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Mediation & Dispute Resolution Services

CONFIDENTIAL

Report Concerning Independent Review of Coaching Culture for Wrestling Canada Lutte

Prepared by:
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December 2, 2018

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Introduction

Scope

I was retained to review the coaching culture of Wrestling Canada Lutte (WCL). Though the review was to deal with coaching issues, these issues do not exist in a vacuum. Every organization has a unique culture that is reflected throughout the organization. In this case, this includes coaching. Therefore, this review has taken an expansive view and examines the coaching culture and issues within WCL that impact coaches and athletes.

Methodology

I was initially given a list of twenty people to interview consisting of athletes, coaches, staff and the President. It became apparent very quickly that this list would not provide an accurate reflection or give a true picture of what was going on within WCL. I approached the Executive Director for additional funding to interview more witnesses. This request was granted.

In total, I interviewed fifty-four witnesses composed of current and former high-performance athletes (including NextGen athletes), coaches, staff, nutritionists, therapists, current and former board members, advisors to WCL and other members of the wrestling community.

The findings that I have provided represent an aggregate of the experiences and stories shared by participants. Where I have drawn a conclusion, it is based on a statement that has been corroborated by at least one other witness. The same is true for quotes that have been cited. Any quote used represents an aggregate of views given.

Interviews

Interviews were conducted in-person, with three exceptions, which were by phone, in various cities across Canada. This included interviews at the four national training centres in Montreal, St. Catharines, Calgary and Vancouver. I made at least two trips to each of the national training centre cities.

For the first round of interviews, I conducted interviews on-site in locations provided by the training centre. For reasons that will become apparent, these interviews were moved off-site for the second round of interviews.

The breakdown of the fifty-four (54) people interviewed is as follows:

I interviewed twenty-seven (27) current and former athletes composed of NextGen, Junior and Senior team athletes both male and female.

I interviewed the following twelve (12) coaches:

- Marty Calder
- Owen Dawkins
- Eamonn Dorgan
- Martine Dugrenier
- Neal Ewers
- Carol Huynh
- Dave Mair
- Dave McKay
- Paul Ragusa
- Dave Spinney
- Tonya Verbeek
- Victor Zilberman

I interviewed the following six (6) current and former WCL staff members:

- Julie Beaulieu, High Performance Manager
- Stephanie Buchan, former High Performance Manager
- Jay Jordan, Board Member and President of Ontario Amateur Wrestling Association
- Clive Llewellyn, former President of WCL and former Executive Board Member
- Tamara Medwidsky, Executive Director
- Don Ryan, President of WCL

I interviewed the following five (5) members of the WCL support team:

- Surinder Budwal, Lead Therapist
- Kelly Drager, Dietitian
- Aaron Nardella, Chiropractor
- Erin Sargent, Lead Physiologist
- Brian Ward, Case Manager

In addition, I interviewed the following four (4) people:

- Monique Smith, Athletes in Action
- The parents of two different athletes who have requested anonymity
- Someone with excellent knowledge of WCL who requested anonymity

This pool of fifty-four interviewees represented a broad range of experiences and perspectives drawn from their diverse backgrounds. While not every interviewee may not be directly quoted in this review, every interviewee provided useful information that refined the knowledge that went into this review.

Challenges

There were a number of challenges faced in writing this report.

When I started this review, athletes were very reluctant to participate. As one athlete said:

I want to make sure that I have full confidentiality and that my name does not appear anywhere.

Athletes were concerned that I was not independent of WCL and that statements they¹ made to me would lead to reprisals if they said anything critical or negative of national coaches or WCL staff. They were concerned how participation in this review could impact their careers with many expressing concerns that their participation might affect their chances of being selected for the 2020 Olympic team.

Athletes also expressed concerns that this review and its recommendations would not be taken seriously. This was largely based on how a previous investigation concerning the former High Performance Director's sexual relationship with an athlete was conducted. Athletes believe that this investigation led to a change in the Code of Conduct that codified WCL's acceptance of coaches carrying out sexual relationships with their athletes and the former High Performance Director receiving a promotion.

It became clear that athletes' concerns about reprisals were valid when one coach began a campaign of intimidation. This coach, concerned about things that had been raised during the interview, used their position of authority to try to determine which athletes had spoken to me and what they had said. The coach said the following in a team meeting:

The coach talked about the meeting that he had with you. They said what they were asked about. They sent a comment online about how if anybody was asked to talk to you that they should speak to them..., the coach said that if anybody was being asked to speak to him (the reviewer) that they should keep in mind that there are people trying to break our team and that we did not speak to anybody if we did not want to. The coach was pointing at people who spoke to you and pointing at people who were going to speak to you. I was grateful that my name was not on the list. The coach was saying that people who were saying things were going to ruin them. I do have things to say about the coach, but I do not want to ruin anything, because carding feels like it is subjective.

I believe efforts by this coach had a chilling effect on interviewees and stymied the independent involvement of some athletes. In this regard, the coach was successful in achieving what they wanted.

Because of these concerns I have adopted special measures to protect the athletes who participated.

For this project, I have guaranteed the athletes complete confidentiality and anonymity. In a normal review where I do not have concerns about reprisal, I would list the names all of the participants I interview. In order to ensure the identities of athletes remain anonymous, I have anonymized quotes and removed all identifying information, such as dates, places and names, so that the identities of the athletes may not be deduced. This means that some facts have been given as generalities.

One of the factors in deciding to interview more than the original twenty people identified, was that it offered a larger pool of interviewees that could help secure anonymity. Being able to offer anonymity meant that more athletes could feel confident in sharing their experiences without the fear of being identified.

¹ I have used "they" and "their" so as not to identify the gender of the speaker.

As athletes began to have confidence with this review, more athletes reached out and expressed interest in participating. As a result, I had to return to various cities for a second set of interviews. These interviews were held off-site from the Training Centres. I staggered interview times so that witnesses would not encounter each other.

WCL staff and national coaches were not made aware of my whereabouts nor the details of my second round interview schedule or the number of interviewees I would be meeting. I interviewed twenty-seven athletes from all four centres, including current and former athletes who had left the program whether to retirement or other factors.

Conflicts of Interest

Throughout this review, I will use the term “conflict of interest”. Conflicts of interest are common throughout many sports and through many of the National Sport Organizations (NSO). There is any number of reasons for these conflicts. The existence of a conflict of interest does not mean that an NSO has acted in bad faith or is operating poorly. As will be seen below, conflicts of interest can be real, potential or perceived in different circumstances. In discussing conflicts of interest, I have relied on the definitions as they are outlined by the Sports Dispute Resolution Centre of Canada (SDRCC).²

A *real* conflict of interest is a “situation in which a person has a private interest that is sufficient to influence him/her in the exercise of other duties.” An example of a real conflict of interest is as simple as “a father sitting on an appeal committee that is reviewing a decision concerning his daughter.”

A *potential* conflict of interest is a “situation where a conflict of interest is predictable but not yet real. It will depend on a future event that may occur, where a conflict of interest is foreseeable but not yet real.” An example of such a conflict of interest is one where “A coach is a member of a selection committee for a team for which his/her athlete may try out. At the onset, there is no conflict but one will arise if the athlete tries out for the team.”

The third type of conflict of interest, and the most common type of conflict I will speak about, is the *perceived* conflict of interest. The perceived conflict of interest is a “situation where a reasonable third person, once aware of the facts, could be concerned about the existence of a conflict of interest.” An example of a perceived conflict of interest is where:

The contract to supply the club’s uniform was awarded to the daughter of the chairperson of the board. There is a perception from a member that favouritism occurred. This perception will be mitigated quickly when the member will learn that the board considered bids from several potential suppliers, in the absence of the chairperson who had voluntarily removed herself from the decision making process after declaring the conflict, and awarded the contract to the lowest bidder.

Acknowledgements

I would especially like to thank the athletes who participated in this review. Despite their genuine and valid concern of reprisal they gave very candid evidence and encouraged their teammates to participate. Without their stories it would have been impossible to have such a comprehensive review. It was a real privilege to meet such a committed group of people.

² SDRCC, “Conflicts of Interest in Sports-Related Decision-Making”, at pg 1, online: <<http://www.crdsc-sdrcc.ca/eng/dispute-resource-publications>>.

Regardless of the following findings, it is important to note that everyone I interviewed, which includes athletes (both current and former), support staff, WCL staff and coaches, were committed to producing successful wrestlers to represent Canada.

I would also like to express my gratitude to Ryan Hilborn who arranged all of the interviews, took notes, drafted witness statements and assisted in the writing of the report. I could not have completed such a major task without his assistance.

A. Sexual Relationships

I have made the following findings regarding sexual relationships within WCL:

- There is a long history of tolerating sexual relationships between national team coaches, national athletes and WCL staff;
- The current Code of Conduct permits these types of relationships;
- Relationships involving coaches and athletes are almost universally opposed by athletes and the coaches who don't have a sexual relationship with their athletes;
- These relationships create a conflict of interest when coaches and staff are involved in relationships with each other or with athletes;
- These relationships undermine the confidence athletes and coaches have in their NSO;
- These relationships expose athletes to the possibility of being sexually harassed;
- Relationships involving staff and coaches with each other or with athletes should be prohibited on the basis that they create the perception of a conflict of interest;
- There is no reporting mechanism athletes or coaches can turn to if they need to report an incident of harassment or abuse;
- A reporting mechanism must be implemented.

I have set out the reasons for these findings below.

