

Communication - Junior Selection Policy 2015 - 2016

The following has been prepared to provide additional information and context to the Junior Selection Policy 2015 – 2016. If you have any additional queries that are not answered here, then please contact Alex Newton, Performance Director or the Lead Talent Coach in your weapon for further clarification: Neale Thomas, Epee; Ian Williams, Sabre; and Maciej Wojtkowiak, Foil.

Principles - GBR Junior (U20) International Programme and Selection

The Talent Programmes we operate are based on performance principles. Much of what we deliver in this area is significantly subsidised by funding bodies and partners and success (and therefore future funding) is measured by athlete progression and ultimately results at the Junior and then Senior World Championship level. Whilst we appreciate that it can be a fantastic experience for young people to have an opportunity to represent GBR (irrespective of results and performance potential), this is not our priority, particularly at major championships.

In order to support our best GBR athletes in their goals of winning Junior World Championship medals, British Fencing are committed to delivering a consistent, accountable programme of international competitive opportunities. This is underpinned by access to a good programme of training and support for identified athletes. Without this link between good quality training and selection, we will not make the step change needed to take us from 12-14th in the world each year with sporadic medals, to consistently delivering medals on the junior world stage.

What are the key changes to the selection process?

The selection document focuses on ensuring we select athletes who are able to compete against an international standard of competition. Automatic selections have been reduced to ensure that we are not sending athletes, who have been able to accumulate national ranking points to get within the Top 10 of the GBR rankings, yet are not competitive at junior internationals or have not been identified by the Lead Talent Coaches as having potential for the future.

Emphasis will be on selecting athletes who, through a structured training, are making the necessary performance progression to ultimately challenge for junior medals.

A new points system for selection to the junior Europeans and World Championships has been introduced which mirrors the system used at the senior level. Selection for these competitions will be awarded to those athletes who are able to produce consistently good performances over the course of the season rather than through a one off result.

Will the automatic selection criteria applied stay the same as last year?

No. Automatic selection will only be given to the top two athletes in the GBR junior ranking lists at the time of selection. The third ranked fencer will only get automatic selection if they have international points from last season.

However, for this year only, discretionary selections will be offered to the athletes, who would have received automatic selection based on the following two sections from last year's selection policy:

- GBR Junior National Champion – first international of the season

- Top 8 Europeans / Worlds - first two junior internationals

Discretionary Selection

We recognise that 'discretionary selection' causes much debate and cause for concern when selecting athletes and teams. However, the most successful sports programmes in the world rely on discretionary selections to ensure they are competitive on the world stage. We will always provide the opportunity for athletes to self select themselves through performances and / or ranking and this selection document is no different.

However, rankings are only one indicator of the potential ability of an athlete to be a future World Champion. They are a measure of current performance and as such our selection policy takes into account and guarantees at least the top two athletes in each ranking list automatic selection which mirrors the senior selection policy. For the two major championships, automatic selection is guaranteed for those athletes who consistently perform in the junior FIE competitions. In making selections, the selectors will be also looking at other factors that would indicate whether an athlete has the potential to succeed at world level such as motivation, age, access to training and where necessary select athletes, even if they do not qualify automatically by ranking. This gives us the opportunity to fast track young fencers and also to select fencers that may have key roles to play in a team. Team medals are just as important to us as individual medals.

Selection dates?

Where the schedule allows, we will aim to make selections for junior international events eight weeks in advance of a nominated FIE competition to make the costs as low as possible for all athletes travelling. In all other cases the intention is that selection will take place a minimum of six weeks in advance of the nominated competition.

Why am I getting 'Performance Targets'?

From a performance perspective, targets help to measure whether we are on track or not and each year we have to submit performance progression targets to Sport England against which we are measured at the annual review and on which are current and future funding is based. This happens in every walk of life. If at the annual review the Talent Programme has not met their performance targets and KPIs then funding will be reduced or lost altogether. From a Sport England perspective they need to measure if we (organisation and athlete level) are progressing and matching the best in the world (ie spending their money in a wise way, doing what we said we would). On an individual athlete level you should already be setting yourselves performance targets throughout the year in conjunction with your coaches.

Those of you who already work with your coaches and plan your seasons will already have set yourself targets – we would strongly encourage you to write these down and share them in advance with the World Class Programme Talent Coaches as part of your annual planning process.

For some fencers it may be necessary to attend these competitions simply for experience, which will vary depending on weapon and age. This is part of the challenge of successful talent ID and pathway development. But repeatedly not making it past the poules or into the L64 is not a beneficial experience and promotes a losing mentality. We need to learn how to win at domestic level,

international domestic and satellite events before we really expose ourselves to FIE junior international competitions.

What about the exam period?

We recognise that exams are important. However, exams affect different year groups differently. If we create a system that permits training and competitive fencing to stop for the entirety of exams (revision period, post exams) this will have an impact on our athletes' ability to be competitive at World level at both a junior and then senior international level. When putting together the training and competition calendar, we are mindful of exams, but training and fencing will continue through this period.

What about clashes with Senior Events?

We will do our utmost to avoid clashes when scheduling competition and training events, but this is not always possible. British Fencing will endeavour to ensure there is a spread of suitable opportunities for our cadet and Juniors to compete and gain ranking points so that selections can take place in a timely fashion, thus keeping travel costs low and ensuring that attendance at competitions can be well organised. We will also do our best to give the earliest notification of competition and selection dates and therefore hopefully avoiding potential clashes.

What's happening next year - is the intention to change again?

The selection document mirrors the process we have at a senior level and therefore is unlikely to change dramatically in the standards expected of an athlete representing GBR at major international competitions.

However, there is an intention to move to a squad-based approach at junior level, focused around those athletes selected for the Talent Programmes. However, if we transition to this approach next year, non Talent Pathway athletes will still be eligible for a squad place for at least the first year.

The proposal is to select a squad of athletes in each weapon at the beginning of the season, as happens in many other countries, and it will only be from this squad that selections to international competitions are made. By limiting the pool of athletes to those that can really be competitive, British Fencing will be able to give athletes travelling as part of the GBR Junior Squads, a good quality experience at the right competitions with the right focus on achieving results at the right time.

Further information and confirmation of this approach will be published once a new Talent Pathway Manager is in position.

Alex Newton
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