



NEWSLETTER

**Specialists in Athlete
Development**

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Welcome to our May 2009 newsletter. The aim of our newsletter is to not only keep people informed of recent developments at Movement Dynamics UK, but to continue to provide information to those individuals responsible for the 'practical' implementation of Athlete Development.

Recovery

It doesn't take a genius to deliver a hard training program. I have witnessed too many times the coach driving athletes to repeated chronic fatigue in an attempt to 'get them fitter'. I have also seen hard work used as a punishment for competition failure. I have then seen the same coach scratch their head in confusion wondering why skills are poor, concentration is poor, injuries are increasing and games are being lost.

If the world of the performance engineer was simply about 'reps and sets', any donkey could do it - in fact *Equus Asinus* is alive and well in our profession.

Conversely there are practitioners who shy away from hard work and create programs that appear to be a 'taper' from a 'taper'. Loathe to exact any discomfort on the athlete this coach protects, protects and protects and bases everything around skill and tactical development.

Where is the correct ground?

The answer lies in the physiological, psychological and structural levels that the competition or activity demands of the athlete. These levels are further compounded by the nature of the competition (single event; tournament; long season) and the qualities that the opposition bring to the contest. In Track and Field Athletics this is illustrated by the difference between the usual domestic competition contested on a weekly basis compared with the tournament type of contest like the Olympic Games where not one effort but a series of improving efforts through consecutive rounds are the order of the day.

In the team environment one has to consider a preparation that allows repeated excellence on a weekly basis throughout the season and, at the same time, prepare for the rigors of the 'main contest' at the end of the season – the 'play-offs'. In the southern hemisphere in Rugby Union and Rugby League there is the luxury of 12-16 weeks of pre-season where considerable gains can be made followed by a maintenance program throughout the season. In the northern hemisphere's Soccer and Rugby programs the pre-season is short and the season sees teams playing sometimes twice a week for 10+ months. Administration won't change the competition timetable so it is up to all the service providers (Coaches, S&C Coaches, Sports Medical practitioners) to assemble the very best rhythm and content of activity to (a) survive the competition onslaught and (b) arrive at play-off time with the tanks still full.



Training Programs

In recent times I have received numerous requests for training programs and although I am at the stage of my life where helping practitioners takes up most of my time I am always reluctant to simply hand over example programs. This is nothing to do with the current environment of secrecy and 'magic program' protection, my decision is based upon the fundamental need for practitioners to react specifically to the needs of the individual athlete in front of them.

Sure, there are some basic things that are common to all programs – progression, overload, recovery, etc – but it is nonsense to try to fit the athlete to the program. The key is to fit the program to the athlete and to do this there are some simple things to consider.

No matter what level of athlete you are working with, including the elite, the starting point is to find out 'where are they now'? Next thing to do is to look at the destination of the program – what are you preparing them for? For some this will be the next competition phase as seen in the pre-season campaigns for most team games. Again, for the senior team environment the preparation might be as complex as (a) attempting to be fresh enough to win the next game and, at the same time (b) continuing adaptation in readiness for the play-offs. For others it may be phase of preparation within a complex competition stage of the athletes life as seen with the super-elite track athlete who may have to peak across several competition phases in the year.

For the developing athlete the issue is far more complex and it is suggested that the destination is interpreted by aiming at a series of 'markers' along their development continuum that are appropriate to their maturation stage. These 'markers' form the passport to future success and there are some enlightened organisations that are clearly in agreement with this process. Rather than use competition results as the sole means of assessing progress or using 'end-stage' physical tests (Speed, Endurance, Power tests such as 10 - 40m Sprint Test; Beep Test; Jump and Reach; Medicine Ball Throws), some organisations are using markers such as:

Stage 1 – Where are they now? Use a basic Physical Competence test battery alongside a basic muscular-skeletal test battery. This process can be applied to the 9-15 age groups and is generic. Then develop all round efficiency in balance and coordination using such exercise streams as – Squat, Lunge, Push, Pull, Rotate, and Brace. Develop appropriate range of movement in every joint.

Stage 2 – Achievement of set standards in sports specific Physical Competence and Muscular-Skeletal assessment. Here the assessment is narrowed to the specifics of the sport and can include some 'Physical Quality' assessment in terms of Speed, Power and Endurance. This process can be applied to the 12-18 age groups and is built upon the previous period of all-round development.

Stage 3 – A maintenance of Physical Competence plus an advancement in the sports specific qualities demanded by the sport.

Remember that the developing athlete needs plenty of energy for growth, time and experiences for social development and sufficient time for their academic development. In their early 20's when 'push comes to shove' and performance attainment becomes the centre of their focus you will be thankful that you were patient and thorough in the formative years.

During an exchange of ideas with a practitioner the other day I was saddened to hear him give me the following illustration of the background of his athletes:

'The players (Under 6 – Under 20) are only active during the week at training – e.g. they do not do any PE at school or any other activities. They only play one sport for the year (for example our junior season runs for 9 months!!)

'We have a massive problem with general posture, basic movement skills and general muscular injuries. Interestingly our U6's and U8's move better and have better posture than our U10's and upwards so there is something going on in everyday life that is effecting these kids.'

