

Harvesting Juniors

Deeside OC has adopted a bold new approach to Junior training in 2012!

Inspired by maverick sports psychologist, Dieter von Schorah - who believes athletes respond better to unpleasant experiences - part-time coach Mike Vokes has adopted his mantra of '*Endure – not Enjoy!*'

"Von Schorah has some exciting new ideas ... and he practices what he preaches. He regularly runs long distance races dressed in impractical animal costumes, and just look at his recent performances!"

"We need to show our Juniors and aspiring squad members some tough love. Other clubs are doing it – we all know that SYO leave their newborn babies on Stanage Edge overnight, and OD regularly make their youngsters jump off the battlements of Warwick Castle."

"What do we do? Treat them to cushy winter weekends and comfortable junior training weekends in hostels. They're doing OK – but we can and must do better!"

Vokes' first experiment was to encourage a sceptical Jon Hateley to enter a team of inexperienced juniors and injured seniors into the most hostile team orienteering event in the UK ... the Harvester Trophy. Four youngsters were ripped from their parents' arms, squashed into over-crowded vehicles and driven to an army training base in deepest Hampshire. Here they were joined by a couple of limping ex-students to make up a most unenthusiastic team in the A-race.

"It's not all about extreme discomfort ... some incentives can enhance the painful learning process", said an earnest Vokes.

"They had tents to sleep in and we gave them pizzas before the event. Well, apart from Anya ... we made her use public transport and a push-bike to get to the event, so she turned up late."

"No Pain – No Gain!" was our zealot's battle-cry as he deserted the campsite for a bottle of wine and a night in a soft bed.

At midnight, first leg runner Hateley was sent out into an area littered with sandy tank tracks and vague, subterranean features. True to the spirit of this novel coaching experiment, he made a special effort to carve fresh tracks through impervious masses of nettles and brambles. His conclusion? ... "It did hurt and my legs are a mess ... but I was pleasantly surprised by my performance, and I did beat Charlie Adams for about the first time ever."

Next up was Vokes' own son, Philip. His previous night-O experience was limited to a handful of 'soft' urban environments, so he was given a particularly feeble head-torch and sent out on a highly technical 6 km course. Remarkably he returned in a respectable time and kept the team in the top 10 places. Chris Owens, another Harvester novice, was forced out on the longest night leg to give him maximum opportunity to damage himself and to lose expensive eye-care products. He too defied expectations and returned intact.

And so it continued. Niall Allen was forced to run miles further than he had ever done before, Tom B was instructed to ignore his foot pains and limp around in the gloom, and brother Mike was dragged out of bed to run a massive 13 km in the early morning heat. All the while other teams were dropping like flies, ultimately pushing 'InDEEfatigable' up into a highly respectable 6th place.

"Told you so!" crowed a sickeningly refreshed Vokes on his return next morning.

“My idea works! We met every single objective; a top 10 finish, avoiding the mini-mass start, finishing before prize-giving, and disqualifying SYO!”

The results of this trial were indeed quite surprising, and even experienced Dee coaches have been made to take notice. The club committee are now considering expanding the ‘*Pain Pays*’ approach to all elements of club activities; there are rumours that new members must attend mandatory bracken-cutting sessions in Delamere, relocating club training nights to Teggs Nose country park, and black-only courses to be on offer at Dee summer evening events. However, they are resisting some of the more extreme suggestions, such as leaving children at O-events to find their own way home (also trialled by Vokes at the Harvester).

Vokes meantime is keen to expand his range of bespoke club kit – specifically designed to increase suffering and frustration. Watch out for new lines of extra-itchy horsehair O-tops, non-magnetic compasses, variable length tunnel tent poles and O-boots with dobs on the inside.

Jon Hateley