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The Developmental Road to Competition: A New Paradigm for the United States

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Summary of Presentation

Competition is a strong societal value in the United States. As the United States falls further behind in science and math, more programs are pushing to enhance the competition in education. Economically speaking, the U.S. competes worldwide in the pursuit of wealth. Our competitive values do not stop with education or economics, but also filter into all levels of sport. In the world of sport competition is foremost in an athlete's training, and it is time for us to examine a developmental approach to competition. Our present approach has produced athletes at the expense of the elimination of sub-elite performers. The Long Term Athlete Development (LTAD) Model provides inclusion, promotes the overall development of physical literacy, and supports involvement of all individuals at a self-selected level of activity across the lifespan.

LTAD is not about eliminating competition, but rather decreasing its emphasis during the early stages of learning. During the initial stages, LTAD stresses the development of fundamental movement skills, tactics, and problem-solving or decision-making strategies that form the foundation for further sport training. LTAD has a child-orientation rather than a professional orientation and is process rather than outcome based.

The LTAD model has the fundamental stage occurring in a specialized sport environment. Although the model encourages children to participate in numerous sports, most children participate in only one sport program. Sport specific environments tend to stress the fundamental skills important for that particular sport and minimize or ignore other fundamental skills, thus reducing the opportunity for the child to have the foundational skills to perform a variety of sport skills. Therefore, when children stop participating in specialized sport they are hesitant to switch sports and are likely to stop participating in physical activities.

To address this problem a Fundamental Athlete Development Model (FAD) is proposed. This model emphasizes that the fundamental stage must provide the child with an opportunity to develop the full range of fundamental skills in a non-sport specific environment (general movement programs). By doing so, children will have developed the foundational skills that will prepare them to be able to switch physical activities in which they participate throughout their lifetime.

The multifaceted structure of U.S. sports organizations, parents, coaches, and the reduction in school physical education programs present obstacles to the implementation of any new model of



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the athlete development model. The implementation process must involve buy-in from individual organizations, introduce the changes to all levels of sport, provide coaches with training and resources for FAD, provide resources for the parents, and stress importance of fundamental movement development in preparation of future physical educators.

Is the United States ready to travel the developmental road? A few organizations have boldly traveled this new road, and have taken the first strides toward a paradigm shift in athlete development in the United States. We can't wait any longer.



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Resources

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Author Bios

Jolynn Kuhlman is a professor and coordinator of the master's program in coaching at Indiana State University. She is president of the National Council for Accreditation of Coaching Education and a contributor to the “National Coaching Report: The State of Coaching in the U.S.A.”

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