



The FA's Long-Term Player Development (LTPD) Model

By Craig Simmons

Following The FA's recent review of football, it became apparent that player development support was, to some extent, failing to meet the needs of school children as effectively as a Governing Body would wish. In spite of having introduced mini-soccer to communities and supported a number of schools, communities and club initiatives, there appeared to be some areas that were open to further improvement. The findings identified a lack of good football technique, physical skills and movement development at primary and secondary school ages and these developmental issues are now being addressed.

The recent FA review, under the direction of Sir Trevor Brooking, recommended the integration of all football in an effort to introduce a logical player development and coach education pathway for all.

During this time a Sport England initiative was introduced to Governing Bodies in the form of a National Long-Term Athlete Development programme. This model had been developed by Istvan Balyi, the renowned planner of long-term athlete development. The FA, together with Sport England, has subsequently combined to produce football's version of LTAD.

The original Long-Term Athlete Development (LTAD) statement from Sport England and Istvan Balyi reads;

"Coaches should remember that the principles and guidelines set out in the LTAD model are central to an evolving and flexible approach to developing sporting abilities. They should not be viewed as rigid rules. Coaches coach people! If a real player-centred coaching system is to be developed; then training, preparation, recovery and competition programmes – must account for individual difference".

Subsequently, each national Governing Body is now producing its own sport-specific development plan. The Football Association supports the principles of Sport England's Long-Term 'Athlete' Development (LTAD) programme whilst preferring the title Long-Term 'Player' Development (LTPD).



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Moving Forward

The FA's reaction to the review findings has been to increase the support available to those practitioners and supporters who work with children. The concept of a player development pathway is being produced in line with the ongoing coach education review for the coach, teacher and parent. This initiative will integrate LTPD into existing courses in all disciplines and levels of qualification (Table 1). The process aligns with all other information avenues which support the courses shown in Table 1 and includes technical, physical, psychological and social development.

Table 1: INTEGRATION OF LTPD INTO EXISTING COURSES ACROSS DISCIPLINES AND LEVELS

TECHNICAL	PHYSICAL	PSYCHOLOGY	SOCIAL
UEFA Pro Licence	Fitness Trainers	Level 5	Child Protection
UEFA 'A' Licence	FA & ScUK Skills Coach	Level 4	Soccer Parent
UEFA 'B' Licence	Online Fitness	Level 3	Drug Awareness
1st4Sport Level 2	Treatment of Injury.	Level 2	Equity and Ethics
1st4Sport Level 1	First Aid	Level 1	Diversity Awareness
Goalkeeping 1 - 4	Emergency Aid	Online Courses	Racism Awareness
FA Youth Coaches			

Given the diversity of participation in football, The FA has decided to adopt an eight-stage model of Long-Term Player Development as shown in Table 2 (over leaf). This example shown describes an age appropriate development pathway over time.

The recommendations for the younger age groups are in accord with the schools age group categories:

- Primary school ages (small-sided games played) stages 1 and 2.
- Secondary school ages (11 v 11 games played) stages 3 and 4.
- School leaver age groups are represented in stages 5 and 6.
- Stage 7 produces the mature player example.
- Stage 8 refers to any participant who is retained within football.



Building flexibility around the model accommodates the diverse needs of all players and support staff, whilst the central model offers the foundation for the varied strands of participants. Eg. schools, counties, communities, professional clubs, disability teams, futsal, free play etc.

All have the opportunity for developing their own particular Long-Term Player Development strand of the central programme with support from the National Governing Body. As such, The Football Association presents a model which supports a fully inclusive participation policy for all.

Terminology within the LTPD model: Eg. FUNdamentals - Learning to Train - Training to Train - Training to Compete 1 - Training to Compete 2 - Training to Win 1 - Training to Win 2 - Retention. Are simply descriptors of a progressive development pathway over time.

(Full explanations for these terms can be found within the suggested reading following the summary.)