Code of Conduct

WCL permits intimate and sexual relationships among athletes, coaches and staff so long as those in the relationship are above the age of eighteen and there is no significant imbalance of power.

It is not unusual for coaches to have sexual relationships with athletes in wrestling across the country. It is surprising to see that the Code of Conduct permits various types of relationships: coach-athlete relationships, coach-coach relationships, coach-staff relationships and staff-staff relationships where the participants are over the age of eighteen and no "significant" power imbalance exists.

The Code of Conduct provides:

Participants shall not have sexual relations, or sexual intimacy of any description; with any other participant he/she has access to in the sport environment if the participant is under the age of 18 years of age. If the participant is 18 years of age or older and if there exists a significant imbalance of power with respect to the relationship between the participants which could reasonably jeopardize effective decision making given the existence or nature of the sexual relations or sexual intimacy, a written disclosure is required to enable assessment and appropriate action.

This section of the Code of Conduct codifies relationships that have a history of existing within WCL. This is understood by both coaches and athletes alike who identified that these types of relationships are disruptive and distracting. One athlete identified that:

The wording about the sexual harassment is problematic. But the over eighteen reporting mechanism is vague. It does not say who they have to report their relationship to or what the mechanisms will be. This section is enabling a culture that is not happening anywhere else. The policy is problematic.

Most of the athletes interviewed were unaware of this provision in their Code of Conduct. When they were asked to read the provision, many of the athletes were outraged and upset by it and felt that coach-athlete relationships should not be permitted. Many athletes and some coaches believe that it was added to give protection to those athletes and coaches that are currently in relationships and not to protect athletes from future types of predatory behaviour.

This provision clearly creates the potential for a conflict of interest.

1) Relationships Between National Team Coaches and Athletes

Overall, coaches and athletes were nearly unanimous in showing disapproval for the idea of coach-athlete sexual relationships. One coach stated:

If I have a subordinate, I do not think it is ethical or appropriate to have a sexual relationship. It creates a perception that my decisions are impacted by that relationship and under rides the perception of decisions being made with a clear head. It is selfish and should not be allowed.

An athlete said:

I think the coach-athlete relationship is disgusting because of the power dynamic.

Another coach said:

When the coach of the national program comes to a practice, the athletes will try harder for the national coach – they have the admiration of all of the athletes and the athletes want to try to get looked at. Kids and especially girls are vulnerable to the national coach. The national coaches have a lot of power.

In the rare instances where there was approval for coach-athlete sexual relationships, the approval came from athletes who were younger. These younger athletes believed that there was no problem so long as the athlete was above the age of eighteen. However, it should be noted that in nearly all cases involving athletes above the age of eighteen, they were nearly unanimous in disapproving of these relationships.

According to many of those interviewed, coach-athlete sexual relationships create a perceived conflict of interest. When asked where they believe there may be a conflict of interest, interviewees tended to state a belief that the relationship may unfairly bias a coach in favour of the athlete in a relationship with a national level coach. This may be done through subtle means of influencing team selection.

Officials within WCL took the position that team selection is an objective process and solely based on results. However, there are a variety of ways that coaches can influence the “objective” criteria. I was told of a number of ways coaches can influence the careers of favoured athletes. One coach told me:

If a national coach favours an athlete, the athlete can be put on more teams for competitions and taken to more events and will travel more. That can lead to spots on the national teams and that leads to funding.

Another coach stated:

It is a possibility that a coach can ask the main competitor of a favoured athlete to change weight classes, which can include asking an athlete to compete in a weight class they are not physically suited to be in. Coaches can exert control over seeding for tournaments and have the ability to seed wrestlers in a way that may make a wrestler’s tournament easier or more difficult.

It was generally acknowledged that coaches have favourite athletes for any number of reasons. Most of the reasons given by coaches for having favourites were related to work ethic and success. However, where a coach is in a relationship with an athlete, it creates the perception that the athlete is favoured because of their intimate relationship with their coach. As a result, athletes and coaches alike were more likely to second-guess a coach's decision when it came to team selection, funding, and the attention that a coach pays to an athlete.

An athlete described the situation of another athlete engaged in a sexual relationship with a coach. The latter athlete worked hard, was talented and received attention. However, the interviewee wondered whether the second athlete had more success because they received extra coaching because of their intimate relationship with the coach. This in turn led the interviewee to wonder if the attention they were being given was because they had earned it, or whether it was because the coach was "targeting" the athlete for a sexual relationship.

When athletes feel targeted by a coach, it can make training with this coach uncomfortable. Wrestling is a physical sport with close contact between athlete and coach. Athletes must be able to trust their coaches and trust that their coach is not targeting them for a sexual relationship. An athlete recounted the following story:

We were at an international event and I was having a drink and the coach put his hand on my thigh. I froze because it went through my mind that he might have told one of the coaches that I was a bitch. I was frozen in place and did not know what to do because it was my coach's friend.

Athletes must also respect their coaches. Athletes often said that they find it difficult to both respect and trust their coaches. Athletes expressed similar feelings when asked about the WCL Code of Conduct and its position on relationships.

It was acknowledged by interviewees, both coaches and athletes alike, that there is a natural power imbalance between a coach and an athlete. National team coaches wield enormous power over athletes with Olympic aspirations. One coach described how athletes tend to perform harder in order to get the attention of the national team coaches. This coach described how this makes athletes vulnerable to national coaches. Another interviewee described how when an athlete is working towards making an Olympic team, athletes are "willing to do just about anything."

Most interviewees drew the distinction between athletes who had recently retired and stepped into the role of a club coach while his/her partner was continuing to wrestle in the same club and national team coaches involved with the national program. Many interviewees did not see the first type of relationship as containing a power imbalance. Instead, many interviewees expressed beliefs that there was an imbalance of power only where a coach could be seen to control elements of team selection and funding. However, those athletes who are in relationships with their coach acknowledged that it may be better if their spouse or partner only coached at the club level.

2) Coach-Coach Relationships

There is also a perception that coach-coach relationships create a conflict of interest. Many interviewees believe that there is a bias that gives an unfair advantage to the athletes at one of the national training centres as a result of the relationship between the international coach and the coach of the training centre.

One interviewee summed it up by saying:

The relationship makes it very difficult for people to perceive that there is impartial decision-making. When the criteria selection is designed a certain way, is it made to benefit a certain centre?

Another coach said:

It is a conflict of interest. The coach at the national centre was involved in that sort of relationship with their athlete, and that athlete is now a National Coach, which is highly resented by a number of centre coaches. There is a misuse of power by that National Coach reflected in recruiting, funding, team composition for international events and a major role in the National Association's policies.

While there is a perception that the decisions being made by the international coach benefit the training centre, there are also perceptions that the opposite is true; that the international coach is actively distancing themselves from the training centre athletes at national and international tournaments to avoid showing any type of favouritism. Both coaches stated during their interviews that their relationship does not impact their ability to do their jobs.

However, the perception of a conflict of interest is reasonable and it remains. The very fact of the relationship leads athletes and coaches at all of the centres to question the decision-making process.

During one interview it was stated that coaches act as advocates on behalf of their athletes when there is ambiguity in the selection criteria. This creates the perception that the training centre coach is using their relationship to advocate for their centre and their athletes. There is also the perception that because of their relationship, the international coach is unable to discipline the training centre coach if needed.

There are additional conflicts of interest in coach-coach relationships that were brought to my attention. One interviewee stated a belief that one coach was leaking confidential/sensitive information to the coach they are in a relationship with. This would be a conflict of interest and an abuse of that coach's position.

Athletes also stated that when coaches are engaged in a sexual relationship with another coach, their relationship could be disruptive to the athlete's focus. Some athletes described how when the coaches are fighting, this energy is brought into the training room. While it was pointed out by one coach that it may not be the relationship that is negative but other elements of a coach's life that are impacting the coach's mood, the relationship itself is believed to be the cause of the mood by the athletes.

Other athletes described how in one relationship, there are two coaches who often wrestle with one another in the training room and how it makes them uncomfortable. One athlete went so far as to say that "it feels like a weird foreplay."

3) Coach-Staff Relationships

As with the previous types of relationships, coach-staff relationships create perceived and potential conflicts of interest and are understood as such by the athletes and the broader wrestling community.

There are persistent rumours of a relationship between a staff member at the national office and a coach of a high performance centre. These rumours were investigated and could not be substantiated. Both parties at the heart of the rumour denied their being involved in a sexual relationship. However, the fact that WCL allows these types of relationships in the Code of Conduct, lets these types of rumours flourish and impacts every decision made by WCL. As with the relationships between coaches, interviewees perceived that this coach was able to use their relationship with the staff member to exploit ambiguities in the selection criteria to advocate for their athletes and their training centre.

One athlete described how they approached a WCL staff member with a complaint about sexual harassment by a national team coach. The athlete believes that the staff member leaked information about the athlete's complaint to the coach and the coach then acted on this information to the athlete's detriment. The athlete claims that this staff member had not disclosed to the athlete their sexual relationship with the coach.

4) Staff-Staff Relationships

These relationships also create potential and perceived conflicts of interest. One interviewee pointed out that relationships at the national organization undermine the independence of the national organization. The relationships carry the risk of diminishing the NSO as a whole in the eyes of coaches and athletes.

Recommendations

- i) **A prohibition on sexual relationships between national team coaches and athletes**
- ii) **A prohibition on sexual relationships between national team coaches and other coaches**
- iii) **A prohibition on sexual relationships between national team coaches and WCL staff**
- iv) **A prohibition on sexual relationships between staff and staff**
- v) **A prohibition on sexual relationships between staff and athletes**

I am recommending WCL prohibit sexual relationships between these groups because of the conflicts of interest they create.

