

# Understanding Talent within a club context



# What is talent?

Oxford Dictionary definition:

**noun**

natural aptitude or skill:

*“he possesses more talent than any other player”*



## Do you agree?



# What is talent?

Everyone defines 'talent' differently

- We often label young athletes as 'talented' as a result of only their performance outcome
- The word is often used interchangeably with 'giftedness' which implies a purely natural occurrence with no effort involved
- We need to have a clear understanding of what 'talent' really is before we can identify and develop it



# What is talent?

There are a number of reasons why young athletes stand out from their peers and appear to have talent:

- Maturation
- Birthdate
- Small talent pool
- More time on task





# Maturation

Young athletes always fall into four different age categories:

- Chronological age
- Biological age
- Training age
- Relative age



# Relative Age Effect

Birthday at the start of an age-group cut-off date perform better than athletes

vs

Birthdays towards the end of the date range

Think of

U15 to U17 = up to 2 years difference

U17 to U20 = up to 3 years difference

+ biological age = >6 years difference

Junior to Senior?



# Junior to Senior Transition

## Will athletes performing well at age-groups be successful seniors?

- A study of 560 top 20 Under 15 athletes revealed that 10 years later only **7%** were still ranked in the top 20 for any event
- Athletes tracked from Under 15 level in 2005 to 2010 had a retention rate of **48%** over the six year period
- 90% of young athletes in the sample competed in the same events in 2010 as they did in 2005 suggesting **high levels of early specialisation**





# Time on Task

Athletes develop at different rates. Those who start earlier or practice more will display a higher skill and fitness levels.

Some athletes will have an older 'training age' because of:

- Their family (they may have started learning the sport from a young age)
- The school they go to (more practice)
- Other sports they do (transferrable skills)
- How much they practice on their own



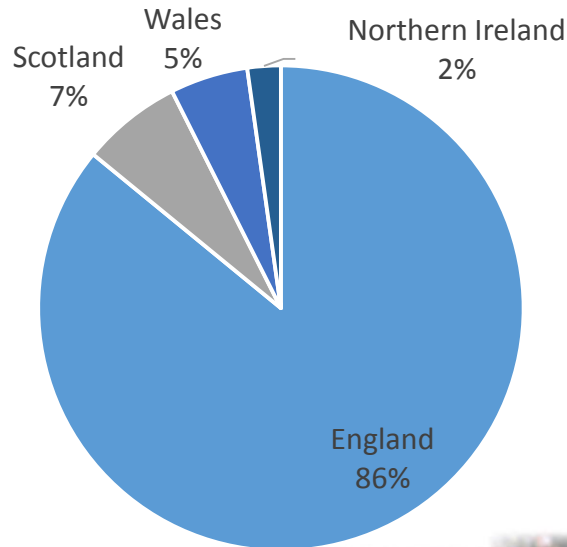


# Talent Pool

Scotland has a small population – only 5 million which is 10% of the British population

Be aware that many sports have a limited talent pool at age group level

**% U15 Boys Sub 2min 10sec Performance**



A sub 2min 10sec performance in the 800m by an U15 male would place them in the top 9 best Scottish athletes, but only top 135 in the UK.



# What is 'Talent' – Key Points

Rather than having any innate ability, young athletes who stand out in age-groups are highly likely to fit into one or more of the following categories:

- Physically mature
- Older in their age-group
- Competing in a small talent pool
- Have more time-on-task

So are you really seeing 'talent' or are you seeing one of the above when you coach young athletes?

If so, what really is talent?



