Journal of Coaching Education

2012 USOC Coaches of the Year

Neal Henderson USA Cycling - "Doc" Counsilman Science Award

The "Doc" Counsilman Science Award is for a coach who utilizes scientific techniques and equipment as an integral part of his or her coaching methods, or has created innovative ways to use sport science.

For years, Henderson has been at the forefront of applying scientific principles in the lab and on the field to improve athlete performance in the world of cycling. During the 2010-11 season, he formulated additional tools and protocols for aerodynamic drag analysis, which helped determine the specific power required for cyclists to attain a given speed. The results helped pace Team USA to a silver-medal finish at the 2011 UCI Track Cycling World Championships. Later that summer, Henderson continued aerodynamic testing to help identify the best wheel combinations for U.S. cyclists competing at the London 2012 Olympic Games. A rare, dual-certified elite U.S. cycling and U.S. triathlon coach, Henderson has been instrumental in establishing training methods based on exercise physiology, including supplemental oxygen training and a computrainer program for junior cyclists at the Boulder Center for Sports Medicine.

James Hrbek, USA Judo— Developmental Coach of the Year

The Developmental Coach of the Year coaches at the youth club, high school, or junior level, or is directly responsible for coaching athletes to the junior and/or elite level. Coaches must be actively coaching or within one year of retirement to be eligible for this award.

Devoted to building the sport of judo in the United States, Hrbek scours the world to find unique judo tournaments and training opportunities for young Americans to gain international experience. In 2011, he coordinated the entire junior program for USA Judo, which fielded U.S. teams for dozens of national and international tournaments and assembled U.S. contingents of more than 50 people. As chairman of USA Judo's Junior Athlete Performance Committee, Hrbek created a database of parents, coaches and athletes that can be used in various judo activities. It is his belief that if properly educated, U.S. junior athletes will have the knowledge to one day become successful coaches themselves, an essential step in building the sport nationally.

Rick Bower, USA Ski and Snowboard– National Coach of the Year

The National Coach of the Year is a coach of an Elite Level Club, Collegiate, Pan-Am, World Championships or Olympic Games team, or the coach of an elite athlete who competes at the highest level of their sport. Coaches must be actively coaching or within one year of retirement to be eligible for this award.

During his six seasons as coach of the U.S. snowboarding halfpipe team, Bower has played an integral role in advancing women's snowboarding. In 2011, he led his athletes to 31 major event podiums and took snowboarding to new heights after helping Kelly Clark become the first female to land a 1080 in competition. This achievement, at the pinnacle of snowboarding events for the year, had a monumental influence on up-and-coming female athletes and the progression of women's snowboarding. For his efforts, Bower was recognized as the U.S. Ski and Snowboard Association International Coach of the Year and USSA International Snowboarding Coach of the Year in 2011.

Dave Denniston, US Paralympic Swimming– Paralympic Coach of the Year

The Paralympic Coach of the Year is a coach of an elite level club, college, Pan-Am, World Championship or Olympic Games, or the coach of an elite athlete who competes at the highest level of their sport. The award winner must currently be coaching or within one year of retirement. In his second year as a U.S. Paralympics resident swimming coach at the U.S. Olympic Training Center in Colorado Springs, Colo.,

Denniston was selected to lead Team USA at the Pan-Pacific Para-Swimming Championships. In 2011, 14 of his 16 athletes were selected to major international teams, where they consistently excelled on the world stage. Among his athletes, Jessica Long collected nine gold medals in nine events, while shattering four world records. A 2008 U.S. Paralympian, Denniston also conducts speaking engagements to share his journey from an able-bodied Olympic hopeful to a Paralympic athlete turned mentor. His experience has allowed him to integrate his team practices with elite able-bodied team practices, helping assist athletes on both teams reach higher goals.

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Tom Waqa, USA Rugby– Volunteer Coach of the Year

The Volunteer Coach of the Year is a coach who does not receive payment in any form for their involvement in coaching at any level. The award winner must be actively coaching or within one year of retirement. Now in his sixth season as the head coach of Brigham Young University's women's rugby team, Waqa has played a key role in molding an unsponsored and formerly unrecognized team into a nationally ranked formidable force. The Fiji native has helped produce All-American nominees in each of his seven seasons, highlighted by 2011 honorees Kristi Jackson, Monica Jackson and Rebekah Siebach, who propelled the Cougars to the Final Four. He also helps identify young talent to compete in the Under-20 National All-Star Championships, which routinely produce scouting opportunities for U.S. national teams. In addition to coaching at BYU, Waqa also volunteers as the Humless men's rugby coach.