Quick facts

- Seventeen Pacific countries sent teams to the 1996 Atlanta Olympic Games, but Papua New Guinea was the only Pacific islander to win a medal - a silver in the men's super-heavyweight boxing.

- A delegation of approximately 170 athletes, coaches, administrators and team managers from the Pacific have attended each of the last two Olympic Games, and although no medals were won, three athletes were in the top eight of their sport.

- There are high hopes for the future success of Pacific Island athletes. Fiji has four times as many sports administrators in the Pacific as Tonga and Vanuatu is ranked in the world's top 10 for women's volleyball, as well as having unprecedented success in table tennis.

• The promotion of sport and exercise is increasingly important as some parts of the Pacific, such as Nauru and Tonga, have high levels of diabetes.

• Australia-Pacific Technical College (APTC) will play a key role in achieving that goal with a new tailor-made course for coaches and sports administrators delivered in partnership with the Australian National Olympic Committee (ANOC). The APTC Community Educators course is being delivered in Fiji and Samoa, with assessment currently being conducted in nine other Pacific countries.

• A new ANOC Master Trainer Course will be delivered in 2014 to ensure selected ANOC and other trainers are fully equipped to deliver the Community Educators course and to develop an ongoing cycle of delivery.


Training for the Olympics
Training for Olympic success
Australia-Pacific Technical College is providing valuable assistance to sports coaches and administrators to prepare athletes for the 2016 Olympic Games.

Sporting teams in the Pacific are determined to win medals at future Olympic Games, and the Rio de Janeiro games in 2016 are no exception. Central to achieving this goal is ensuring that professional standards of coaching, sports management and administration are in place to support athletes competing at the highest international levels.

Australia-Pacific Technical College (APTC) will play a key role in achieving this goal with a tailored course for coaches and sports administrators delivered in partnership with Oceanic National Olympic Committees (ONOC).

The ONOC Community Educators course is being delivered in Fiji and Samoa, with assessments being conducted in nine other Pacific countries.

“We have the responsibility to ensure that teams are well trained, disciplined and focused on reaching their goals,” says Dennis Miller, ONOC Executive Director.

“If you look at the statistics for the last four Olympics the majority of our customers are in the lowest percentile and the majority of our coaches are not prepared,” says Macu Korotamana, one of the first to complete an accredited ONOC Community Educator course.

Fifteen Pacific countries sent teams to the 1996 Atlanta Olympics, but Paea Wolfgam is Tonga’s only medalist to date. Samoa’s female weightlifter Ele Opelepo was just 1 kilogram off lifting a medal-winning weight, finishing fourth.

However, there are high hopes for the future success of Pacific Island athletes. Papua New Guinea is currently developing a strong pool of athletes who will be selected for the 2016 Olympic Games.

In line with the work carried out by the ONOC Community Educators, graduates deliver training to others, a new ONOC Master Trainer program will be introduced in 2014. It aims to enable selected ONOC and other trainers to deliver quality training to local coaches and sports administrators across the member countries.

With this capacity to ‘train the trainers’, ONOC will also be able to continue the program independently for many years to come.

And although there is “a lot of work to be done” to develop professional sports in the Pacific, this new training ensures that athletes will be “able to perform on the day”, according to Macu.

“It’s not just at the Olympics that matter. It is everyday leading up to the Olympics and that means sports administrators knowing their job and doing it right.”

The benefits of onsite assessment
A significant aspect of the delivery of the APTC-ONOC Community Educators course is the onsite assessment of student training delivery. While the training program is delivered in Fiji and Samoa, the workshops help learners apply what they have learned in their own home countries.

This has meant that APTC staff, including assessors from Australia, have travelled to nine different countries across the Pacific, including Kiribati, Palau and Tuvalu, to assess more than 20 students.

Bridget Gray, Coordinator of the APTC Centre for Professional Development in Fiji, says the course is not only a productive partnership between APTC and ONOC, but also a genuine Pacific-wide collaboration.

“Part of the reason APTC has connected well with ONOC is that the goals of both organisations are similar, both organisations seek to develop the potential of Pacific Islanders and improve workforce opportunities,” says Bridget.

According to Bridget, this training is also important because while most sporting bodies in the Pacific are run by enthusiastic, voluntary, they are often untrained and that there is a need for “proper financial management and accountability”.

Macu Korotamana, one of the first to complete an accredited ONOC Community Educator, believes that the course will also help improve athlete performance at an elite level.

“For us to come to that higher level of sports development we first need to fill the gap of more qualified sports administrators and coaches. With this program we have the first steps,” Macu says.

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Coaching future champions
Sixteen-year-old athlete Taialah Ah Yuck from Kadavu in Fiji knows if she wants to succeed in the Olympics, she has to have a quality coach and support staff. Taialah is a member of the Fiji Youth Olympic Games Training Squad that is preparing for the Youth Olympics in Nanjing China this year.

Taialah is hoping to be selected for the 400 and 800 metre running events in the Pacific Squad, which includes Pacific countries. “It’s really huge for me because if I’m the first time I will represent Fiji if I qualify,” says Taialah.

Taialah’s coach, Macu Korotamana, an accredited ONOC Community Educator who recently graduated from APTC, says coaching in the Pacific needs to become more professional and also focus on youth. “In Fiji we think we are naturally gifted in sports, but there is so much more that goes into it,” Macu says. “There is a need for us to develop our grassroots and our community sports administrators and coaches to equip them with the necessary tools.” As a young athlete, Taialah already knows the importance of having a professional coach who knows how to develop your technical and tactical elements of training as “it can affect the way you participate in the event.”

“it’s really important because it’s the base of everything I do,” says Taialah. “The coach gives you advice on what to do and what not to do, on nutrition and diet, which are really important.”

1 The Oceanic Sport Education Program (OSEP) is a partnership between the Australian Sport Commission (ASC), Oceanic National Olympic Committees (ONOC) and the Organisations of Sport Federations in Oceanic (OSFO). It offers sport administrative and generic coaching training materials and is expected to expand to other sport education areas like sport science and medicine, community sport coaching, team manager and sport management growth.

Relying on community volunteer
Across the Pacific about 90 per cent of sports administrators and coaches are volunteers, according to ONOC estimates.

And although these volunteers are essential for the success of local sports, the reliance on the goodwill of people to dedicate their own time – often balancing other commitments such as full time work and families – makes it a challenge to increase the level of professionalism and structure needed for athletes to excel.

This has created a need for more investment in and co-ordination of sports management. Recent progress in this area includes each Pacific National Olympic Committee now having an office and employing staff.

“Everyone in the country is moving forward in sport as an industry, you see professional people who are qualified and employed,” says Sainimili Talalolka, who coordinated the Oceanic Sport Education Program (OSEP) at ONOC.

Sainimili hopes the new APTC-ONOC Community Educator course will help with professional development of community volunteers and sports administrators and coaches, while also raising awareness of the importance of structure and management in sport to government and officials.

“Through this training we want to demonstrate to the people with the resources that there is a need to be more strategic if we want success in sport,” Sainimili says.

“We need to better coordinate our national activities with in-country partners through strategic planning, investment in quality control of our sport training and development initiatives and consider employing competent people to deliver professional sports programs.”

This is already happening in Papua New Guinea whose government has seen an increase in the number of professional sportspersons.

Sainimili also believes that being more strategic, rather than the traditional “eat up the resources” approach, will help better utilise the already stretched resources available to local sporting bodies.