

## RIO 2016: PLANNING FOR SA PARA-CYCLING TEAM SUCCESS

The maxim of all good architects is that “*form follows function*” - which means that a building must be planned to serve the function for which it is intended before consideration is given to the design of its form (what it will look like). Switching the planning sequence around simply doesn't work. A similar logic applies in planning the South African para-cycling team's participation in the Rio 2016 Paralympic Games: The plan's *function* is to secure at least three Paralympic medals; its *form* is the approach through which this can be achieved.



Given its very obvious *function*, what then is the general *design* of the Rio 2016 plan for South African para-cycling? On the surface, this appears quite simple, comprising as it does, three main components:

- (i) *Phase 1* (already past), which included the period of transition from London 2012 to the current Rio 2016 quadrennial: focused on retaining the best performers of 2012 as potential riders for 2016 (e.g. through SASCOC's OPEX athlete support programme);
- (ii) *Phase 2* (just ending 2013-2014): aimed at establishing an expanded pool of competitive riders from which to ultimately select the Rio 2016 team; focused on providing high performance support to riders, informed by monitoring of training and the assessment of competition performance; and
- (iii) *Phase 3* (2015/2016): focused on saturation high performance support and providing competition experience for the South African team of riders selected for Rio 2016.

The simplicity, as outlined above, allows for easy grasp and communication; however, it does not reveal the complex design of inter-connected elements that allow the plan to practically perform its function. A few of these elements are outlined below:

### ***Identifying 'best of the best' riders***

A very significant part of the plan is the process through which South Africa's most competitive male and female para-cyclists are identified as candidates for selection to the Rio 2016 team. This involves assessment of the performances of all riders who participate in the para-cycling road and track national championships and comparison of performances relative to the published national team selection standards. The standards are planned to become more stringent each year,



increasing from levels that initially allow for the eligibility of promising sub-elite riders to compete internationally, to levels that approach Paralympic medal-earning performance equivalents. Through this process, a relatively large pool of candidates for team selection is reduced to a smaller group of riders with the greatest medal-earning prospects for Rio 2016.



### ***Securing Paralympic slots***

The process of securing a targeted number of Paralympic slots is something akin to an actuarial science, accounting for a whole range of uncertainties. Nation points earned in UCI World Cup, World Championship and a limited number of C1 events accrue from 2014/15 onwards, up until April 2016. At this cut-off date, South Africa's tally of points will be divided by the total number of points earned by all nations, and the resulting factor will then be multiplied by the number of riders accommodated by the IPC at the Paralympic Games. The outcome of this calculation, performed separately for male and female riders, will be the number of slots earned by South Africa.<sup>1</sup> Participation by the national team in key UCI events and performances of riders in points-earning top-10 finish positions (ideally medal finishes) is therefore critical. Experience shows that for the total number of Paralympic slots finally earned, more than double that number of riders will need to have contributed towards earning the requisite tally of nation points; i.e. it really is an expanded and sustained team effort.



The slots earned by South Africa are expected to accommodate a minimum of four male riders and up to three females (to ensure fair gender representativeness)<sup>2</sup>.

### ***High performance investment***

From 2014, the plan aims to provide a sustained level of high performance support to the pool of riders from which the Rio 2016 team will ultimately be selected. This is essential in order for their full athletic potential to be realised. Since the level of support cannot realistically match that which is enjoyed by riders from other many competing nations, the plan aims for the best possible return on high performance investment.

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<sup>1</sup> One or more 'bonus' slots may be allocated by the IPC to eligible nations; also, some allocated slots may be ring-fenced by the IPC for specific riders or riders in specific classes.

<sup>2</sup> Note: These numbers are indicative; they could be higher or lower.



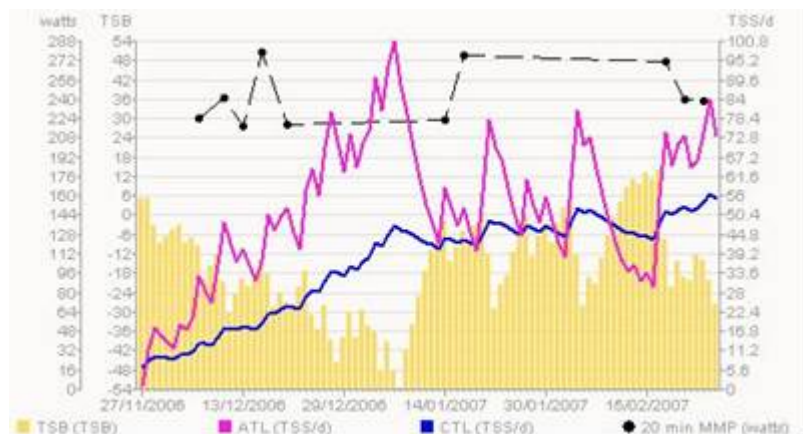
Support for high performance provided by SASCOC through the NAP and OPEX programmes is essential. Riders who are not on SASCOC's support programmes, but who show potential for possible inclusion in the Rio 2016 team, are supported to the extent possible by Cycling South Africa.

