what it is like to succeed and, crucially, fail in the sporting arena where little things mean a lot.

He also knows sport and not just high-profile ones like football, rugby and cricket.

As a younger man he was a keen follower of Ayr Scottish Eagles, the professional ice hockey team who won all four trophies up for grabs during a glorious Grand Slam year back in 1998.

Tennant became close to the players, a unique quality of ice hockey, and, as an aspiring coach, started to understand the psyche of successful teams built from players from different backgrounds and from different parts of the world.

He got to know their traits, their strengths and weaknesses and, basically, what made them tick and has also studied in other sporting areas, like the New Zealand rugby team.

He, like the rest of sports lovers, celebrated the success of unfashionable English football side, Leicester City, who won the Premiership at a canter last season with an exhilarating brand of football under then boss Claudio Ranieri.

Could, argued Tennant, the Italian have made a crucial error in disposing of key parts of their backroom staff including the sports psychologist?

He does not want Scottish Hockey to make mistakes and recognises that the organisation has a major job on its hands to convince business to support his vision to develop successful international teams and podium athletes.

Tennant has been in post since January after 13 years with

Scottish cricket. He has already travelled to Spain with the country's senior women's team for the World League.

He will see the senior men's team compete in Ireland soon in their World League, but one thing he is convinced of – this country has talent and two passionate and hard-working head coaches in Gordon Shepherd (women) and Derek Forsyth (men) supported by committed support staff.

Gaining success requires resources and Tennant would love to see more Scottish corporates back the enthusiasm of the organisation but he realises that businessmen and women demand a return on their investment.

He said: "We are embarking on an exciting journey which will hopefully give young Scottish athletes the opportunity to win Commonwealth and Olympic medals and we hope that a number of Scottish businesses may want to partner and support us on that journey."

Other partnerships, like the one enjoyed by hockey bosses and Edinburgh University, could also be a key to progress.

And the fact that Scotland has a number of fee-paying schools already committed to hockey is, he argues, a major plus.

Now he wants to see the state school system come on board in a big way in partnership with local clubs, creating "hockey hotbeds" where young hockey players would be able to access the same opportunities afforded to the players in the independent sector.

He highlighted the outstanding work being done by Uddingston Hockey Club who he singled out as an example of "excellent practice".

It is, he said, all about aspiration and belief. Scotland currently has two players in the Great Britain squad, Edinburgh-born Chris Grassick, Scotland's captain who is

recovering from a serious leg injury, and Alan Forsyth, last season's top scorer in England's top league for club side Surbiton.

The boys come from different parts of the country. Paisley-born Forsyth was an integral part of the Bromac Kelburne squad which has dominated Scottish hockey for more than a decade.

Grassick played for Inverleith before moving south to Surbiton to continue his development and push for an Olympic place.

Tennant is determined to ensure that Scotland unearths talent from all part of the country and would love to see the university community in Aberdeen, Dundee and Glasgow mirror the facilities offered to students at Edinburgh.

Is it, he argues, a surprise that the Capital's university supplies several members of the current national squad?

Tennant said: "I was on the plane coming back from Spain with the women's team and got into conversation with one of our young squad members.

"She told me that her sister was in the Great Britain sailing squad and the girl I was speaking to is now making here mark in hockey.

"I'd love to see both of them making the Olympics and possibly standing on a podium."

The gold medal success of Britain's women's team in Rio has ignited a passion for the sport as well as raising the profile.

Now is the time for administrators, business and the public to take note of Tennant's desire to turn raw, natural talent into successful athletes.