The Football Association Introduction to Long-Term 'Player' Development (LTPD)

The FA LTPD model consists of eight stages. Its flexibility allows for varied strands of participation, ongoing change and varied levels of ability and maturity.

Table 2: LONG-TERM 'PLAYER' DEVELOPMENT (LTPD)

STAGES 1 AND 2	STAGES 3 AND 4	STAGES 5 AND 6	STAGES 7 AND 8
1. FUNdamentals (FUNdamentals) 5 to 8 years old Ages may overlap ±	3. Developing practice (Training to Train) 11 to 14 years old Ages may overlap ±	5. Training for competition (Training to Compete 2) 16 to 18 years old Ages may overlap ±	7. Training to win (Training to Win 2) 20 years old plus Ages may overlap ±
2. Enjoying practice (Learning to Train) 8 to 11 years old	4. Understanding competition (Training to Compete 1) 14 to 16 years old	6. Developing winning (Training to Compete 1) 18 to 20 years old	8. Retaining people in football (Retention) Any age applies
PRIMARY SCHOOL AGE	SECONDARY SCHOOL AGE	SECONDARY SCHOOL AGE	MATURE ADULT AGE

(Adapted from Balyi, Hills, Simmons and Way 2003)

Key Issues

Research has shown that young children in sport are exposed to unreasonable amounts of competition with too little practice time being made available. This circumstance invariably denies quality technique development and reduces the physical movement benefits that sporting practice time offers. Psychological and social development may also be adversely affected by this over-competitive process.

The FA Long-Term Player Development model indicates that time spent in primary school age practice compared to games should ideally produce a ratio of four parts practice time to one part competitive small-sided game time. Progressing at secondary school age to a ratio of, eg, two or three parts practice time to one part 11 v 11 game time. Balancing these activities requires local information and consideration of the needs of the players concerned.

The ratios suggested are not prescriptive but reflect examples of learning environments which offer players varied opportunities for development.

In addition to increased quality practice time, 'periodisation' is also considered. This term strongly recommends annual planning programmes which allow for specialised development periods designed to meet individual needs. These building blocks are considered fundamental to long-term benefits.



The model has at its core a picture of age and maturity-appropriate activity. Beginning with actual age (chronological), this aspect also takes account of varying maturity status and the impact this has in groups of mixed ability players.

What Occurs and When

The occurrences shown in Table 3 are self-explanatory examples of the first six stages of the model and are not considered complete or rigid. They reflect different ages and stages of development which demonstrate appropriateness and windows of opportunity for the four disciplines.

The younger age groups demonstrate significant developmental changes compared to the 20-year-old plus ages and as such are the examples within these tables.

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Table 3: EXAMPLES OF THE FIRST SIX STAGES OF LTPD

PRIMARY SCHOOL AGE	TECHNICAL	PHYSICAL	PSYCHOLOGICAL	SOCIAL
5 to 11 years old (BY DATE OF BIRTH)	Basic Techniques "Ball and the wall" activities	A. B. C. s - Agility. Balance. Co-ordination. Speed	Enthusiasm	Fun and enjoyment.
Chronological age has to take account of the variability of gender, ability, maturation and the developmental needs of the individual	Improving Basic skills Group practice Games as the teacher	K. G. B. - Kinesthesia (movement). Gliding (ice & snow etc) Buoyancy (water)	Imagination & Exploration Avoiding anxiety and boredom	Support from parents, schools and clubs. Inclusion and participation.
In 2 LTPD Phases 5 - 8 & 8 - 11	Interchange of positions Invasion game principles Playing other sports	C. P. K. - Catching. Passing. Kicking. R. J. T. - Running. Jumping. Throwing	Progressive introduction to mental skills Progressive group activities	Form relationships. Safe environment. Simple rules and ethics.
		Motor control. Multi-skills. Mixed activities	Understanding games	Group behaviour can be influenced as a foundation.