"How long is a piece of string?" is a question that applies to the related question as to what should comprise South Africa's para-cycling high performance programme: Essentially, the programme must be configured in response to the individual needs of riders; also, it needs to evolve as new insights are gained of what is a very complex and multi-faceted *science*. It is certain, however, that as international performance levels increase fractionally each year, the investment necessary to enable South Africa's riders to compete at these ever-higher levels will have to increase by a considerably greater fraction.

High performance investment is not an end in itself. It is a means to an end - which is to have South Africa's elite para-cyclists actualise their full potential at the highest levels of international competitive cycling. The high performance programme must, therefore, be coupled with training programmes, and monitoring thereof, and assessment of the outcome of high performance investment in the form of rider performances in international competitions.

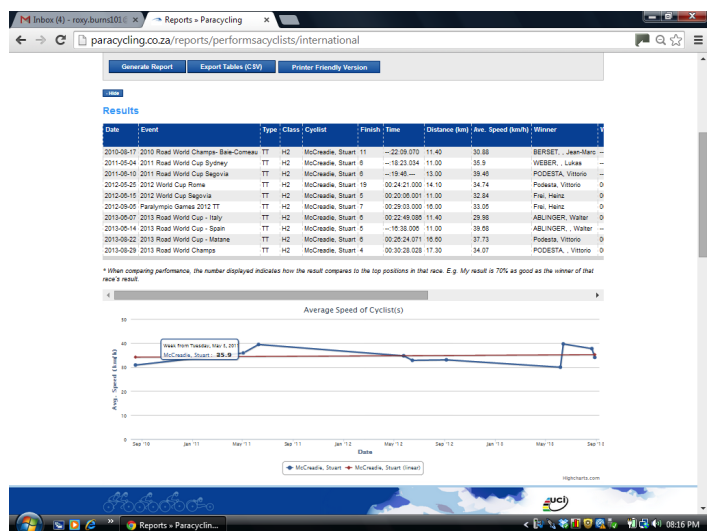
***Up-stream monitoring and directing of rider training; down-stream assessment of performance***

There is a very sophisticated system in place for monitoring the 'up-stream' training efforts of riders who are in contention for selection to the Rio 2016 team. Riders on Cycling South Africa's high performance programme up-load their device-captured training effort data (kilometres ridden, watts expended, heart-rate, etc.) onto the *South African para-cycling database and information system* on a weekly basis. The data is then analysed, using specialised software, with the aim of identifying or confirming (pre-defined) trends relative to specified targets (e.g. periodization trends, trends directed towards a forthcoming UCI World Cup event, or recovery following such an event). Differentiation is made between trends in chronic and acute training effort, with the aim of achieving optimum levels of rider readiness/recovery.





On the ‘down-stream’ side, monitoring and evaluation of the performances of riders in key events is critical. In this regard, *trend* interpretation is far more important than knowledge of *spot value* performances. The aim is to establish whether the performances of riders, extrapolated towards 2016, are/will be at levels that are likely to secure Paralympic medals. Where there are gaps between current levels of rider performances and international winning performance levels, it is important to know whether the trends in rider performances (over time) indicate that the gaps are narrowing; i.e. the system allows insight to be gained as to whether a rider is trending towards a medal performance in 2016. Trend analysis, which is possible through the South African para-cycling database and information system, is a very powerful tool in gauging and guiding rider performances in the build-up to Rio 2016.



To return to the analogy of the architectural maxim that ‘form follows function’: There is confidence that if all key stake-holders (Department of Sport and Recreation, SASCOC, Cycling South Africa, coaches and team administrators and riders) subscribe fully to the *form* of the Rio 2016 plan for South African para-cycling, its *function* will be achieved - **AT LEAST THREE MEDALS WILL BE IN THE BAG.**