

# Journal of Coaching Education

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## BOOK REVIEW:

Fisher, R., & Bailey, R. (eds.). (2008). *Talent identification and development – The search for sporting excellence*. In Perspectives – The multidisciplinary series of physical education and sport science, Volume 9. Berlin, Germany: ICSSPE.

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Talent identification and development have been substantive topics of discussion for coaches and sport scientists for decades. The larger topic, long-term athlete development, gained global significance as early as the 1970s, with the explosion of astonishing performances by women of the former German Democratic Republic in the Olympic Games after less than a decade of dedicated development. Since then, the topic has ebbed and flowed through conversations of coaches and sport scientists who were resolved to find innovative ways to identify and develop athletes who could respond to intense training and competition and achieve sporting excellence. Fisher and Bailey, as editors, have collated multidisciplinary articles from around the world to address talent identification and development from various perspectives. They have skillfully woven approaches to talent identification and several development models to give readers a broad overview of talent identification and development within the context of sporting excellence.

The book's authors have made a strong case for sound, "...well-balanced and high quality physical education programs in schools as a basis for talent identification and development as well as for lifelong participation in sport and physical activity (p. 17)". They have also made a case for recognizing fundamental matters of children's growth and development patterns as well as children's needs and interests as children mature into adolescents and young adults. The authors have also included more contemporary advances in the knowledge base by commenting on the evolution of increasingly complex systems, often fueled by national interests in sport performance excellence, and the sophistication of methods used. Models designed for sporting excellence in the 1970s, based largely on physical performance parameters, have morphed into



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more insightful lines that recognize integrative approaches to athlete performance, providing increasing importance to each athlete's personal qualities and temperament as well as life experiences. Also taken into consideration by the authors was the way in which talent is formulated. This underscores the need to provide more opportunities for the potential to show itself along with recognition of the value of developmental programs and initiatives, which are built upon more developmental approaches that focus on the process of nature and nurture, particularly during a youngster's adolescent phase of growth.

The book is divided into two sections. The first involves disciplinary perspectives to talent identification and development. Bailey, Holt, Philippaerts, Coutts, Vaeyens, Cooke, and Burnett provide insight into philosophical, psychological, physiological, biomechanical and sociological areas that are written to reveal the important roles each discipline plays in the development of scientific knowledge and the science and art of coaching. All of the authors in this section have interwoven the importance of multi-disciplinary approaches to the topic of talent identification and development. Holt emphasized the importance of considering personal characteristics and environmental conditions when planning. Philippaerts, Coutts, and Vaeyens, along with Cooke, stressed the need to view each area of sport science in a broader context when considering talent identification and developmental models and programs. Burnett pinpointed socio-political, economic and psycho-social factors that impact athletes' elite performances and suggested cultural and sport science discipline balance in order for athletes to achieve sporting excellence.

The second section presents models and issues in talent identification development. Malina posed a superb exposé of issues and concepts relating to the topic and looked at what he called the "uniqueness of youth" (p.111). He also infused issues associated with heredity, the environment, and implications of talent development programs. Other authors (Reilly, Williams, and Richardson) consolidated the latest thinking of talent identification and development through an example of association football (soccer) and implications for youth. Cote and Fraser-Thomas provided a framework for basing healthy talent identification and development in youth sport. The framework also forged the importance of families, coaches, peers and school system personnel as vital socialization agents for athletes in the pursuit of performance excellence.

The editors and authors have skillfully woven the chapters into a harmonized tapestry on talent identification and development that coaches at every level can benefit from. The book, once read, has the potential to elevate the discussion between and among coaches and sport scientists so that focus and intensity of energy can be placed on the design of models that are holistic in their approach and practical for coaches and sport scientists in their continued quest to identify and develop athletes who could respond to intense training and competition in order to achieve sporting excellence.



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In order to keep the book's costs to a minimum, the International Council of Sport Science and Physical Education (ICSSPE) has produced the book in paperback form, using only black ink throughout. The book's layout is quite simple, yet effective, for readers. In addition to the usual preface and table of contents, the book contains two sections, as described above. The final pages are packed with resources on the topic, providing up-to-date internet sources, and lists of journals, reference books (encyclopedias and handbooks), congress/workshop proceedings, databases and directories. The book is number 9 in a series involving multidisciplinary approaches to topics of interest. Others include school sport and competition, physical activity and aging, the business of sport, sport and information technology, aspects of sport governance, health enhancing physical activity, sport for persons with a disability, and children, obesity and exercise – prevention, treatment and management of childhood and adolescent obesity.

The editors and authors of this book have impeccable credentials. Fisher and Bailey are both full professors at universities in the UK in the areas of physical and sport education. Authors combine nearly 200 years of teaching, service, and research in the areas of physical and sport education, sport science, and human growth and development. As leading authorities in their fields, they have provided meaningful perspectives on the topic. This book is one of the few available that amalgamates theoretical frameworks, varying perspectives and approaches, as well as possible applications for coaches and sport scientists. This book is a “must read” for coaches and sport scientists who, working collaboratively, continue to seek sporting excellence through the identification and development of talent.