SECONDARY SCHOOL AGE	TECHNICAL	PHYSICAL	PSYCHOLOGICAL	SOCIAL
11 to 16 years old (by date of birth) Chronological age has to take account of the variability of gender, ability, maturation and the developmental needs of the individual IN 2 LTPD PHASES 11 - 14 & 14 - 16	Refining techniques Skill execution under pressure Attacking & Defending principles Introduction to tactics and team work Rotation	Adolescent growth spurt Aerobic development Changing shape. Early / late maturation Athleticism changes Increasing variation between players	Self concept Awareness Responsibility Goal setting Confidence Coping strategies	Accept responsibility Fair play Peer group features Values and beliefs Appropriate behaviours Personal and group responsibilities

SCHOOL LEAVER AGE	TECHNICAL	PHYSICAL	PSYCHOLOGICAL	SOCIAL
16 to 20 years old (by date of birth) Chronological age has to take account of the variability of gender, ability, maturation and the developmental needs of the individual IN 2 LTPD PHASES 16 - 18 & 18 - 20	Becoming technically proficient Executing the correct technique on demand Contributing to team play involving space & time Producing the techniques required to support both defending & attacking strategies	Muscle mass gains. Strength improves. Power increases. Lactate training. Improving recovery. Full potential is progressively achieved.	Lifestyle skills. Developing a stable temperament. Understanding match play. Communication. Advanced coping strategies are developed.	Developing emotional stability. Being socially responsible. Recognising cultural differences. Dealing with conflict. Appreciating others.

The example shown below would appear to be a logical description of a suitable foundation for progress.

The football player at primary school age can start to experience LTPD within these three simple features.

1. Skill acquisition – The three interwoven phases are:
 - I. Technique development – mastering the ball
 - II. Physical development – athletic movement
 - III. Combining and effectively executing the correct technique, movement and decision on demand.

2. For the coach in a football context two factors to avoid are 'Anxiety and Boredom'.

- Anxiety may occur primarily when the coach expects too much from young players
- Boredom may occur when the coach expects too little.

3. The priorities for the primary school aged player are:

- To have fun and improve their techniques
- To develop their movement and discover the benefits of learning.

Surely this applies at all ages!



Question

How will these principles be maintained throughout the golden age of learning?

One answer may be found in the effective education of quality skills coaches:

- These practitioners can provide the enjoyable and challenging environments in which the players develop their techniques.
- This atmosphere can also offer opportunities for improving the players' movement skills whilst learning from a range of experiences.

With this in mind, the ideal scenario for both short and long-term player development is to meet the individual developmental needs of the players as often and as realistically as possible.

Summary

LTPD is in accord with the schools physical education and sports programmes which provide opportunities for children to experience a multi-sport environment before they choose their preference – hopefully football.

This choice of sport will to some extent depend on the impression the children have during their football activity.

Therefore, it is in everyone's interest in football to make this participation as enjoyable as possible and to the point where children are motivated to come back for more.

Acknowledgement: Bayli, Hills, Simmons and Way 2003

Note: Examples of player development issues in this article are addressed in a general manner. It is recognised that specific needs of children require individual reviews at a personal and local level.

Views expressed are with awareness in mind. They are not prescriptive in any way and are demonstrating the many alternatives available.

Additional information is available through:

- The Sports Coach UK (ScUK) LTAD booklet titled "Coaching for Long-term Athlete Development" ISBN - 13: 978-1-902523-70-9 ISBN - 10: 1-902523-70 -9
- From their skills courses which can be found at www.sportsCoachuk.org
- Sports Coach UK (ScUK) Phone; 0113 274 4802

Craig Simmons has been making a significant contribution to The Football Association Coach Education programme since 1972. He has been involved all aspects of development and performance related to the maturing young player. In 1997 he was appointed as Player Development Adviser to The FA which opened a new career pathway including a Masters Degree in Sports Science. This background has supported extensive involvement in all aspects of player development. He is currently focused on the recently introduced 'Long-Term Player Development' (LTPD) model which supports all football in England and is described within this article.

Your contribution to this emerging programme is welcome. Please feel free to forward your ideas on this subject to: Craig.Simmons@TheFA.com