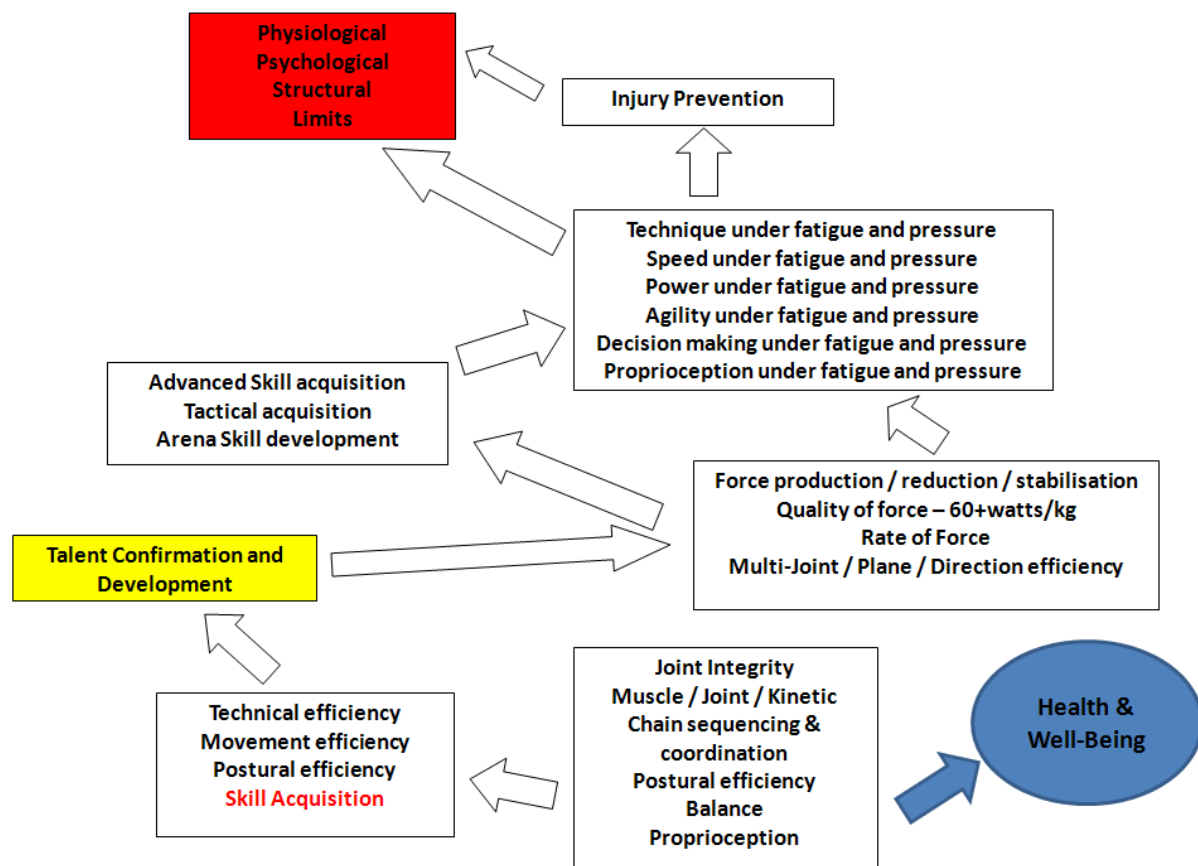
Here we have another illustration of the difficulties that each one of us face as we attempt to give young, developing athletes a sound grounding in a sport and at the same time try to keep them engaged for the longest period of time.

It may be that we have reached the stage where grimly hanging on to what we thought was the right thing to do is no longer applicable. If the younger generations are indeed less healthy, less active and less physically literate then to continue on a journey of sports skills acquisition as the sole focus will no longer work. Yes, this may engage them for a while and yes, some teams will win some local competitions but if their movement efficiency and movement consistency is not firmly bedded in for all time then their future and the sports future must be in doubt.

Most NGB's have amassed high quality resources mainly focused on skill acquisition and game sense. There are hundreds of drills and small-sided games that focus on skill development and early tactical awareness for the coach to call upon. Schemes of work and individual session plans are available for the coach to follow in the search for sports specific improvement. Where are the processes and progressions to increase the required physical qualities of the developing athlete so that they can execute these sports specific actions and postures?

A suggested journey follows.....

A Suggested Journey



At the top of the process is the destination – the long term aim of the program – the ability of the athlete to reach their physiological, psychological and structural limits. The journey starts simple and basic where the minimum outcome is a healthy athlete who is physically active and who displays all-round movement efficiency and enjoyment in multi-sport / activity participation.

By developing the fundamentals (physical literacy) the athlete can expect progression in their skill acquisition in whatever sport(s) they are committed to. With a physically literate athlete, well versed in all-round fundamental sports skills the Talent Confirmation and Development Stages can be productive for all concerned.

As this stage unfolds the maturing athlete can be exposed to more appropriate facets of a developing program where improved physical qualities can lead to more advanced performance development.

From this sensible, long term process can grow an athlete who can confidently enter into a stage of more advanced preparation in their late teens and early 20's. They should arrive at this point with consistency across all facets of their adaptation and be ready to be appropriately exposed to the rigours of high performance. They have now 'earned the right' to be challenged.

Oh! For the patience, resources, strategies and knowledge to see this really happen!