The very fact that WCL permits these types of relationships leads athletes to lose trust and respect in their coaches and coaches and athletes to lose trust in the organization.

A prohibition on relationships of this sort will help restore the trust of athletes in the organization. There is a perception that the current policy on sexual relationships in WCL was drafted to benefit coaches who are or were in relationships with athletes, other coaches or staff. This perception has seriously diminished WCL in the eyes of many people involved in the wrestling community.

The current Code of Conduct, which permits these types of relationship, could open WCL to litigation for sexual harassment claims. It also gives an easy avenue for athletes to appeal every team selection. Where an athlete that is chosen for the national team is in a relationship with a national team coach, there is a clear conflict of interest.

This proposed change in policy to the current Code of Conduct led some interviewees to raise different scenarios. Some stated a belief that people in the wrestling community will continue to have relationships, but they will be in secret. Actually, an absolute prohibition will have the opposite effect. A prohibition will send the message to athletes, coaches and staff that these types of relationships are forbidden and are therefore not to be considered.

Some people believe that having a policy prohibiting relationships is unconstitutional and a violation of their "Charter" rights. However, many professions and workplaces do not permit these types of relationships. Other NSOs have policies prohibiting relationships, including Alpine Canada, which developed its policy as a result of its own sexual harassment issues. In wrestling, Alberta Amateur Wrestling Association has a prohibition on relationships.

B. Sexual Abuse

The impetus for this review were allegations of sexual abuse brought forward by two anonymous parties who made complaints to Own the Podium (OTP), the Minister of Sport and WCL. It was not in my mandate to review those specific complaints. However, based on my interviews, there may be some validity to those allegations. Those allegations should be reviewed in more detail.

In this review, evidence of sexual exploitation of minors by current WCL coaching staff was not brought to my attention, but I do find that there are insufficient safeguards to protect minors. Currently, coaches and anyone affiliated with the athletes and teams are not required to undergo a Vulnerable Sector Check. This leaves young and vulnerable athletes exposed to the risk that someone with a history of sexual abuse could be coaching them.

Furthermore, there is no database which records whether someone is in good standing in their own province. Therefore, coaches and athletes prohibited from involvement in one province or locale can move from place to place.

Alpine Canada Alpin (ACA) recently faced a similar issue and came out with a list of new policies that WCL can look to for guidance. Recommendations made by ACA included:

- Mandatory background checks for all ACA staff and coaches;
- Mandatory background checks for all active ACA-Canadian Ski Coaches (CSC) member coaches;
- Creation of a U18 Safe in Sport policy;
- Rule of Two criteria included in ACA U18 Safe in Sport Policy;
- Annual reviews of all safety policies;
- Annual ACA-CSC coaching database updates to provide all provincial and club partners a centralized location to review an active ACA-CSC member coach status to ensure they have met the requirements to be licensed, including the completion of a background screen, signature of the coaching code of conduct and the identification of coaches who have breached the coaching code of conduct.

Recommendations

- i) **Mandatory Vulnerable Sector Check for all WCL staff and coaches**
- ii) **Mandatory Vulnerable Sector Check for all provincial staff and coaches**
- iii) **Creation of a coach and athlete database to ensure they have met the requirements to be licensed, including the completion of a background screen, signature of the coaching Code of Conduct and the identification of coaches who have breached the coaching Code of Conduct**
- iv) **Rule of Two policy implemented for athletes under eighteen**
- v) **There should be an annual review of all safety policies**
- vi) **There should be an independent review of the allegations made by the two anonymous parties to OTP, the Minister of Sport and WCL**

C. Problems Identified in Coaching

During the review, allegations relating to physical abuse, verbal abuse, psychological abuse and sexual abuse were made. My findings are:

- There is a pattern of physical abuse that has become normalized;
- There is a pattern of coaches verbally abusing their athletes;
- There is a pattern of coaches psychologically abusing their athletes;
- The one size fits all approach to coaching is outdated;
- Sexism is a normalized part of wrestling in some gyms;
- New coaches are not being certified.

The reasons for my findings are below.

1) Physical Abuse

Allegations of coaches hitting, grabbing and pushing athletes were made by athletes. These claims were investigated and substantiated. This physical abuse is often disguised as practice when a coach is frustrated with an athlete.

Athletes and coaches described instances where coaches are taking out their anger or their frustrations on athletes by training one-on-one with an athlete and being overly aggressive with the athlete, to the point of hurting the athlete. It is in the one-on-one context that coaches are doing things like smashing athletes' faces off of the mat, pushing athletes up against the wall, punching and hitting athletes.

There was in an incident involving a national centre coach and an athlete at the 2008 Olympics where the athlete was hit by the coach. This incident was captured on international television. As far as this report is concerned, this incident is not being re-examined to determine what took place. However, this incident is still important because it was continually referenced by interviewees and was seen as the standard by which all other allegations or instances of physical abuse were measured.

Outside of Canadian wrestling, in the broader public, this incident was picked up by national media and became something of an embarrassment for the coach, the athlete involved and to the sport. Regardless of the coach's expression of remorse over the incident, there is a perception that the coach had not been sufficiently sanctioned by WCL. This has created the further perception that WCL had accepted and normalized aggressive coaching. The perception is that aggressive coaching is "within the parameters of the sport," as one athlete described it.

One athlete's description of being pushed by their coach shows how this type of physical abuse has become normalized. This athlete described how their coach was frustrated with them and how the coach, on "the field of play," pushed the athlete and continued to push the athlete until they were up against a wall. This athlete described feeling upset at the time. The athlete also told how they did not think to report it because, even though they were upset, they believed, and still believe, that it is a normal part of the sport, "in part because our sport is a combative sport and coaches are trying to instil toughness."

Another form of physical abuse is through the extreme use of shark bait/king of the mat. While shark bait/king of the mat is a common training tool across wrestling gyms, a coach was identified as using it to punish those athletes the coach is unhappy with. This coach will have athletes wrestle in the centre of a group until they can no longer physically wrestle. Athletes are expected to wrestle with the athlete as hard as they can and are punished or are threatened that they will take that athlete's spot on the mat or in the centre of the circle if they do not wrestle their hardest. This coach also forced an athlete to be in the middle of the circle for shark bait/ king of the mat even though they were recovering from an injury and were crying.

This same coach is said by some interviewees to have chosen athletes for move demonstrations because of something that happened "outside of practice." I was given examples of this coach punching an athlete by coming across the athlete's face in an overly aggressive manner when demonstrating a cross-face or throwing athletes to the floor when demonstrating a move like a snapdown or using the snapdown as a pretense to punch the wrestler in the back of the head or neck by coming down with a closed fist instead of a hooked hand. The athlete distinguished this coach's overly aggressive coaching technique with a subsequent coach they trained with and described the coaching styles as being two vastly different experiences.

Another way this coach is physically abusing his athletes is by having their athletes run until they vomit and then continuing to push them further. According to one interviewee, this coach was using this to punish athletes and as a common training tool. This practice was common in the US for football players, but is now banned. This practice could lead to a charge of manslaughter if an athlete were to die while doing it.

Some interviewees were shown a video clip of a coach swatting an athlete with a towel and asked for their responses. Some interviewees responded by saying that they did not have a problem with that sort of interaction between a coach and an athlete and that it is a normal part of the sport. On further and subsequent reflection, most interviewees thought the interaction looked bad and perhaps no longer had a place within the wrestling world.

Athletes seemed to feel that coaches were physically abusing their athletes in these ways in order to physically intimidate them. Many athletes described how they feel powerless to respond or to defend themselves. This is because of the power coaches exert over their athletes. Many athletes also expressed a sense that their coaches are like family members to them, like a type of parent. As a result, it becomes more difficult to speak about the abuse.

Another instance of physical intimidation I heard was when a coach smashed an athlete's glasses. The athlete had put their glasses on a chair while they wrestled. When the coach became frustrated with the athlete, they smashed the athlete's glasses.

2) Verbal abuse

Some interviewees responded to the video of the coach swatting an athlete with a towel by saying that they were not so much concerned with the athlete being swatted by a towel, but with the manner in which the coach yelled at his athlete after she was pushed out of the circle and gave up a point. For these interviewees, the coach yelling at the athlete was the bigger issue. One interviewee commented that in some matches, when they are losing, they do not want to go into the corner with their coach.

More often than not, interviewees felt that the larger issue was with coaches verbally abusing their athletes during practices as well as during and after matches. Athletes' recounted experiences of having their dedication to wrestling continually questioned and asked if they were "buying in" to the coach's program. Some coaches will tell athletes that they "wrestled like shit." Some coaches are calling their athletes "fat," "lazy," "slut" and "useless." Another coach sent an athlete a text message telling the athlete after a loss, "You fucking suck."

Athletes' recounted experiences of post-match discussions during which some coaches tell their athletes that they should be embarrassed with the results of their matches. One interviewee described this sort of behaviour as depriving athletes of time where they can reflect on their match and to learn from their successes and their failures on the mat and to progress as athletes. Instead of having this reflection time, the athletes are being subjected to negative treatment and being made to feel defensive.

Another athlete remarked:

A big step forward is that they need to see us as human beings. They scream and curse at us. They do not see us as humans. There is no other profession in the world where you can treat people like that. I understand that athletes need to be motivated, but that is too far.

3) Psychological Abuse

This is the most common form of abuse that was described.

