



AO Coaches & Club Town Hall meeting – Wed Jun 3, 2020

Good afternoon everyone and welcome to the Athletics Ontario Coaches, Club & Officials Town Hall meeting.

Before we get started, I would like to acknowledge the recent protests that have been going on in the US and to a lesser extent also here in Canada.

The Coaches, Clubs and Officials on today's call are the leaders of our community and we have a collective duty to ensure that all of our members feel safe and free from discrimination based on race, sexual orientation, religion and political beliefs.

As Canadians we tend to deny the presence of racism in our country. We are proud to say that we are accepting of all and have some of the most racial diverse cities in the world. Unfortunately, the sad reality is that we are not significantly better than our neighbors to the south. Many people in Canada would very quickly say "I am not racist", in reality, many of these people are in fact part of a category called "silent racism". This is a term that refers to negative thoughts and attitudes regarding people of colour on the part of white people.

The question that we need to ask ourselves is not, are we racist, or not racist. Instead, we should be asking ourselves are we more racist or less racist? And how can I become anti-racist and ensure that I am not racist through my passivity.

While the leader of the most powerful nation on the planet is overtly racist, his actions and comments are displaying what many people in the US are subconsciously feeling but have not necessarily been as vocal or overt in their racism. While I don't support the violence of some of the recent protests, I can understand the frustration that has led many to feel they have no other choice but to ensure people take notice and acknowledge that things have not changed enough over the past 50+ years.

They say education and conversation is the best way to reduce racism. I would suggest that education has been happening, if not enough, it is at least a start. Unfortunately, there has been very little in the way of conversation. The truth is that this is a difficult and uncomfortable conversation to have, so we avoid having it.

As a father of two beautiful biracial daughters, I can tell you that this, silent racism is out there. In recent conversations with my kids they have shared stories about their childhood that both saddens me and makes me angry that they had to experience these subtle forms of racism that I was not aware of. Questions like, “where are you really from?”, when they had answered that they were born in Canada or their subconscious desire to fit in by straightening their hair so they would look more white.

Athletics is one of, if not the most, multi culturally diverse sports in the world. But that does not mean we do not have opportunities to improve our real acceptance of this diversity.

I believe that this group of leaders within Athletics Ontario is a good place to start the uncomfortable conversations about things like “White Privilege” and “Silent Racism” and how we can make real changes within our community. For instance, discussions on what changes could we bring into our coaching and official education programs, that specifically address bias, prejudice, and racism. If we don’t equip our coaches and officials with the tools to understand these issues, the issues will perpetuate long after we are gone.

James Baldwin, an American novelist, playwright, poet and activist said, “Not everything that is faced can be changed, but nothing can be changed until it is faced.”

We will continue this dialogue on future Town Hall meetings and while it will, initially, be uncomfortable, I believe we can make a collective difference.

Return to Training Updates

This week the Province extended the State of Emergency until the end of June and also announced that, while they will continue with the Provinces reopening plans they will start taking a regional approach to openings, recognizing that there are areas of the Province that are harder hit with COVID-19 than other areas of the Province. Several areas have yet to have any identified cases while others have a significant number of cases that are continuing to grow. We are anticipating that the Province will expand the number of allowable group participants on a region by region basis.

Our recent return to training guidelines will be modified to match any changes through this new regional approach to reopening.

Anthony has been working with AC and Trackie to create the individual waiver & attestation process online that will enable members to start training in groups, following the AO and National Back on Track return to training guidelines. This will also include a club specific attestation that will be completed online prior to a club being sanctioned to hold group training. At this point it looks like the system will be available by Monday June 8th.

After last weeks call, a number of coaches informed us that facility operators in their area were not aware of the Provinces direction on the ability to open their facilities to members of the Provincial or National sport organizations, namely AO and AC members. In an effort to support the clubs as you are having discussions with your facility operators we will be providing clubs that have signed off on the club attestation process with a letter of support from AO, indicating that the club has met the AO and National Return to training requirements for a safe return to training. Hopefully this will facilitate a positive dialogue with the various facility owners/operators across the Province.

We have been in discussions with the Toronto Track & Field centre and they are currently working out their plans to support the return to training at their location. They will be setting up a booking process for clubs/individuals to book 1 hour sessions through an online booking process and AO is working with them to ensure all individuals registering are members of AO as per the Provincial requirements. There is no current timeline for opening, but we will let everyone know as soon as it is officially opened.

We understand that numerous facilities are not able to open due to their inability to staff the facilities. All we can do is suggest that you continue to have discussions with your facilities and municipalities about opening as soon as they can. Talk to your local city counselors and let them know that Return to Training guidelines have been developed by your Provincial Sport organization and get them involved in driving the conversation to open things up.

Questions:

1. Can an AO coach, at this time, provide workouts for athletes training individually, at their home, or in a public park?
2. We have received calls from parents telling us that other regional clubs have organized training with 8 or more athletes.
 - a. Can groups train now? Can AO be explicit on what clubs/coaches can and cannot do during this phase of return to training?
3. The vast majority, if not all, Municipalities, and Service groups in Ontario have cancelled summer camps for children (elementary) because it is difficult to manage social distancing and health concerns (i.e. sharing water bottles etc) with those age groups.
 - a. Will AO be assertive in setting guidelines to align with this direction?

Answers can be listened to through the June 3rd town hall audio/video

As a reminder:

The PSO & NSO recommendations include guidelines that ensure members are still maintaining all of the Provinces social distance rules which currently means groups no larger than 5 and everyone in the groups maintaining at least 2m distance from each other, unless you are from the same household.