

Technology driving the move towards effective safeguarding in sport

Submitted by: Astute Marketeers

Wednesday, 30 June 2021

Technology that is automating the implementation of safeguarding procedures in both grassroots and elite sport in the US should be replicated in the UK.

That's the message from Sheffield-based sports tech specialists Sport:80, which has already been developing and implementing the technology with USA Archery, the national governing body (NGB) for the sport at both the elite and grassroots level.

"Safeguarding has become increasingly important over the last 10 to 15 years," explains Mary Emmons, Chief of Sport Performance & Organisational Development at USA Archery.

"An athlete's safety is a high priority and there are a lot of things to be considered to make sure protocols are in place not only at national level but also at state and local level."

All national governing bodies in the U.S. have adopted the U.S. Center for SafeSport (USCSS) Code, as well as the Minor Athlete Abuse and Prevention Policy (MAAPP), which together have created a minimum standard for participation in sport, to ensure athletes are protected from sexual and physical abuse and other forms of misconduct.

People in positions of authority are required to take the USCSS Training annually, as well as complete a background screening every two years, whilst there is a separate campaign to educate people on how to recognise and stop abuse in sport. In USA Archery's case, this included the creation of the Athlete Safety Procedure for Event Organisers policy, so that staff and others participating in events are SafeSport trained, background screened and/or checked against the suspended or banned list before they can access the field of play and/or serve in positions of authority.

The particular challenge has come at grassroots level.

"People come into sport, because they love sport and they want to volunteer, train or coach," continues Mary, "but sometimes participants don't realize all the steps that go into safeguarding as not all grassroots organizations require the same screening processes as NGBs. There has been a lot of education that has had to take place to let people know what those requirements are at the club level and that these processes are ongoing. Working with Sport:80 has allowed us to automate many of our processes to verify compliance"

One of the positive aspects of how safeguarding is being managed in the US is that the

USCSS Training Programme has been centralised. This means, for example, if someone takes the training in lacrosse, and they also coach in archery, they can produce their certificate and not have to take the training twice.

"From a technology perspective, there are multiple levels to safeguarding and SafeSport training," explains Jonny Turner, COO at Sport:80. "If you're an adult wanting to participate, whether as a

volunteer or coach or administrator, there will be different training for you compared with being a youth athlete, or, for example, if you're an athlete, as well as a coach or an administrator.”

Using technology, Sport:80 has been able to automate NGB’s member access to the USCSS training, as well as access to background screenings by setting dependencies against particular roles identified in the USCSS Code and MAAPP and also the NGB’s background screening policy. “If an individual is missing one or more requirements, the platform will inform them and remove their current [coach or official] status until they come back into compliance, for example. This also helps reduce staff time by automating the compliance process and notifying participants when they are due for renewal.

Automation also improves the reporting process and assists NGBs to demonstrate individuals had the correct certification at the time that it was required for purposes of audit reporting.

“Working with USA Archery has highlighted the difference between the UK system the U.S. one. We have tried to model what we’re delivering for our UK governing bodies on what we have delivered in the U.S. There, if you want to be a valid coach at a club, you must have a current background screen, you must have a current USCSS SafeSport training, and you must have a current membership. Also, coaches must have a current membership, USCSS SafeSport training and background screen to appear on the coaching register that’s published on the USA Archery website, for example, all of which is automated. So, from grassroots to elite, we have been able to join those processes and also create an audit trail.”

So, when it comes to the technology, what’s next?

“We want to make sure that we have closed all the loopholes that we can close,” continues Jonny.

“In the U.S. specifically, there's something called a centralised disciplinary database. This database lists people who have been sanctioned or banned from sport across all NGBs. So, we want to be able to integrate an API with that database, so that when someone signs up as a member with one sport, we can check whether they are trying to come from another sport that has already told them they can't participate. That's still a manual process but it's definitely an area where technology could step in.”

Ends.