Many coaches are using the practice of breaking down an athlete in order to build them back up. The idea is that athletes are being broken down physically, emotionally and psychologically and then being built back up stronger. This is meant to build an athlete's confidence.

One coach said the following:

As coaches, we have the ability to build people up and tear them down. As a coach there is an element of having to break wrestlers down and then build them back up stronger and to build their confidence. But we also have the ability to tear them apart and to keep them that way.

During interviews with coaches and athletes, the issue that has become apparent is that coaches are breaking down their athletes without necessarily building their athletes back up. It is arguable if this philosophy even works. Some athletes, especially those at the end of their careers, were more likely to call this type of coaching psychological or emotional abuse. Many athletes were unclear, especially at the time, that there was any purpose to the way their coaches are or were treating them. This is a coaching philosophy that has been used with some success in the past, however, as many interviewees noted, this is an "old school" coaching philosophy. A very serious concern is that athletes are being broken down and being left broken without having been built back up.

This is not to suggest that all athletes are leaving the program as psychologically broken individuals. I was particularly impressed with the strength, determination and resolve of the athletes affiliated with WCL. In fact, there were some interviewees who shared a common sentiment that many of the successes they have had are in spite of their coaches and not always because of them.

There is a prevailing attitude among coaches who practice the breaking down-style of coaching that athletes who do not fit that style are weak and lazy. This is not true. High performance athletes understand the effort required. Most, if not all, athletes welcomed the physical challenges involved in wrestling. There were even those interviewees who understated the effects of being hit or being yelled at by claiming that it is a part of the sport.

It is clear that all of the coaches affiliated with WCL want their athletes to succeed and to be the best wrestlers in the world. But it is not clear that all coaches have their athlete's best interests in mind. There are coaches who seem to be using their power over their athletes to exert control over the personal lives of their athletes. One training centre has a complete prohibition on dating, whether the athletes are dating another athlete or someone from outside of the centre. The head coach of this centre exerts control over the amount of socializing athletes are to do outside of wrestling. This coach is suggesting to the athletes which courses they should be taking in school and how to structure their course loads so that they have more time to spend wrestling and training. Some athletes described leaving this gym with a seriously impaired ability to make decisions for themselves.

An athlete described having their confidence destroyed by comments made by another coach. This athlete had won a major international event and the coach told the athlete and others at the gym that they only won because the competition was lousy. The athlete responded by throwing out their gold medal.

Another common tool coaches' employ is walking out of their athlete's corner during their matches. The common scenario is that coaches are becoming frustrated with an athlete during the athlete's match. Athletes were again nearly unanimous in saying that this is a coaching tool that they do not like. In addition to being emotionally abusive, this also raises security and health concerns for athletes as athletes do not have a coach available to stop the match, or protest illegal/dangerous moves by an opponent.

One athlete described the emotional impact a coach has on an athlete when the coach walks out after it happened to the athlete:

This impacted my ability to wrestle. I was very emotional.

As another interviewee described:

It is not good to do this to an athlete. You humiliate your athlete when you do that because it makes them feel shame because their idol is turning their back on you.

A final way that coaches are psychologically abusing their athletes is through silence. Numerous interviewees spoke of how some coaches are responding to athletes that upset them with silence. Silence to an athlete is almost more terrifying than being yelled at. Some coaches will walk away and refuse to speak to an athlete until that athlete apologizes for the perceived wrong doing, whether the athlete was in the wrong or not. The periods of silence varied from days, weeks, months, years and, in one case, decades. In nearly every case, the athletes are the ones to apologize to the coach. In only limited instances have I heard about a coach apologizing to athletes.

4) One Size Fits All Approach to Coaching

It is clear that some coaches are applying the same style of coaching they learned and experienced as young athletes. These coaches may see the value in breaking down and building up because that is what they learned. Some coaches may feel that yelling at their athletes or hitting their athletes to motivate them is an effective style of coaching for all of their athletes because that was effective when they were athletes. However, many interviewees also seem to recognize that there is not one uniform way to coach and to get the maximum out of their athletes.

One coach said the following:

I have heard coaches tell athletes that they have wrestled like shit. I think a coach can put it a different way to an athlete, but this is where the grey area falls. Certain athletes, I can be different with. Some athletes respond to tough love. Some athletes are different and do not respond well to tough love. Good coaches know that they should not treat athletes all the same.

Overwhelmingly, it seems that athletes want to be listened to by their coaches and they want to be involved in their development as athletes. Many athletes seem to want explanations for why things are being done. While one coach was using shark bait/king of the mat as a tool of abuse, another coach was using it effectively by limiting the amount of time an athlete would be on the mat. This second coach was telling their athletes why they were being put in that situation and how it would help them in future matches and high-pressure situations. The athlete who reported this stated that it was effective for them because they understood why they were being asked to do a certain move or action.

5) Coach Education

To be eligible to be a national coach, a coach must have their Competition-Development. However, many of the current coaches achieved that designation due to their years of experience and not from their level of training. In other words, they were “grandfathered” into the designation. Though there are opportunities to update their professional development, they are voluntary. This is contributing to many of the problems that have been identified so far. Many of the coaches do not participate in professional development and continue to use their “old school” ways instead of adapting. This must change and training should be mandatory for anyone who wants to continue with the National Program.

6) Training New Coaches

There are a number of young coaches who are looking to get into the pool of national coaches that WCL is failing to tap into.

A number of young coaches and athletes looking to start coaching reported that the training sessions for coaches have been cancelled at the last minute or not run at all. The reason given for the cancellation of coach certification courses is that nearly all of the coaches registered did not have the necessary prerequisites to be able to take the course and that some funding may be provided to those coaches affected by the cancellation.

Failing to certify young and new coaches creates problems for WCL. Recently, the certification requirements have been rigidly enforced. The reasons for the enforcement of minimum certification requirements are extremely important to professionalizing the coaching pool, but it has led to some young coaches being denied access to the mat to coach their athletes at tournaments. Without offering more certification courses, a perception is created that WCL is attempting to limit the number of young coaches in order to protect the coaches who already have their certification. This means that the older coaches who have been grandfathered in have no incentive to modernize.

Failing to certify means that WCL is also losing out on young coaches and the fresh ideas they will bring. This is not to suggest that the ideas of the old coaches are deficient, but in order for the sport to progress it must be able to take in new ideas. In addition, it gives older coaches the ability to mentor younger coaches and to allow the younger coaches the ability to take more leadership on the mat.

One young coach stated the need for bringing in young coaches as such:

We need to get more alumni involved in coaching. In my generation, some of us have become coaches. In the previous generation, almost none. They moved into their new careers.

7) Coach Involvement in Hazing-Style Activities

It is common for athletes in centres across the country to celebrate each other's birthdays using something called "Birthday Beats" in one centre or "Birthday Bumps" in another. In the centre where athletes administer "Birthday Beats" the process was described in this way:

[One centre] does the "Birthday Beats" by holding somebody down and everybody gangs up and holds the person down. Sometimes they pull the persons shorts down and slap the person on the ass. That is a tradition at [this centre]. If you are in that room and your birthday falls on a practice day you know it is going to happen.

Interviewees reported that at this centre the coaches are involved in administering the "Birthday Beats." Most athletes did not see a problem with this and described it as being playful. However, there was an incident involving one coach taking this behaviour too far. Stories were also recounted of some athletes hitting each other too hard.

This practice can be perceived as a hazing ritual and is not an acceptable practice. Athletes can find a better way to celebrate each other's birthdays. I am aware that as a result of this review the coach put a stop to the practice. It is not clear whether this was done because the coach knew that it was not an acceptable practice, or whether they wanted athletes to tell the review that it no longer occurs.

8) Coaches Contacting Athletes

There were complaints of a coach contacting athletes at any and all hours of the day. This coach was calling athletes when he was drunk in the middle of the night on athletes' personal cell phones or through informal methods of communication. One athlete complained about how this was inappropriate. Another athlete believed they were being sexually harassed by these late-night calls. There needs to be a policy of when and by what method a coach may contact an athlete to prevent these types of incidents.

Recommendations:

- i) Mandatory training for all coaches who participate internationally, including:**
 - **How to deal with the modern athlete**
 - **Coaching the female athlete (Coaching males and females differently)**
 - **Psychological motivation**
 - **How to communicate with the modern athlete**
 - **How to motivate an athlete: What is the difference between motivating and bullying**
 - **Nutrition**
 - **Weight cutting**
 - **Training about the ways the body and mind can react to stress**
 - **Training about how to spot eating disorders and disordered eating**
 - **Sexual harassment**
 - **Ethics and conduct (representing Canada)**

The training must be mandatory for any coach who wishes to be considered as a coach for any event involving WCL. Failure to participate should lead to the coach not being allowed to be part of Team Canada. It should also lead to a withdrawal of funding for their training centre.

ii) There should be no physical contact between coaches and athletes

This would include butt slapping, shaking and hitting with towels. The only exception would be to demonstrate a legitimate wrestling technique or massaging an athlete's muscles during matches to help break up the lactic acids (also known as "flushing"). However, there should be an absolute prohibition on coaches giving athletes a massage in any other context.

iii) Verbal abuse, including swearing, yelling and using pejorative language (slut, lazy, fat, useless) should be prohibited by the Code of Conduct

iv) Coaches should not be pushing their athletes physically until they vomit or are on the mat in tears from exhaustion

v) Coaches and staff need to be reminded that they are there for the athletes and not the other way around

A staff member said the following:

I do not believe that this is a coach centered sport. I believe that the coaches have their athlete's best interests at heart. It would be a fair comment to say that they believe they are athlete centred but are not operating under best practices.

