



NEWSLETTER

Specialists in Long Term Athlete Development

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Welcome to our August 2007 newsletter. The aim of our newsletter is to not only keep people informed of recent developments at Movement Dynamics (MD), but to continue to provide information to those individuals responsible for the 'practical' implementation of Long Term Athlete Development (LTAD).

An extract from the web-site

Coaching Generation Y – Kelvin Giles

....I see young athletes, barely in their teens, on a crusade of winning their local, regional or national championship. Nothing else matters to the coach in charge, everything is geared to 'winning at all costs' and often the coaches status in their particular micro-world of sport is enhanced by the number of age-group champions they produce. While they charge ahead chasing their own particular 'holy grail' of sport (the regional U/12 Championships or the World Youth Championships) they are given the responsibility of choosing the poor mite who is going to get the glory for them. Now we are in the world of Talent Identification, a scientific approach of the late 20th Century that allows us to assemble our very best young things and prepare them for outcome based contests. Unfortunately the competition rules are usually the same as those in the adult world, the competition schedules also very similar and coaching methodology is taken straight out of the adult world and simply watered down in some shape or form.

Who are we kidding? The world of competitive sport in the 12-16 age groups is dominated by the lucky soul who happened to be born a lot earlier than most of the others in the same chronological age group. In young males the 'best' athletes in this age group are usually those who shave three times a day. To quote a leading Australian High Performance Coach in an address to up-and-coming coaches, "Don't think that it is your coaching talent that creates the improvement from 12-16 years. It's a matter of growth and hormones – size is the dominant factor."

In all this argument my mind drifts to the late developer, the poor soul who was born at the very end of the school year they abide in. They are 6-9 months behind in all the growth and development factors that each has to negotiate and they have to operate under the same rules. Contest outcomes are the death-knell to this group of children even though in their own way they may display sound physical competence, agility, balance and coordination. They are young people crammed full of potential, just as eager to take part and probably with the same dreams as the 'gorilla' they have to compete against. Sad thing is that by their late teens everyone is pretty equal in development and maturation, life has a way of evening out the process and lo and behold we reach the start line for elite performance development (18+ years) and we have either burned-out the early maturer or crushed the spirit of the late developer.

An Interesting Relationship

Spine Injuries Ace Juniors Elite Tennis hopefuls putting themselves at risk.

Courier Mail, Brisbane, Australia 20th July 2007

Young tennis hopefuls who train hard with the dream of becoming the next Roger Federer or Venus Williams risk doing permanent damage to their spine, doctors say.

Using MRI, doctors found that 28 out of 33 teens in a British study had developed back abnormalities, some of which were irreparable. The spinal problems emerged despite none of the youngsters – in an elite training program run by Britain's national tennis centre – have reported any previous back pain. The players comprised of 18 males and 15 females, aged from 16 to 23.

The MRI pictures, interpreted by two musculo-skeletal radiologists, found that only 5 of the young players had spines that would be considered normal. The study is published online this week by the British Journal of Sports Medicine. The problems included spinal disc degeneration, herniated discs, complete fractures and nasty stress fractures known as pars lesions. Three of the 10 pars lesions in 9 players were complete fractures.

23 players had early signs of diseased facet joints, which help the spine to flex. This rate (70% of the group) is nearly 5 times that of the general population. 24 players had bone overgrowth while cysts in the synovial fluid, which lubricates the joints, were found in 10 players. In 13 players, the spinal discs were drying out because of insufficient lubrication and the discs were bulging in another 13. Rotation, hyperextension and flexion during play are the suspected causes. The authors, led by David Connell of the Royal National Orthopaedic Hospital in London said that coaches should modify training techniques and schedules in order to minimise wear and tear.

If all is to be believed in this present day 'shock and awe' style of journalism, this article illustrates the current environment of many of our developing athletes. We have all experienced the push by parents, teachers, athletes and coaches for that fleeting 15 minutes of celebrity that sees the pursuit of elite performance turned into an exercise to find the 'next superstar'. This is where we keep on getting it wrong. The key is NOT to try to get the 'superstar' now but to develop the athlete so that they are better prepared when they do reach the upper echelons of their sport. By 'better' I mean more skilful, more physically and emotionally resilient, more athletic and more adaptable.

The data contained in this article also highlights the 'training-age' issue of long term development. The players cited in the article would appear to be in the late Training to Train Stage through to the early Training to Win Stage of their development. Already some of the 16 year old players are showing signs of wear and tear – what future do they have?

All-round athletic development, carefully planned to accommodate individual maturation rhythms with a broad base of multi-joint, multi-plane and multi-directional movement efficiency thrown in for good measure – should be the order of the day. It would be interesting to see the balance of training being undertaken by this group of athletes – how many balls do they hit in a week? How much Left versus Right movement patterns are involved? What is their competition frequency, density and type? How many of them were late maturers? What were their scores in all-round Physical Competence?

Don't for one minute think that this is only happening in Tennis. *"Unfit children may well lack the required proprioceptive skills and weak and/or inflexible joint structures may not be able to withstand the forces."* (Di Fiori, 1999)

UK Courses, 2007

October 20/21st - Long Term Athlete Development Level 1 Course – Selsdon Park Golf Club and Hotel, South Croydon, Surrey (Details on web-site)

October 25th to 28th - The Golf Athlete – Level 1 and Level 2 Courses – Selsdon Park Golf Club and Hotel, South Croydon, Surrey (Details on web-site)

Australian Rugby Union

The most experienced organisation in the delivery of the correct formula in an athlete development process, this leading Australian sporting organisation is not standing still. After a very successful initial 3 years of player development they have commenced a review of their Elite Player Development (EPD) process. While many organisations have yet to contemplate change in their structures and strategies with regard to Elite Athlete Development this National Governing Body is already questioning assumptions and looking for even better ways of producing the next generation of players.

At a recent gathering of the EPD Strength and Conditioning staff the Physical Competence battery was put under scrutiny and fine tuned for the exact requirements of the sport. There was also the creation of some important sports / position specific processes. With Vern Gambetta in attendance the discussion was spirited and robust and the outcomes clearly far reaching and focused.

The role of Physical Competence in the EPD pathway is a cornerstone process and Movement Dynamics is proud to be associated with this project.

Al Ain Soccer Club - UAE

It was good to meet with Mick McDermott – Head Fitness Coach, Al Ain Soccer Club - in recent weeks during his whirlwind visit to Australia. Mick has been asked by the owners of the Al Ain Soccer Club in the UAE to create a world-class development pathway for players in the region.

After our extensive 'brainstorming' session it became clear that the key to a successful future was going to be patience. Soccer is a sport that is finding it difficult to 'question its assumptions' on player development. This is due to the worldwide attraction of the sport to the young player. Governing Bodies and Clubs actually suffer from this global phenomena – no matter what they do, good or bad, the players will still turn up in their thousands. In a sport driven by the success of the senior competition environment (World Cup, European Cup, European Champions League etc.), the senior clubs such as Manchester United, Real Madrid do not really have to worry too much about player development. They only need to unearth one or two players per year to see their playing or transfer stocks remain healthy.

Mick faces a different situation in the UAE where his enlightened bosses are looking a lot closer at local player development. The key for Mick is not simply purchasing the Movement Dynamics resource – it is creating an environment and infrastructure within which it can be effective. He has to commit to an education role in the first instance before he can move things forward. He will be embracing support mechanisms such as coach education and sports medicine and science to come on board philosophically before he can spend time on the actual delivery of quality programs. We wish him luck in this project and will be supporting his dreams.