# Nurturing Talent

## The Role of the Club



# Nurturing Talent in the Club

Early vs late specialisation

Developing the necessary physical requirements

Understanding the development process

Developing the right behaviours

Additional areas of support





# Early vs Late Specialisation



# Early VS Late Specialisation

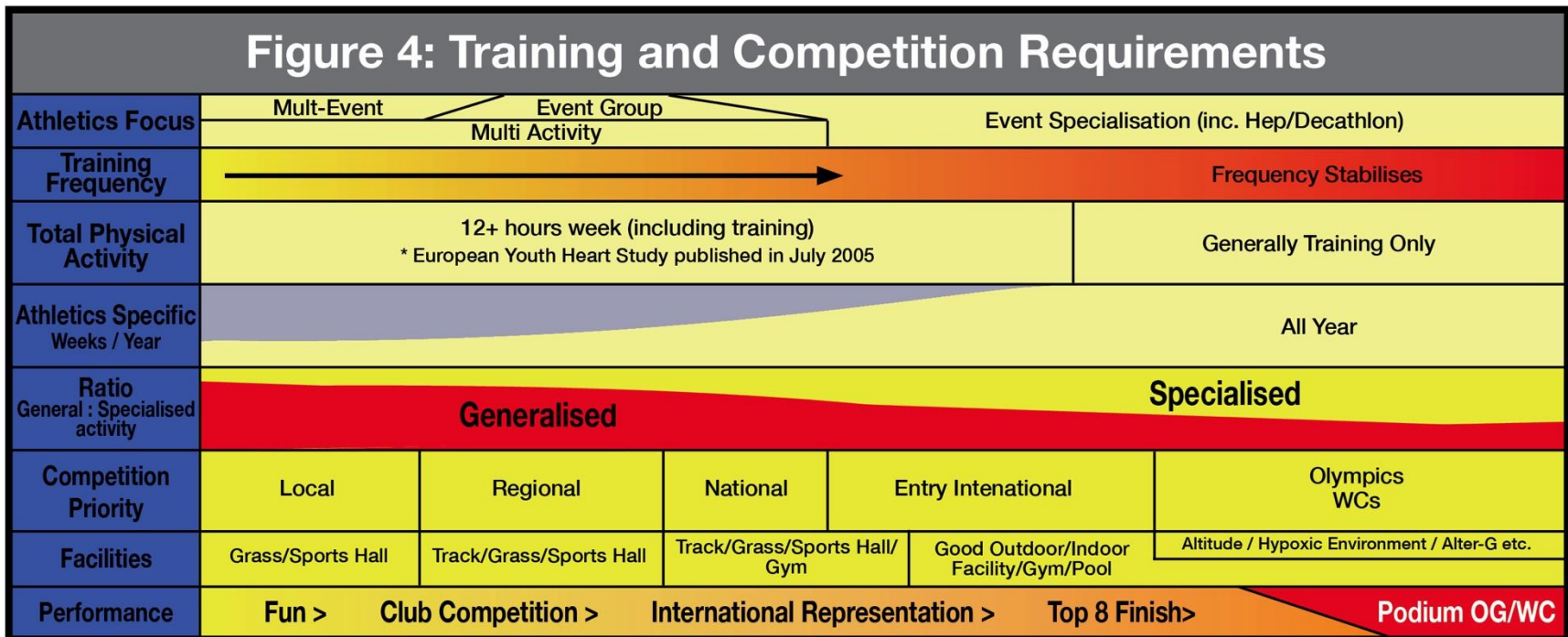


BRITISH ATHLETICS

## scottishathletics Athlete Development Model



Developmental Age +/-																		
Chrono. Age	9	10	11	12	13	14	15	16	17	18	19	20	21	22	23	24	25	26+
Stage of Development	Pre-Puberty			Puberty						Post-Puberty				Adulthood				
Education	Primary			Secondary				Further Education		Employment Higher Education / University								



# Early vs Late Specialisation

Studies have proven that taking a sport-specific training approach with athletes under the age of 14 can, in the short-term, improve sports performance...however...

This approach is detrimental to long-term performance and overall success in the sport

Outcomes of a 14 year study with 9-12 year olds...



# Short-term or Long-term Success?

## Early specialisation

- Quick performance improvement
- Best performance achieved at 15-16 years because of quick adaptation
- Inconsistency of performance in competitions
- By age of 18 many athletes were burned out
- Prone to injury because of forced adaptation

## Early diversification

- Steady performance improvements
- Best performance at 18+ the age of physiological and psychological maturation
- Consistency of performance in competitions
- Longer athlete life
- Fewer injuries





# Early vs Late Specialisation

Don't push for short-term, early age athletic performance

Understand the differences between biological ages versus chronological age

Technique, Technique, Technique

**Kids are not miniature adults**



If the athlete has gone through a good long term progression, they should be fully prepared for training at the highest intensity levels



# Implications for Competitions

## Appropriate competitions

- Right competition at the right time for the athlete

## Level of competition

- Moving up an age group
- Open graded competitions

## Number of competitions

- Season (indoor / outdoor)
- Week
- On a day / weekend?



# Implications for Competitions

Clubs needs vs athletes' needs

Leagues – fit for purpose?

Pool of athletes available – are they utilised?

- Fronting the best team at every competition
- Giving every athlete an opportunity to compete

Event Specific Competitions

Success at U13 / U15, or success at senior level?

What is more important for the club?

What is more important for the athlete?