A coach said:

I have a concern that the balance may tip too far into wrestling being athlete centred.

vi) There needs to be more opportunities for new and young coaches

vii) There needs to be the development and promotion of more women coaches

viii) Protocol around contacting athletes needs to be developed

ix) Discontinue the practice of "Birthday Beats"

D. Drinking Culture

Interviewees described that there is a heavy drinking culture among coaches at the national level. The type of drinking that was described included heavy drinking in the hospitality suite, in restaurants, bars and nightclubs. Interviewees were unanimous in describing a culture of drinking to excess. This drinking culture predominantly takes part during trips and tournaments and is primarily among coaches, staff and wrestling officials. Some interviewees with more history in the national program, whether as athletes or coaches, described how the drinking culture has become more moderate over the years, but that there are still coaches drinking to excess.

There were serious issues raised during interviews in relation to coaches drinking during trips. Coaches are drinking to the point where they are missing weigh-ins and matches because they had gone out the night before. Coaches are coming to matches hung over. One interviewee described a coach falling asleep during a tournament as a result of their drinking the night before a tournament. Coaches are spending money from the contingency fund on alcohol. A national coach had gotten so drunk the night before that they held up a bus going to the airport that contained wrestlers from Canada and wrestlers from a different country. This incident caused the athletes present a great deal of embarrassment.

There is a common perception, that some coaches are using trips abroad as opportunities to see the world and as opportunities to meet up and drink with “*old wrestling buddies.*” It was explained that this mindset leads coaches to drink to excess, which leads to the types of unprofessional consequences outlined above.

Interviewees described coaches, WCL staff and board members drinking with national team athletes. One athlete described how national team athletes are at tournaments to compete. They described how they might drink after they are done competing, but until then they are focussed on their performance.

This athlete described how they see the way coaches and athletes approach trips:

On wrestling trips, coaches see it as a bit of a trip. When I go, I am there with a high performance mentality.

It was a near unanimous feeling among interviewees that athletes and coaches should not be partying and drinking together. However, some also pointed out what they thought of as grey areas. Athletes described drinking together with their coach in celebration for winning a major event, such as an Olympic medal or the Pan American Games, or any other tournament the athlete spent a great deal of time and mental energy preparing for. Another athlete described having a drink with a coach and that coach’s family. Another athlete believed that it may be more acceptable for athletes and coaches to drink together socially when the athlete is a bit older and closer to retirement. I was also told of how the lines become blurred when athletes make the transition into coaching they may initially continue to drink socially with athletes who are still their friends.

The same interviewee who described transitioning into coaching also described learning that they discovered that drinking with athletes, as a coach is inappropriate. There is a story that was repeated by many people of a promising young coach who is no longer involved in wrestling as a result of drinking and sexual impropriety with a young athlete committed while drinking. Neither the coach nor the young athlete is associated with wrestling anymore.

Interviewees expressed that there are legitimate safety concerns that arise when coaches are hung over at tournaments. A big part of a coach’s job during a tournament is to direct their athlete while the athlete is on the mat for a match. It was described how part of giving direction to an athlete is also about directing an athlete from danger. This is difficult to do if a coach is not present or is hung over.

Another issue that was raised is that WCL officials are also involved in heavy drinking during tournaments. I find that this allegation was founded.

I made the following findings regarding the drinking culture in WCL:

- Many coaches at the national level are drinking during trips and tournaments;
- Coaches are drinking in front of athletes;
- Coaches are drinking with athletes;
- Coaches are missing events as a result of drinking;
- Coaches are showing up late to events as a result of drinking;
- Coaches are coming to matches hung over;
- Coaches are coming to matches smelling of alcohol.

I did not find that athletes are consuming alcohol during tournaments. I find that when athletes drink, it is after their competitions are complete.

Recommendations

i) Prohibit drinking between coaches and athletes

One coach suggested that it is normally younger coaches who are drinking to excess with athletes. This same coach described how there is generally a maturing period among young coaches. There should not be a cooling period among young coaches. WCL should not be waiting for a young coach to either “mature” through trial and error or to fail and be entirely removed from the program, as in the case of the young coach cited above. WCL should be proactive in stopping coaches from continuing to drink with their athletes, whether they are friends or not.

Being a national level coach is a profession and coaches should be conducting themselves professionally at all times. Drinking in front of athletes may lead athletes to lose respect for their coach. It also sets a bad example for young athletes who may come away with the impression that this type of behaviour is acceptable.

One exception to this prohibition may be celebratory drinks between an athlete and their coach. It is natural that athletes want to celebrate their major accomplishments with their coaches. Coaches are instrumental in helping athletes achieve success and should be allowed to celebrate these major achievements with their athletes.

ii) Develop a policy concerning alcohol consumption

WCL must develop a policy for the use of alcohol among coaches, staff, officials and athletes both at home and abroad.

Coaches are at tournaments to coach. Drinking has inhibited coaches from carrying out their duties.

Athletes train hard for tournaments and require and deserve to have their coaches present for tournaments with a clear head and focused on their athletes' matches. When coaches are hung over for athletes' matches, it may endanger the safety of athletes. Because wrestling matches have a tempo that can change in an instant, coaches need to be focused on what is happening. Canadians would be surprised to learn that some coaches are missing their athletes' matches or show up hung over.

There are also concerns that have been raised about the ability of coaches to ensure the safety of younger athletes travelling with the team to national and international events. There is one example given by an interviewee of an athlete having an injury while on a trip and the athletes being unable to get a hold of the coach because they were out drinking. The athletes were only able to get help by calling a parent who was back in Canada.

Similarly, WCL staff and officials are representing Canada at all times. They should set a good example for athletes and represent our country in a positive way.

iii) Develop a policy on cannabis for coaches and staff members

As of October 17, 2018, cannabis is a legal substance in Canada. WCL must develop a policy for the use of recreational cannabis among coaches and staff members. The use of cannabis is banned in sport for athletes. This policy should consider the legal right of coaches and staff, who are not screened for the use of banned substances, to use recreational cannabis in their private lives. This policy could provide that national team coaches should not be consuming cannabis in public or at WCL events or talking about the consumption of cannabis in public settings. One concern that should be considered is the potential that coaches, officials or staff may be denied entry into some countries for the use of cannabis.

E. Concussions and Injuries

In wrestling at the high performance level, there are bound to be concussions and injuries. Athletes regularly hit their heads on the mat or on the body parts of other athletes. There have been major developments in medical science concerning concussions in the past two decades and WCL is working hard to make sure that concussions are taken seriously. However, there are a few gaps in the system. I heard various stories of coaches not taking injuries seriously or questioning the legitimacy of an athlete's injuries. There were reports of athletes coming back from injury too quickly.

It is apparent that it is not necessarily just the coaches who are getting the athlete to return before they are ready, but the athletes themselves who are pushing themselves to return early.

According to Erin Sargent, WCL's Lead Physiologist, the concussion protocol that is followed in Calgary is as such:

- We have a communication plan an athlete is supposed to follow. If the coach or athlete knows of a concussion incident they are supposed to let me know. Then we connect them with the Benson Concussion Institute.
- Each year, they complete a baseline concussion test. This involves the SCAT5, the KINARM test and a cardiovascular/exercise assessment to see what their stress response is to a particular workload on the bike. This allows us to get an estimate of their "normal" so we know what that is for the individual should they experience a concussion.
- If a concussion is suspected, the athlete will see doctor Benson and he will put them on a return to play protocol once they are cleared to do so. This involves weekly check-ups and weekly KINARM test to track progress and an exercise program that is monitored in the CSI physiology lab once per week. It is important to start light exercise as soon as possible as the research indicates that getting blood to the brain helps to improve recovery.
- We see the athlete every week to adjust their program and to see Dr. Benson. They may also see a neck specialist/physiotherapist to deal with other common issues that often come along with concussion (neck pain/strain etc.).
- When they are getting ready to come back to wrestling (ie. passed all clinical tests), Dr. Benson has them complete a more stressful exercise test in the lab. If they pass, then they can go on the mat with a gradual return to play plan.

A similar protocol is followed at the BC training centre. According to Dave McKay:

- We have a concussion protocol, which we adhere to. The concussion protocol is triggered where we see something or are made aware of an issue. Then we report it.
- The medical staff keep us informed of the medical issue. They speak to us and direct us and we cannot violate that. If they are on the concussion protocol they have to be cleared.
- Sometimes we get things in writing, sometimes it is oral. We are not a professional hockey team with a full medical staff travelling full-time with us. But we have a fairly good system. Athletes do not disclose things all of the time.

There are gaps in the concussion protocols where coaches are relying on sight or where they are relying on athletes to self-report their concussions. Based on the statements of a number of interviewees it is clear that athletes are not always the most knowledgeable when it comes to self-reporting injuries. Baseline testing, as used in Calgary, seems a preferable method.

Athletes and coaches are reluctant to report injuries out of fear that the information will be leaked to a competitor or that the athlete will miss a competition, which could jeopardize that athlete's chance for carding or for qualifying for a major tournament.

Recommendations

- i) There should be mandatory education for all coaches and athletes around concussions**
- ii) If an athlete is funded by WCL then they should use WCL's medical treatment for concussions and other major injuries.**

This will prevent athletes from doctor shopping for a medical opinion to the liking of whether they are clear to return to the field of play. This should be part of their carding contract.

