

An interview with Dr Angus Mugford, a keynote speaker at BASES-FEPSAC Conference 2017

Dr Mustafa Sarkar finds out more about Dr Angus Mugford.



Angus is Director of High Performance for the Toronto Blue Jays, a Canadian professional baseball team who compete in Major League Baseball, where he leads a team of specialists across Sports Medicine, Sport Science, Strength and Conditioning, and Mental Performance. Prior to this role, he served as the Director of the International Management Group (IMG) Institute, which led mental performance and

leadership consulting services for sport, corporate and military organisations. Angus will be talking at BASES-FEPSAC Conference 2017 about helping to build a high performance culture, specifically about leading a collaborative and integrated player development support system and implementing strategies to ensure sustained high performance.

What were some of the key insights from your work as the Director of IMG academies?

I was at IMG for over 11 years, although in many respects it felt like double that. It was the best learning environment I could have possibly hoped for and I got an incredible variety of experiences. Looking back, I see three key insights that were really significant:

1. Importance of practising what you preach. Regardless of your training or background, the pursuit of mastery is important. I also think that being authentic and a constant learner allows you to be that much more effective and continue to evolve. I learned more in my time at IMG than I ever taught others.

2. Understand your context and who the stakeholders are.

There was a lot of customer service in the private academy setting, and that didn't change as I began doing more consulting with elite performers both on- and off-campus. Letting go of your assumptions, and taking the time to know 'your audience', and understanding the context of their challenges and opportunities are important to pay attention to.

3. Leadership and high performance is not a job; it's a way of life. I have been lucky enough to be around some great (and not so great) leaders. The best I have come across are very authentic and always remain hungry to learn and positively impact others. It's especially evident when they have nothing to gain from a relationship, but simply live that way. A dear friend of mine who works in coach development in New Zealand said it best when he reminded me that "We are human 'beings' not 'doings'."

What is involved in your current role as Director of High Performance for the Toronto Blue Jays?

I oversee our Sports Medicine department composed of athletic trainers, physical therapists and physicians, as well as the strength and conditioning, nutrition, mental performance and sport science. There really is no model for it in the United States, so there is a lot of strategic work in shaping the department, collaborating with the needs of the organisation, and managing change through people, process and implementation of technology and research and development. Part of the vision from the President, that bought me into the opportunity, was the desire to integrate a high performance

culture throughout the organisation. While we are mainly helping to keep players on the field and maximise their potential, part of my role is to also help develop our staff into being the best that they can be.

What have been some of the most rewarding and most difficult moments as a practitioner working in professional sport (baseball)?

Most rewarding moments are thankfully plentiful. I get great satisfaction from seeing both players and staff work hard and see results. Just this year, seeing our high performance team collaborate together and produce pieces of work that involved different ways of working together and seeing the positive way our players and coaches responded was great. Most difficult are when I see selfish behaviour, from either players or staff. It typically comes from a place of fear and insecurity, which is unfortunately a by-product of a professional sport environment where the reality of 1 year contracts and people being fired is normal.

Where does sport science play a role in your job?

We're very fortunate to have a fellow Brit, Clive Brewer as our Head of Sport Science and my Assistant Director. We have had to work hard to actually shift a perception that sport science is a single department that deals with technology, and in fact, the integration of the science of sport to solve performance problems and maximise our players' recovery, performance and learning. This first year has been about learning for Clive and me more than anything. There are some complications that make conventional implementation more challenging (e.g. players union, lack of readiness for change, league regulations), but we have taken that time to address some of the obvious opportunities such as nutrition and communication processes.

What do you think are some of the challenges facing sport psychology and sport science more broadly?

As the President of the Association for Applied Sport Psychology (AASP), developing the sustainable growth of job opportunities is a priority for me. I could go on for hours on this question, but the two areas that I would like to highlight are: (1) making sure that we understand the perspective of key decision-makers and that we understand 'value' and return on investment for those funding for positions, and (2) that if we see a growth in positions in the next 5-10 years, then we have a strong enough pipeline of professionals getting high level training and mentoring to successfully continue our growth. This takes the combined work of a lot of people and institutions and even as researchers, practitioners, graduate programme directors and different professional organisations, to start addressing these issues together. ■



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Interview by Dr Mustafa Sarkar: Senior Lecturer in Sport and Exercise Psychology at Nottingham Trent University