Why we need a Long Term Athlete Development Model

The current system for athlete development emphasizes winning and competing, instead of maximizing the windows of accelerated adaptation to training and developing fundamental sport skills.

The current emphasis on outcome (winning) as opposed to process (skill development) is seen as a shortcoming in the sports system. Such practices may lead to one-sided preparation, early burn out, lost potential or over-training.

- Developmental athletes over-compete and under-train
- Adult training and competition programs are superimposed on developing athletes
- Training methods and competition programs designed for male athletes are superimposed on female athletes
- Preparation is geared to the short-term outcome of winning, and not to the process
- Chronological rather than developmental age (maturity) is used in training/competition planning
- Coaches largely neglect the critical periods of accelerated adaptation to training
- Fundamental movement skills and sport skills are not taught properly
- The most knowledgeable coaches work at the elite level; volunteer coaches work at the developmental level where quality, trained coaches are essential
- Parents are not educated about LTAD
- Developmental training needs of athletes with a disability are not well understood
- In most sports, the competition system hinders athlete development
- There is no talent identification system
- There is no integration between physical education programs in the schools, recreational community programs, track clubs and elite competitive programs
- Sports specialize too early in an attempt to attract and retain participants.

The development and implementation of the LTAD model will enable coaches to positively affect the development of athletes in track and field.

Introducing young athletes to fundamental motor skills at an early stage provides them with the opportunity to perfect their skills before demanding competitive schedules are introduced and winning becomes an important training outcome.

Numerous sport organizations in countries around the world are now showing significant interest in a LTAD model. Investment in the implementation of LTAD will secure long term success for Track and Field (Athletics) by using this strategy to influence delivery.

Coaches are urged to become familiar with the maturation principles for young athletes and apply these principles to training, competition and recovery protocol.

In practice, all coaches working with young people have to concern themselves with the health and well being of the athlete and their development.