- iii) There needs to be a formalized written medical clearance before an athlete can go back to practice or competition**

This would prevent athletes from going back before they are ready or coaches forcing them to. A written protocol will prevent confusion or athletes slipping through the cracks.

F. Disordered Eating

During their interviews, some interviewees spoke about issues around disordered eating and eating disorders. Kelly Drager, the team Registered Dietician, explained the difference between the two:

An eating disorder has to be diagnosed by a clinician. Disordered eating can definitely lead to an eating disorder, but it has to be diagnosed by a professional. Disordered eating is where people have diets where they are not always eating in healthy ways. There may be a mental component, but it may not be the same thing. The disordered eating can be as a result of a desire for control.

Disordered eating and eating disorders are not uncommon in wrestling. The majority of athletes were uncomfortable to speak to their experiences with it.

Wrestlers affected by disordered eating had similar experiences. Disordered eating has its roots in the weight cutting athletes do when they wrestle in either high school or varsity. While weight cutting is not supposed to happen with high school aged athletes, it does. Athletes' bodies change during high school and their weight fluctuates. This continues into when athletes go into varsity wrestling, which is where they develop the idea of the weight class they are "supposed" to be in.

When asked where they learned how to weight cut, athletes responded by saying that they mostly learn by watching older athletes and through trial and error. This means that athletes are passing weight-cutting techniques from wrestler to wrestler. According to one wrestler, she was learning by trial and error and had developed a process of eating candy and wearing a sauna suit. For many others, cutting weight is done by spending many hours in the sauna. One athlete was sent back into the sauna so many times that the athlete fainted.

For many years, WCL operated without a nutritionist. This meant that for many years, high performance athletes were doing what they learned from other athletes in order to make weight. According to Kelly Drager, the nutritionist out of the Calgary training centre, not having a nutritionist for a long time has left lasting effects on the sport. According to Drager, she understands that athletes are going to cut weight. She sees her role as being able to help athletes understand the effects on their health and tries to help them achieve their weight goals through healthy options.

Prior to Drager being hired as the nutritionist for the high performance program, the informally learned cutting process led many athletes to learn how to quickly lose weight in unhealthy and unsafe ways. One athlete described how when they would cut weight it would lead the athlete to binge eat which would lead to their weight fluctuations. These weight fluctuations occurred in other athletes' experiences as well.

Coaches are aware that athletes are cutting weight and in some cases are having their athletes do it, as in the case of the athlete who fainted. At the same time, coaches are encouraging athletes to compete at weight classes they may not be suited to. In fact, some have been resistant to the information and strategies for healthy weight loss Kelly Drager offers.

It should be made clear that coaches should not shoulder the blame for this. Coaches face their own pressures when it comes to athletes and their weight classes. If a coach brings an athlete to a tournament and the athlete does not make weight that is a source of embarrassment for the coach. There are also limits on spaces and resources on teams and so coaches may feel pressure to put talented athletes in different weight classes. Coaches also do not receive training on disordered eating and eating disorders.

It is not just coaches who are resistant to Drager's advice. Some athletes are also reluctant to follow healthy weight cutting advice.

A problem that has been identified with following Drager's advice is that she is in Calgary only. Drager may be at TOPS, but the rest of the time she is located in Calgary and meetings for the other national training centres have to be conducted via Skype, telephone or email. This is not the best way to dispense nutritional information.

While issues around weight cutting are changing since the implementation of same day weigh-ins, disordered eating will remain a problem while athletes continue to feel the need to cut weight.

Recommendations

- i) It should be mandatory that coaches receive training on healthy eating, dieting, weight loss, disordered eating and eating disorders**

It is unclear what training coaches have received on these topics. The national team coaches should have a uniform approach when it comes to setting out guidelines for athletes to follow in terms of diet and nutrition. Poor diet and unhealthy attitudes toward food can have lasting long-term and possibly life-altering effects on athletes.

Coaches should be trained in a national standard. This can be done through resources sent to the coaches and athletes regularly. It can also be done with mandatory sessions at TOPS.

- ii) Athletes need to be given more resources for healthy eating**

Athletes need the resources and information if they are going to be cutting weight in order to be safe, secure and healthy.

- iii) The nutritionist needs to be doing more to work with the athletes outside of Calgary**

Many athletes saw the geographical distance between themselves and the nutritionist as a barrier to their ability to get resources or information in a timely manner. This may mean hiring additional nutritionists to

- iv) Develop and promote a national initiative that promotes healthy attitudes towards food**

Different coaches have different approaches to food and nutrition. There should be standards that should come from WCL that promote healthy attitudes towards food. These standards must recognize that every athlete is different and that their bodies require different programs.

- v) It should be added into the Code of Conduct that coaches should not be asking athletes to cut weight**

It would be ideal that athletes never have to cut weight, however, it is unrealistic in a sport with weight classes. Because of the pressures that are placed on coaches to have their athletes make weight, it is understandable that coaches would in turn put some of that pressure on their athletes to make weight.

G. Issues Particular to Women in Wrestling

Many women interviewed were reluctant to acknowledge that there is a difference between men and women in wrestling. This is understandable as they are participating in a historically male sport. An interviewee described the problem in the following way:

Wrestling is still sexist and macho. If I make a complaint I am told that I am being difficult. The female athletes are made to feel like second-class athletes. It is common.

1) Sexism in Wrestling

There is a pattern of sexism that has been established throughout Canadian wrestling, from the clubs to the varsity programs to the high performance centres. It is a common perception among some of the male coaches and athletes that women's wrestling is "new," that it is inferior to men's wrestling and that it is somehow easier to be successful as a female athlete.

Many people described how female athletes were being ignored by male coaches in favour of male athletes and being made to feel like they are second-class, despite the national female program's numerous successes on the world stage. Some very successful women only received attention after they had such great success on the international stage that they could not be ignored. There are also coaches who believe that male athletes should be coached by male coaches and female wrestlers coached by female coaches.

The pattern of sexism that exists is present because of the attitudes of coaches. One athlete commented that allowing coach-athlete relationships contributed to the problem:

There is a certain climate for women wrestlers. The coach athlete relationships are too frequent. It has been happening for too long.

A female athlete heard a coach continually make sexist comments in front of both male and female athletes. In one example, this coach discovered that two of the athletes were in a relationship and so began asking the male, with other athletes present, how the female athlete is in the kitchen, if she finished doing his laundry and if she was keeping her him "satisfied." This interviewee recounted another incident where the coach asked the female athlete to examine bruises on another female athlete and told this athlete that they were hickeys.

In another instance, this coach was overheard by a different athlete saying:

In his day going to tournaments was like going to a buffet because the other teams had female athletes and that our team brought snacks.

This coach was also heard calling a female athlete a "slut."

When coaches make these types of comments it creates a climate where sexism is normalized and acceptable. The male athletes who look up to their coaches see this behaviour and think that it is acceptable to behave this way. According to a witness, in their room, the male wrestlers had created a game called "Varsity Bingo." The game "was a competition between the male wrestlers to see who they could sleep with. They had a big sheet up in their locker room as the Bingo card. It included both female wrestlers as well as other female varsity athletes."

The above examples clearly constituted sexual harassment and must stop. It is unacceptable and creates a toxic environment. It leaves WCL liable to be sued for sexual harassment.

Wrestling in Canada has a history of being coached primarily by male coaches. WCL, in recent years, has been working to increase the number of female coaches. Tonya Verbeek, Carol Huynh and Martine Dugrenier have all become coaches at national centres since retiring, and Tamara Medwidsky serves as the Executive Director of WCL. However, because of the number of men who coach, attitudes have been slow in shifting.

2) Female Coaches

There is a need for more female coaches in wrestling in order to address many of the barriers female coaches and athletes face. One interviewee described to me how coaches have typically not understood the impact the menstrual cycle has on the female body:

The older male coaches have beliefs about what things should be like. They do not understand what it is like being a woman athlete, like when we are on our periods. They treat it like it is just an excuse.

The same interviewee also pointed out the need many female coaches have for child care. Many of the women who are coaching or would like to get into coaching are doing so around the time they are beginning to have a family. One of the barriers for these coaches is associated with the difficulty of attending training sessions and tournaments without access to child care.

3) How women's monthly cycles impact their weight and weight class

For many women, there is a broad range that their weight can fluctuate given where they are in their monthly cycle. Coaches need to be trained in understanding women's monthly cycles as they can influence how an athlete would cut weight depending on where they are in their monthly cycle. For example, the practice of taking a sauna may not be equally effective at losing weight throughout the month.

4) Child Care

This is a universal need for all coaches, both male and female, however, it seems to be a greater barrier to entry for female coaches, who are often not the primary breadwinners in their families when they are wrestlers with young families or when they are coaching.

When coaches and athletes with young families were asked about how they felt about this, they responded with enthusiasm and expressed how this would help many of them compete and would lighten the load of going to tournaments.

Recommendations:

i) Coaches should be given mandatory training on coaching the female athlete

The training must be mandatory for any coach who wishes to be considered as a coach for any event involving WCL. Failure to participate should lead to the coach not being allowed to be part of Team Canada. It should also lead to a withdrawal of funding for their training centre

ii) There needs to be the development and promotion of more women coaches

iii) WCL should conduct a study of how women's monthly cycles impacts their weight and weight class

iv) Coaches should be given access to child care

Offering coaches access to child care at tournaments will help coaches with young families gain access to more coaching opportunities.

