

8 Key Factors to Develop Talent

Factor #1 – 10-Year Rule

It takes a minimum of 10 years or 10 000 hours of training to reach an elite level in any field or sport. Many studies have shown that this is the minimum commitment to reach your best and become a dominant force in your field.

Here are some facts:

- ✓ U.S. Olympians begin their sport participation at the average age of 12.0 for males and 11.5 for female.
- ✓ Most Olympians reported a 12- to 13-year period of talent development from their sport introduction to making an Olympic team.

So, it basically takes a minimum of 10 years for a softball player to reach the elite level (college, international).

Factor #2 – The FUNdamentals

FUNdamentals movement skills and sports skills lead to physical literacy. Physical literacy is how competent you are in movement and sports skills. It should be developed before the onset of puberty or adolescent growth spurt.

At a young age, the focus should be on developing overall athleticism that includes ABC's (Agility, Balance, Coordination, Speed) and other generic sports skills such as jumping, climbing, catching, throwing, walking, skating, skipping, kicking, dribbling, and so on.

There are 3 sports that provide just about all of the fundamentals found in all other sports:

Athletics (track and field): run, wheel, jump, or throw

Gymnastics: agility, balance, coordination, and speed.

Swimming: for anything related to water and water safety reasons.

Factor #3 – Specialization

Softball is a late-specialization sports which means that you should specialize in softball before the age of 12 or 13 years old. You should participate in multiple sports. The trend right now in North America is to pick one sport and play as many games as possible, do camps, take lessons, spend hours practicing without doing anything else. This is detrimental to the long term development of the young softball player.

Specializing too early leads to:

- ✓ One-sided , sport-specific preparation (i.e. a good softball player but an average athlete)
- ✓ Lack of ABC's, the basic movements and sports skills
- ✓ Overuse injuries
- ✓ Early burnout
- ✓ Early retirement from training and competition
- ✓ Decrease in performance at the top level because of lack of athleticism

Practice multiple physical activities until 11-12 years and specialize in softball only after that age.

Factor #4 – Developmental Age

Chronological age is the time elapsed after your birth. Developmental age refers to the one's physical, psychological , cognitive, and emotional maturity.

The developmental age of an athlete plays a big role in its development. Often, kids that are early maturers (i.e. a 12 years old girls looks like a 16 years old) will often appear better or be more dominant on the field because of their physical maturation.

This leads to being selected more often, get better coaching and more playing time which is often done to the detriment of the less developed kid. We need to pay attention because the late maturers will often catch up and pass them up later. That's why we need not to give up on those late maturers.

Factor #5 – Trainability

Trainability can be defined to how trainable something is. The 5 basics S's of training and performance are Stamina (endurance), Strength, Speed, Skill, and Suppleness (flexibility). Each of these have their own optimal window of trainability. That means that during these windows, that specific quality will respond very well to training.

Optimal Windows of Trainability

- ✓ Stamina – Before onset of puberty.
- ✓ Strength – Immediately after the onset of menarche (beginning of periods) in girls and 2 years about the beginning of puberty in boys.
- ✓ Speed – Between the ages of 7-9 and 13-16 in boys and 6-8 and 11-13 in girls.
- ✓ Skill – Between the ages of 9-12 in boys and 8-11 for girls.
- ✓ Suppleness – Between the ages of 6 and 10 for both genders.

One thing to keep in mind: all systems and all physical qualities are always trainable at any age. If you train it , you will get better.

Factor #6 – Mental, Cognitive, and Emotional Development.

To reach the elite level, the athlete has to go beyond physical, technical, and tactical development. The mental, cognitive, and emotional development need to be enhanced as well.

Just about every coach and player will tell you the mental game is anywhere between 50 and 90% of the total performance yet we barely spend any time training it !

Factor # 7 – Periodization

It's a big word to say that you need to progress things logically. Don't focus on drag bunt before you can actually drop a good sacrifice bunt down consistently or don't work on a screwball until you can throw strikes consistently along with a good change-up. Focus on the fundamentals first and progress things in logical manner.

Factor #8 – Calendar Planning for Competition

A big problem in North America, we play too many games and we don't practice enough. You should spend at least the same number of hours practicing as you spend playing games. Yet, in most cases, it's far from being the case.

Of course, you get better in games but you don't get that many repetitions of anything and it's not the time either to fix someone's mechanics. This has to be done in practices.

Think about all of those factors and see how, as a coach, a player or an athlete, you can utilize that information to help yourself become a better athlete in the long.

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