



NEWSLETTER

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Athlete Development**

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Welcome to our August 2008 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).

Dispelling the Myths

Some practitioners may see the role of Physical Competence and Functional development as being too far away from 'end stage' performance. This is often due to the fact that their entire environment, especially those working in professional sports, is geared to one of two things – winning or losing. Let's be frank – this layer of the athlete development continuum is the tough part, it's the 'sharp end', not a place for the faint-hearted. This is the pressure end of things where, very often, a bad set of results or a plague of injuries can see a career come to an abrupt end.

Don't get fooled by the pressure for immediate results, the principles of performance production are the same at all layers of the continuum. Athletes engaged in the ferociously competitive environments of Olympic Games, Premier Leagues, Championship Tournaments, Test Matches, etc still need the physical qualities to carry out the technical demands of their sport. Ted Polglaze from the University of Western Australian summed up some of these physical qualities as:

- Stay Low–ability (Rugby Props, Basketball Players, Hockey Players)
- Change Gear–ability (not just from a standing start but from various levels of start-speed)
- Get Up–ability (not just in contact sports)
- TUF – Technique under fatigue
- SUF – Speed under fatigue
- DUF – Decision making under fatigue
- PUF – Power under fatigue

Each of these qualities, and all the others that make up the performance spectrum, must be viewed in an analytical way by the practitioners responsible for their development. Each of them is made up of movement efficiency platforms from which they can grow. Without these fundamentals in place the levels of velocity, power, force and endurance will, at best, be curtailed and, at worst, lead to injury. Total Structural Strength, Total Structural Stability and Total Structural Flexibility – developed with the specific sports movements and postures in mind – are the pre-requisites.

"Get strong and stable – then get fast – then endure that speed", maybe an illustration of the pathway to provide the athlete in this pressure cooker environment.



HOW?

We can all wish for a situation where all athletes who enter into the Talent Confirmation Stage of their development (mid-teens) arrive in pristine condition with full physical literacy and competence – multi-joint, multi-plane and multi-directional. "This ain't goin' to happen".

To have this 'Bottom-Up' system demands a total restructure of physical literacy development in all our schools from age 6 and upwards. Children will have to be well taught by specialists on a daily basis and also spontaneously practice these new skills and physical attributes in a 'play' environment after school. The current 'X-Box' / Internet / IPod generation simply won't do this unless we legislate for it. Even more importantly there are implications to Teacher and Coach Education platforms as the demand for practitioners who are well versed in all aspects of athlete development becomes more important.

We will have to do our best in a 'Top-Down' system. The Talent Confirmation stage of the mid-teens should accept that the athletes will arrive with limitations in their Athletic, Functional and Training development. If we accept this reality we may well approach our tasks in a different way rather than blindly continue to 'fast-track' the athlete and ignore these limitations.

Refreshing

My recent visit to the Northern Ireland Institute of Sport and the follow-up meeting with members of the Northern Ireland Sports Council rekindled my faith in our ability to change things for the better in athlete development.

The High Performance crew at NIIS, led by Phil Moreland, displayed a thorough understanding of what they need to do to make a difference. The idea of an 'Entry Portfolio' for those athletes with potential embraces the multi-disciplined approach so effective in today's quest for repeatable excellence. The exciting part is that the NIIS accept that Talent Identification goes way beyond the results of a 'Beep' Test, Jump & Reach and a Speed Test.

Standards will be expected in Physical Competence, Muscular-Skeletal efficiency and sports specific Performance Indicator Tests. Added to this will be the assembly of data on the cognitive and psycho-social status of the athlete.

The fascinating point of this focus is 'what has gone before'. The layers of performance production beneath the High Performance entry level will become the major players in this long term continuum. With defined entry standards in a variety of qualities at the High Performance level the teachers, coaches and administrators at the preceding levels will have a clear direction and responsibility. We may be seeing one of those rare chances to create a seamless transition through the development stages. This will not be an easy journey as the key issues will revolve around the upskilling of current personnel so that they can actually deliver the required programs.

As difficult as this journey might be there is an excitement to it all and Robin Gregg, Talent Development Consultant with Sport Northern Ireland, has a talented group of practitioners to work with.