H. WCL Head Office and Control of the NSO

While I was not asked to investigate the WCL Head Office, there were many issues and concerns that were raised involving the WCL Head Office in Ottawa. Most interviewees regarded WCL and its staff with a lot of suspicion. After carrying out this review, I find that many of causes of suspicion among interviewees are valid.

- Interviewees have a legitimate fear of reprisal
- WCL leaks sensitive information
- Communication between WCL Head Office with coaches and athletes in the training centre is slow
- Job titles among staff are not defined
- WCL, as the NSO, refuses to exert control over the PSOs

The wrestling community wants firm and effective leadership from its NSO. The community wants less ambiguity, clear directives of what athletes and coaches can and cannot do, and have the confidence that the its NSO is supporting its members.

1) Fear of Reprisal

Many interviewees, whether they are athletes or coaches, regard WCL with suspicion and distrust. There is a perception that the culture of WCL that never changes and that its members protect each other and, while they compete with one another, they are, in the end, comrades.

It cannot be understated how the handling of the former High Performance Director's sexual relationship with an athlete and WCL's response hurt WCL's reputation. Athletes and coaches alike, as was previously stated, almost universally do not like the idea of sexual relationships between coaches and athletes. In an email, a national centre coach characterized WCL as creating a "culture of consequence-free sexual misconduct." Many others characterized WCL in the same manner. The common perception is that after the former High Performance Director's relationship with an athlete was investigated by WCL, it was swept under the rug and the former High Performance Director faced no discipline or sanction. Instead, many athletes and coaches saw that the former High Performance Director was promoted. Some staff members in WCL may disagree with the characterization of the former High Performance Director as a "promotion," however; this is how it is perceived. It also had the effect of seriously diminishing the credibility of the organization and cementing the feeling interviewees have that WCL protects its own.

Because of the perception that WCL operates as a tight-knit community, many interviewees feel that they cannot complain to the head office without it leaking out and there being reprisal against the athlete.

A coach said the following:

I think this is real for athletes. I think it is a legitimate concern that athletes might be worried that if they raise a concern about a coach the person raising a concern will be punished in terms of not being supported or of retribution by the person in power who is in a relationship with the coach.

Even among WCL staff there is a fear of reprisal. Staff are concerned for their jobs if they speak up or can be subject to the silent treatment if they do.

Interviewees described how reprisal could be in the form of lost opportunities of funding or a lack of coaching. Athletes can also be reprisal against by coaches withdrawing attention and providing athletes with weak training partners. The athlete can also have their funding pulled.

2) Leaking Information

There is a perception that information that is reported to WCL is being leaked to other members of the wrestling community. Athletes and coaches have a valid concern with regard to this.

I have heard information leak about comments being made at board meetings, confidential trip evaluations, and complaints being made against coaches. The leaked information enters a rumour mill in this close-knit wrestling community.

The result of sensitive information being leaked is that it further diminishes the faith athletes and coaches have in their NSO. Coaches and athletes feel like they have nowhere to turn when they have a problem or need some type of support. This creates a sense of isolation. There is a general sense that their NSO is working against them to protect its own interests.

Both athletes and coaches want to feel protected by their NSO. Many feel that this is lacking.

3) Staff Roles

When asked, coaches and athletes could not identify the roles and responsibilities of staff at the NSO. There is a common perception that WCL creates a job title that “includes everything under the sun.” A lot of this confusion seems to stem from the fact that some staff are operating without clearly defined job descriptions and roles within the organization.

One example is that of the case manager. He does not have a formal job description. When asked about this, the case manager responded that this is because he does not work for WCL. While this may be true, technically, the lack of a clearly defined role for the case manager leaves coaches, athletes and other members of the wrestling community confused about his role with WCL. It also undermines his effectiveness, as there is strong suspicion of what he does, and whether his role is to protect the interests of WCL or to be an independent avenue for athletes to take their concerns.

4) Communicating with Athletes and Coaches

There is a perception among athletes and coaches that WCL communicates poorly with athletes and coaches. This is another source of frustration among athletes and coaches. There are some coaches and athletes who presented examples of reaching out to staff and not receiving a response to their question for months, and often only because they sent numerous emails.

The problems with communication create a sense for many there is not transparency in dealing with WCL. This leads many athletes and coaches to question things like team selection criteria.

The former High Performance Director resigned from his position in August. This was a significant event that was directly related to this review but not brought to its attention.

5) NSO Control and Oversight of the PSOs and the National Training Centres

One of the primary complaints that sparked this review were allegations that a convicted sex offender and another person accused of a sex offence were present at events in one province. This added to the sense of frustration some coaches, athletes and parents already feel about not being protected and not having their concerns listened to. The attitude of WCL is that this is a jurisdictional matter that falls within the jurisdiction of the PSO and WCL has no control over the matter.

There was a common claim by WCL that it could not do anything over issues like this because it does not have control over the PSOs and their clubs, the training centres and coaches in Canada.

However, when I spoke with interviewees I found that WCL can exert some control over these groups. One way is to ban clubs who violate the WCL Code of Conduct from wrestling events and tournaments. Another way is to pull funding from training centres. There is a sense that coaches can be suspended or even stripped of their coaching certifications. There are ways to hold these groups accountable and to exert control.

The hands-off approach WCL has taken on a number of issues seems to be informed by a clash between more centralization of the sport or decentralization of the sport to the national training centres spread through four provinces. One interviewee claimed that this was a strength of the sport. But this tension between centralization and decentralization gives athletes and coaches the sense that WCL is not leading. Because of its resources and the power of the organization to set criteria for team selection, WCL has a lot of authority that it is not exercising.

The effects of the decentralized approach are seen when members from across the country come together to represent Canada. The athletes from the Montreal training centre hold themselves apart from the other national team athletes. When they are at international events, they are still very much a part of Team Montreal and are told to view their Team Canada teammates as competition.

6) President's Perceived Conflict of Interest

There is a perceived conflict of interest with regard to the two hats Don Ryan wears as President of WCL and as a coach of athletes who compete nationally. Many NSOs have problems with coaches and parents often serving in a number of roles that may lead to conflicts of interest. This is not to suggest that Mr. Ryan has acted in any improper manner as both President and coach, but it creates a perception that his athletes may be favoured. It is important to develop a conflict of interest policy for any member of the board who is also a

Recommendations

i) Clarify Job Positions Among WCL Staff

WCL staff need to have clear positions within the organization. Clarity of roles in the organization will provide it with stability and give athletes and coaches a sense of where to go and who to approach.

There is a sense among athletes, coaches and staff that when presented with something they do not like, they can shop around until they are given a response they want. With clarity in job titles, the organization can improve its ability to speak with one voice.

ii) Have a More Professional Board of Directors Composed and Increased Gender Parity Among Board Members

Many of the issues identified could be resolved if the WCL Board were to be constituted differently. There is a sense in the wrestling community that “if you do not have cauliflower ears, your opinion is not worth much.”

The board would be more effective if it were comprised of more professionals. While some members of the wrestling community are resistant to the idea of having people serve on the board that are not from the wrestling community, board members with professional backgrounds bring other types of expertise that many current board members lack. Someone with an advertising background can bring insights on promoting the sport. People with legal backgrounds can provide some legal insights. An expert with a Human Resources background could provide leadership with respect to harassment and a Code of Conduct. It would be useful to have someone with financial expertise.

This is not to suggest that board members are doing a bad job, but many sports organizations have moved into having a board composed of more professionals. Hockey Canada, Soccer Canada and Football Canada all have professionals serving on their boards.

iii) Bring in more women to serve on the Board of Directors

Of the eleven current board members, only two are women. This seems inconsistent with the sport considering that it is the women's program, which is having the most success at the Olympics and brings in the majority of funding.

iv) Develop a Database of Athletes and Coaches

WCL is looking at developing a database of athletes and coaches. This will improve WCL's ability to communicate policy changes and will also help them be able to gather data on the numbers of wrestlers and coaches in Canada.

A database will also help WCL enforce the sanctions on coaches and athletes. One of the issues raised with regard to the sex offender is that WCL has no mechanism to track athletes and coaches between the PSOs and sex offenders can switch provinces and continue to coach somewhere else.

The database will also help WCL present to the Canadian Olympic Committee accurate numbers of its participants, which may help it make the case for more funding.

v) Create a harassment policy

WCL needs a harassment policy. Currently, WCL is failing its athletes, coaches and employees in this regard. Continuing without a harassment policy could open WCL to sexual harassment liability. After it came out that the former High Performance Director was carrying on an affair with an athlete, WCL acted in a manner, which may amount to wilful blindness. If this were to be the case it could expose the organization to legal liability for ignoring obvious signs of sexual impropriety.

vi) Provide athletes training on the new sexual harassment policy

Athletes require training on what is sexual harassment. It became clear during interviews that there was a real knowledge gap for athletes when it comes to sexual harassment. Those who articulated feeling sexually harassed seemed to come to that position later in their careers with education and maturity. An important part of protecting athletes is giving them the knowledge to protect themselves.

vii) Create a reporting mechanism for sexual harassment claims and outline the process in the Code of Conduct

As a follow-up to the harassment policy, WCL must create a reporting mechanism for sexual harassment claims and avoid a repeat of the same lack of a reporting mechanism that was identified with the policy on sexual relationships.

