An Overview of the Current Approach to Research at the Australian Institute of Sport

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Sports science and sports medicine have been part of the activities of the Australian Institute of Sport (AIS) since the establishment of the organisation in 1981. Over the years, the number of people employed in these disciplines has greatly expanded, and there has been increasing emphasis on applied research as a means of providing high-level support to AIS and national sports programs. AIS research has played a major role in the developing methods for: identifying and developing talented young athletes; analysing competition performance; preparing for competition in hot conditions; optimising the nutritional practices of athletes; and detecting prohibited use of recombinant erythropoietin. Advances also have been made in understanding the effects of training on immune function, and in refining the use of hypoxic environments as aids to athlete preparation. Various procedures designed to augment the post-exercise recovery of athletes have been assessed, and neurophysiological studies have been conducted to help guide approaches to skill enhancement and injury prevention. Recently, there has been a major focus on the development of technology that allows scientific monitoring of athletes in their normal training and competition environments, as opposed to just laboratory settings. In 2005, an AIS Applied Research Centre was formally instituted to increase both the breadth and the depth of organisational research capacity, and to promote the integration of research effort. The Centre is responsible for distribution of a moderate research budget, and also oversees a PhD scheme, an R&D Partnerships program, a Visiting Scholars' program, and a range of other initiatives. The AIS approach to research is characterised by close interaction between scientists, coaches and administrators in the planning and conduct of studies, and by sensitivity to practical considerations. The approach is facilitated by a physical environment that entails co-location of the different parties, and it favours the early implementation of research outcomes.