

Buying in to CS4L – Long Term Athlete Development

After a few years of educating the sport community about the general seven-stage Canadian model for Long-Term Athlete Development (LTAD) it's time to take action and start implementing the principles of developmentally based sport rather than the current chronologically based system.

While bringing about change is a frightening proposition, it's hard to argue with the potential. Think about it.

LTAD provides us with the opportunity to:

- Change the culture of Canadian sport.
- Have a sport specific plan that is based on the same science and vision for all sports.
- Educate coaches with skills and techniques that are appropriate to their program.
- Review and change competition structures and schedules that make common sense.
- Promote the development of the full range of motor and sport skills by all sports to produce better athletes and healthier communities.
- Use Active Start and FUNdamentals stage resources across all sports and in all communities.
- Get more children active and hook them earlier to support and enhance the *Active for Life* concept throughout our lifetime.
- Work together so everyone including children will benefit.

For more details on the LTAD check out: www.ltad.ca.

Hearing the Message

Almost daily the coffee chat is about some negative sport experience from a game or competition from the previous night. We all hear and see it – children play too many games and are not learning the skills, children are forced too early to choose one sport, the use of tactic to win games, parents, coaches and even children yelling at referees.

What Can Be Done About It?

LTAD gives us a chance to get it right; to make everyone's, but especially children's sport experience much more positive. It's also proven that it's better for an athlete's development in the long run. The LTAD uses scientific research to conclude that it takes a minimum of 10 years and 10,000 hours of training for a talented athlete to reach elite levels. However, if an athlete isn't physically literate when they reach higher levels of sport, remedial training is required to correct the literacy shortcomings. Specializing in most sports before the ages of 12 –15 contributes to one sided, sport specific preparation, lack of basic movement and sport skills, over-use injuries, early burnout and early retirement.

Manitoba has some great examples of athletes that participated in other sports before they found tremendous success in another sport. Cindy Klassen played field hockey, field lacrosse and inline hockey until she started Speed skating at age 18. Clara Hughes started

Speed skating at 16 and cycling at 17. After winning Olympic medals in cycling, she returned to Speed skating at 28. Jennifer Botterill grew up playing Ringette and didn't play hockey until she was 13. She also played high-level Basketball and Ringette at Canada Games before she went on to play Hockey in the NCAA and be Canada's youngest member of the Olympic Women's Gold Medal Hockey Team. All of these women were involved in many sports and physical activities as children.

In order to move Canadian sport in this direction it will take conscious thought, superb communications and constant monitoring.

What can you do as a Major Player in the Sport System?

1. Educated yourself, your Board and others in your sport as to what CS4L – LTAD is and the principles that guide the model?
2. Search out your NSOs involvement in developing a sport specific LTAD – find out how you and your PSO can contribute.
3. Think about the implications/impacts it could have on your Sport in Manitoba.
4. Think about how your sport is currently delivered. Do you under- train and over- compete, do you have optimal competition calendars, in frequency and levels? Are athletes forced to specialize in your sport? At what age? Do you cut children from your programs at early developmental stages? Are coaches educated about growth, maturation and trainability principles? How are decisions made about athlete training and competition? Who drives the annual training and competition calendar?
5. What do you offer as a PSO for the development of fundamental motor skills? Are the ABCs incorporated into games and warm up activities? Do you partner with school programs or recreation and departments to deliver your programs? Do you partner with other sports to ensure your athletes are introduced to all of the ABC's at the right age and stage? Do you have the technical expertise to determine what skills should be taught at what ages or stages?
6. How can you communicate with parents and coaches to encourage them to learn and enforce the principles of LTAD?
7. Can you describe the pathway for athlete development in your sport? How does someone become a world champion? If athletes are cut from your programs do you re- direct them to other sports that they can train and perform well? How does your sport help transition from an athlete's competitive career to lifelong physical activity and participation in sport?

The first steps in implementing the LTAD are 'walking the talk'. By initiating conversation and discussion about the ages, stages and principles we can start the process of improving the sport delivery system and ultimately make it better for all athletes from an active start to active for life.

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