One interviewee asked rhetorically "*what good a policy is if it is unenforceable?*" Without a proper reporting mechanism, the policies are practically non-existent.

viii) Investigate all future leaks of sensitive information and sanction those responsible

The issue of staff or national team coaches leaking the sensitive information they are privy to is unprofessional and diminishes the trust and confidence athletes and coaches have in their organization. The same holds true for board members who do not keep information confidential.

ix) Respond to athletes' and coaches' requests for information in a timely manner

Athletes and coaches' requests for information should be responded to in a timely manner. Failing to do so makes the organization look unprofessional, disorganized and like it cannot justify its decisions. Athletes and coaches believe that WCL does not respond in a timely manner because it has something to hide.

x) Conduct exit interviews with all athletes and employees who leave

This will help determine whether they left willingly or as a result of negative experiences with their coaches or WCL staff.

xi) Review whether any board members of WCL are in a Conflict of Interest

The issue of coaches being on the board when they still coach athletes needs to be reviewed. If the practice is to continue clear guidelines should be established and published.

I. Complaint Process

WCL needs to ensure that the complaint process is clear and independent. Neither athletes nor members of the wrestling community have confidence in the current system. The process is not well known nor is it considered to be independent. Most athletes do not know where they would turn if they were sexually harassed or abused by a coach. Some thought they would talk with their coach, some the executive director and some thought the national coach. No one could explain what the case manager's role is. Those who are familiar with the position thought that the case manager was not independent and was too close with the management team. Currently there is no job description for the case manager. However the case manager explained he is not the person who takes complaints. He suggested that there should be somebody external to WCL who receives complaints and evaluates them. This person could advise the person of their rights and possibly facilitate a resolution. An excellent example of this type of independent person is the Discrimination and Harassment Counsel Program Law Society of Ontario <http://www.dhcounsel.on.ca/en-ca/default>. This type of position could be very inexpensive. The case manager estimated that it would not require more than 50 hours a year to review the complaints and to facilitate a resolution.

Furthermore, when there is a complaint about carding or team selection athletes do not know where to turn. They should be advised of their right to appeal under the Appeal Policy or to the Sports Dispute Resolution Centre of Canada.

Though creating an independent dispute resolution mechanism is not expensive, all of the Canadian NSOs face the same issues. It would be advisable for the WCL to join forces with other NSOs to create a mechanism for dealing with complaints. WCL should lobby Sport Canada with the other NSOs to create an ombudsman for sport.

Recommendations

- i) Establish an independent Complaints Person**
- ii) Advise athletes of their rights to appeal a decision under the Appeal Policy and to the SDRCC**
- iii) WCL should lobby with the other NSOs to create an ombudsman for sport**

J. Coaches' Compensation

In this report I have made many recommendations about how the coaches have to act more professionally, however, WCL must also recognize the professionalism of its coaches by paying them a professional salary. While it is an honour to represent Canada as a national coach, the dedication these coaches show and the sacrifices they make should be repaid in accordance with the expectations we have of them. The amount they are currently being paid by WCL is not commensurate with their success on the international stage.

Recommendation

- i) Coaches' salaries at the National Centres should be reviewed and a better compensation package should be paid**

K. Involving Athletes in the Implementation of This Report

There is a deep-seated concern among athletes that the findings and the recommendations made in this report will be ignored and their involvement in this review will have been a waste of time. This is based on their previous experiences bringing forward complaints. This is an opportunity for WCL to change that narrative.

Athletes should be given the copies of this report and its recommendations and should be given legitimate opportunities to be involved in the implementation process.

There should be an audit carried out after six months and a second audit after a year to evaluate whether the recommendations in this report have been implemented.

Recommendations

- i) Athletes should be involved in the implementation of the recommendations made in this report**
- ii) There should be an audit carried out after six months and a second audit after a year to evaluate whether the recommendations in this report have been implemented**

Conclusion

It has been a real privilege and honour to conduct this review. I had the opportunity to meet many incredible people who have dedicated their lives to the sport of wrestling. The passion from athletes, coaches and staff is undeniable.

Despite the findings I have made in this report, the level of dedication and the hard work that every one of the interviewees I met showed impresses me. Every person involved with WCL is committed to making wrestling a better sport and to building on the success it has already achieved.

The problems I came across during this review, with a very few notable exceptions, were the result of people earnestly doing their best. While there may be concerns about the direction of each coach's understanding of what is best, I believe that coaches are striving to help their athletes succeed. I have made recommendations in this report that are designed to help WCL and coaches in this endeavour. I am optimistic that by implementing the recommendations set out in this report, WCL can provide a safe and encouraging atmosphere for its high performance athletes to excel. This will support the goal of success in Tokyo 2020.

Some of these recommendations have also been made with the goal of giving WCL the tools to help modernize its sport and to turn it into a global leader.

This will help the organization operate a sport that young athletes will want to join and remain active in during their lifetimes as athletes, coaches and, perhaps, future members of the executive.



David Bennett
December 2, 2018
Ottawa, Ontario

Appendix: Recommendations

- 1) A prohibition on sexual relationships between national team coaches and athletes (p 12)
- 2) A prohibition on sexual relationships between national team coaches and other coaches (p 12)
- 3) A prohibition on sexual relationships between national team coaches and WCL staff (p 12)
- 4) A prohibition on sexual relationships between staff and staff (p 12)
- 5) A prohibition on sexual relationships between staff and athletes (p 12)
- 6) Mandatory Vulnerable Sector Check for all WCL staff and coaches (p 13)
- 7) Mandatory Vulnerable Sector Check for all provincial staff and coaches (p 13)
- 8) Creation of a coach and athlete database to ensure they have met the requirements to be licensed, including the completion of a background screen, signature of the coaching Code of Conduct and the identification of coaches who have breached the coaching Code of Conduct (p 13)
- 9) Rule of Two policy implemented for athletes under eighteen (p 13)
- 10) There should be an annual review of all safety policies (p 13)
- 11) There should be an independent review of the allegations made by the two anonymous parties to OTP, the Minister of Sport and WCL (p 13)
- 12) Mandatory training for all coaches who participate internationally, including:
 - How to deal with the modern athlete
 - Coaching the female athlete (Coaching males and females differently)
 - Psychological motivation
 - How to communicate with the modern athlete
 - How to motivate an athlete: What is the difference between motivating and bullying
 - Nutrition
 - Weight cutting
 - Training about the ways the body and mind can react to stress
 - Training about how to spot eating disorders and disordered eating
 - Sexual harassment
 - Ethics and conduct (representing Canada) (p 19)
- 13) There should be no physical contact between coaches and athletes (p 20)
- 14) Verbal abuse, including swearing, yelling, using pejorative language (slut, lazy, fat, useless) should be prohibited by the Code of Conduct (p 20)
- 15) Coaches should not be pushing their athletes physically until they vomit or are on the mat in tears from exhaustion (p 20)
- 16) Coaches and staff need to be reminded that they are there for the athletes and not the other way around (p 20)
- 17) There needs to be more opportunities for new and young coaches (p 20)
- 18) There needs to be the development and promotion of more women coaches (p 20)

- 19) Protocol around contacting athletes (p 20)
- 20) Discontinue the practice of “Birthday Beats” (p 20)
- 21) Prohibit drinking between coaches and athletes (p 22)
- 22) Develop a policy concerning alcohol consumption (p 22)
- 23) Develop a policy on cannabis for coaches and staff members (p 23)
- 24) There should be mandatory education for all coaches and athletes around concussions (p 25)
- 25) If an athlete is funded by WCL then they should use WCL’s medical treatment for concussions and other major injuries (p 25)
- 26) There needs to be a formalized written medical clearance before an athlete can go back to practice or competition (p 25)
- 27) It should be mandatory that coaches receive training on healthy eating, dieting, weight loss, disordered eating and eating disorders (p 27)
- 28) Athletes need to be given more resources for healthy eating (p 27)
- 29) The nutritionist needs to be doing more to work with the athletes outside of Calgary (p 27)
- 30) Develop and promote a national initiative that promotes healthy attitudes towards food (p 27)
- 31) It should be added into the Code of Conduct that coaches should not be asking athletes to cut weight (p 27)
- 32) Coaches should be given mandatory training on coaching the female athlete (p 29)
- 33) There needs to be the development and promotion of more women coaches (p 29)
- 34) WCL should conduct a study of how women’s monthly cycles impacts their weight and weight class (p 29)
- 35) Coaches should be given access to child care (p 29)
- 36) Clarify Job Positions Among WCL Staff (p 32)
- 37) Have a More Professional Board of Directors Composed and Increased Gender Parity Among Board Members (p 32)
- 38) Bring in more women to serve on the Board of Directors (p 33)
- 39) Develop a Database of Athletes and Coaches (p 33)
- 40) Create a harassment policy (p 33)
- 41) Provide athletes training on the new sexual harassment policy (p 33)
- 42) Create a reporting mechanism for sexual harassment claims and outline the process in the Code of Conduct (p 33)
- 43) Investigate all future leaks of sensitive information and sanction those responsible (p 33)
- 44) Respond to athletes’ and coaches’ requests for information in a timely manner (p 34)

- 45) Conduct exit interviews with all athletes and employees who leave (p 34)
- 46) Review whether any board members of WCL are in a Conflict of Interest (p 34)
- 47) Establish an independent Complaints Person (p 35)
- 48) Advise athletes of their rights to appeal a decision under the Appeal Policy and to the SDRCC (p 35)
- 49) WCL should lobby with the other NSOs to create an ombudsman for sport (p 35)
- 50) Coaches' salaries at the National Centres should be reviewed and a better compensation package should be paid (p 36)
- 51) Athletes should be involved in the implementation of the recommendations made in this report (p 37)
- 52) There should be an audit carried out after six months and a second audit after a year to evaluate whether the recommendations in this report have been implemented (p 37)