

# PLAYER DEVELOPMENT

## LTAD – Long Term Athlete Development

We as coaches need to look at the way we work with our players, it is not any good treating all players the same and expecting that all of the players will achieve the same degree of success when working either in training or a game situation. Children are not little adults, so our coaching programmes and expectations of them should be relevant to their age and the stage of development they are at.

The section below is a summary of three of the phases of development and the types of training and areas of development that the coach should be focusing on in each phase.

(Information below taken from FA Fitness for Football book.)

### **Fundamental phase (6 - 11 years)**

The fundamental phase of development lays the foundation on which future development is built. This is the time when the young player will begin to learn the basic skills that will continue to be used throughout their playing career.

This is also the stage at which the young player is least developed physically and therefore has limited stamina and strength levels, so training should be focused on technique and playing rather than fitness and strength training.

Football should be all about having fun, doing something you enjoy and being part of a team, therefore the coach needs to ensure that their players enjoy their first experiences of the game.

The key implications for coaches working with this age group are summarized below.

- **Aim to develop physical literacy, incorporating – Agility, Balance, Co-ordination and Speed.**
- **Basic skills should be developed, such as passing, shooting, heading, controlling the ball, turning with the ball, etc.**
- **Activities should be of a short duration with endurance being developed through play and games not endurance training.**
- **Specific activities and games should emphasize co-ordination.**

### **Training to train phase (11 - 14 years)**

During this phase of development, athletic formation begins to take place with the body and its capacities develop rapidly.

This is also the time when the percentage of players that begin to drop out increases as players begin to find other activities; computer games, socializing with friends, other sports and the discovery of the opposite sex demand more of their time, therefore coaches need to ensure that they maintain their players interest in the game.

Ensuring training sessions are still fun, varied and involve competitive elements such as five-a-side matches will help maintain interest and hopefully begin to keep more teenagers in the game.

The key implications for coaches working at this age group are summarized below.

- Remember that chronological age may not be the most appropriate way to group players as young people develop at different rates so compare height, body mass, strength, etc. instead.
- Players should learn how to train during this phase, including physical, technical, tactical and ancillary capacities (e.g. warm up, cool down, nutrition, rest, recovery, etc.).
- Some previously learned skills might need refinement, as limb growth will impact on technique, balance and co-ordination.
- Focus on speed work either during or immediately after the warm up and not when players are tired at the end of a training session.

### **Training to compete phase (14 - 20 years)**

The biggest changes in training occur during this phase. The exercises undertaken are aimed at development, but with the intensity and volume of work gradually increasing.

The key implications for coaches working at this age group are summarized below.

- **Aerobic and anaerobic systems become fully developed and can be trained for maximum output.**
- **Strength training can be maximized to improve overall strength development.**
- **Learning how to compete is important, incorporating all technical, tactical and ancillary components into performance.**

As highlighted in the 'Training to train' phase, as the young players' age increases more players drop out of the game and the role of the coach is critical to maintaining the interest and motivation of the younger player.

Football as a sport has many positive outcomes for those that regularly participate, including:

- **Fitness,**
- **Teamwork,**
- **Competitiveness,**
- **Responsibility to others (i.e. team mates),**
- **Social skills.**

This is why we need to maintain the interests of young players in this age group at such a crucial time in their development and the coach is central to this along with teachers and parents.

### **Long term development – summary**

In the long term development programme it should be apparent that there is a gradual change from general to specific conditioning of players as they pass through the various stages of athletic development.

The coach needs to be aware that at the younger age groups the players' training should concentrate on the technical aspects of the game as this is when basic skills are learned, while ensuring training is varied and the emphasis is on playing and having fun.