# Developing physical requirements





# What things really look like (or we should guard against)

Sports-specific 'OUTCOME'  
training

Sports-specific  
'DEVELOPMENT' training

Fundamentals

**This is where we can  
make a difference  
right now**

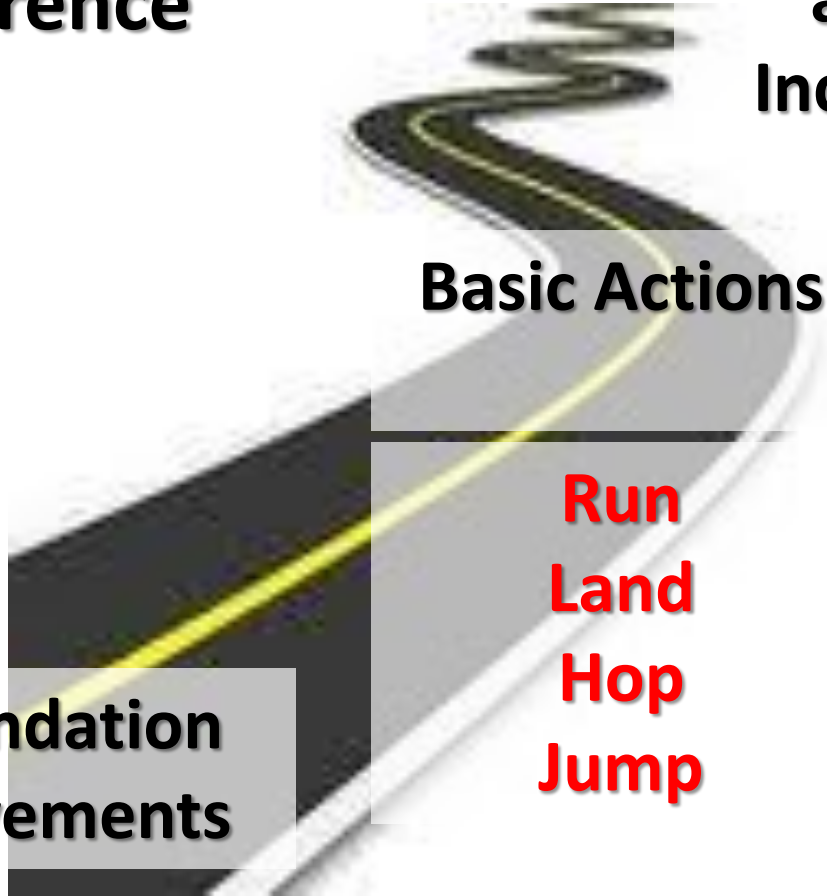
**Sports Specific  
activity  
Inc. Games**

**Basic Actions**

**Run  
Land  
Hop  
Jump**

**Foundation  
Movements**

**Squat, Lunge,  
Brace**



*“...the physical competence to do the technical stuff”*

Keep physical competence development **one step ahead** of technical development



# Understanding the development process





# The development process

Successful athletes focus on **effort** instead of **outcomes** e.g. executing a race tactics rather than times and positions

## Outcome/Performance Focussed Athletes

- Compare with others not themselves
- Lose enjoyment for the sport
- Lose confidence when they don't perform
- Put pressure on themselves
- More nervous and scared of performance

## Effort/Learning Focussed Athletes

- Only compare against themselves and so more in control
- Enjoy the sport
- Less nervous and more self confident
- Focus on their own development, not others
- Make more successful athletes



# Developing the right behaviours



# Developing the Right Behaviours

Attitude, Hard work, Commitment and Discipline to make a **permanent** contribution to their lives and the lives of others

Perseverance, Respect and Humility to inter-act positively with others



# Developing the Right Behaviours

Mindset is a belief about ability





# Developing the right behaviours

	A fixed athlete	A growth athlete
Believe..	...talent is something you are born with and you have it or you don't	...talent is a process of learning and is <b>NOT</b> set in stone
Focus on...	...showing off (or hiding) their ability	...learning how to develop their ability
<b>Effort</b>	..believe things will come easily because they have talent but there are some things they will never be able to do	...believe anything is possible and see effort and understanding as the way to develop skills
<b>Challenges</b>	..avoid challenges they struggle with because they make them look less talented	...embrace challenges as learning opportunities whether they can do them <b>YET</b> or not
<b>Set backs</b>	..give up easily or lack focus in areas that they find difficult and stick to what they can do	...persist following setbacks and see it as part of the learning process and <b>NOT</b> as a way of defining their ability
<b>Negative feedback</b>	..ignore useful negative feedback as their focus is on what you can do well	...learn from criticism and see it as an important part of understanding how to improve
<b>Ownership</b>	...feel it's not their fault if things don't work out	..understand they need to drive the process
As a result...	...plateau early and under achieve	...maximise potential

# Developing the right behaviours

The 24 hour athlete...

If they don't handle their lives outside the sport, they won't handle the sport



They can't lead two lives



# Role of the Club

How are you developing your coaches?

How are you providing education for parents?

- Understanding their role?
  - Importance of family support
  - Leave The Coaching To The Coach
  - Support Competitive Environments

How are the club educating the athletes

- The role of the coach?



# Role of the Club

## Financial Support

- Transition to senior level
- Warm weather training
- Bringing in coaching expertise





# Summary

Talent is NOT athletes who stand out from their peers in junior performances

Talent IS:

- Young athletes who recognise their strengths and weaknesses and **work hard** on improving all physical and technical components of their sport
- Young athletes who understand the long-term development process in becoming an elite senior and the **challenges** they will face in the future
- Young athletes who consistently try to display growth mindset behaviours and endeavour to **change** any fixed mindset beliefs



# Nurturing Talent Environment



- Athlete needs centred
- Coach drives knowledge and understanding in four key areas
- Parents, club and school reinforce messages



Success



what people think  
it looks like

Success



what it really  
looks like