

Project Jeune a Potentiel – a compelling French-Belgian collaboration

Sabrina, a technical assistant at the French-speaking league of para sport in Belgium, gives an insight into how the collaboration between France and Belgium on the Project Jeune a Potentiel (JAP) came about.

How did the involvement of Belgian youngsters in JAP come about?

Last January I joined the Belgian part of the French speaking para-sport league and immediately tried to establish training camps with youth with potential. At that time we did not have multi-sport camps in Belgium.

I therefore made an assessment on what existed in the surrounding countries and contacted the Fédération Française Handisport. They immediately directed me to Sami El Gueddari, the responsible person for the JAP.

I explained to him our development goals and approach and he welcomed us with open arms.

How many young people are in the Belgium delegation and how are the young people identified?

I started with six youngsters divided by their speciality - three in table tennis, two in wheelchair events in athletics and two in swimming.

In Belgium, we have one talent identification day annually and we learn a lot from the clubs throughout the year. We also try to align with able-bodied federations.

With regard to talent selection criteria, the performance is obviously essential but also the youngsters' motivation, too. Both let us estimate different pathways for young athletes.

What are your expectation regarding the collaboration?

Our aim is to learn from the organising countries to then establish the same kind of programmes in our country. I think that it really is added value to collaborate and create a mix of young people from different countries.

It's the first time that we have taken youngsters abroad.

What are your first impressions?

In general I am surprised by our youngsters as they have given their all, even in the sports that are not their first choice. We can see they want it and that each of them has talent. This allows us to analyse the work we have to continue in Belgium.

What is your benchmark of success?

The idea is to identify from now on young people with potential, to create a solid base and a dynamic for the Tokyo 2020 Paralympic Games.

We will debrief the coaches of each young athlete, fine-tune their objectives, adapt their training schedule and of course find a club for those who don't have one yet.

The JAP is positive for the youngsters but also very enriching for me in terms of the knowledge that I can exchange with the staff of the programme, the coaches and the athletes etc.

If possible it would be a pleasure for us to return next year and continue this fruitful collaboration.