



SOFTBALL CANADA'S ATHLETE DEVELOPMENT MATRIX

[GOLD MEDAL PROFILE
INTEGRATED]





Softball Canada's Athlete Development Matrix (ADM)

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

A tremendous amount of time and energy was invested in creating Softball Canada's Athlete Development Matrix. We were very fortunate to be able to access some of the most knowledgeable and experienced experts both in the field of softball specifically and in the ancillary areas impacting athlete development. Their input was critical in ensuring the information

contained within the guide was both relevant and leading edge ensuring it would serve as a powerful resource for Softball in Canada.

The successful development of this guide is the result of the many long hours our contributors have given of their time, expertise and knowledge. Without this

valuable collaboration and teamwork, none of this would be possible. Softball Canada would like to thank all those involved for their insights, leadership and generosity in helping us build the very best pathway to develop the very best athletes.

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Softball Canada's Athlete Development Matrix (ADM)

WHAT IS AN ATHLETE DEVELOPMENT MATRIX?

An Athlete Development Matrix (ADM) is an outline of the skills and attributes of athletes progressing through each stage of development to providing the greatest probability of success to the individual as they mature - not just with athletic success but also participation for health and social benefits.

Softball Canada's ADM is a document to help guide coaches and steer the National Coaching Certification Program (NCCP) content. It lays out in great detail what a player should be able to do at each stage of **their** Long-Term Athlete Development. Softball's ADM tries to ensure that players do not miss critical skills early in learning the game - therefore leading to more successful softball development.

WHO IS IT FOR?

The Athlete Development Matrix is a document designed to help guide coaches and administrators as they work together to develop athletes and is the foundation in which Softball Canada aligns its various resources including coach certification and athlete program development. For parents the ADM should act as a directory of skills that their child's coaches will be teaching them throughout the season.

The ADM is NOT a "cookbook" for high performance excellence, but rather a guide to developing all players to maximize their enjoyment of the sport - and to ensure that those players who have the talent and drive to become World Class Athletes have the necessary fundamental foundation by learning the correct skills at the appropriate stage of development.

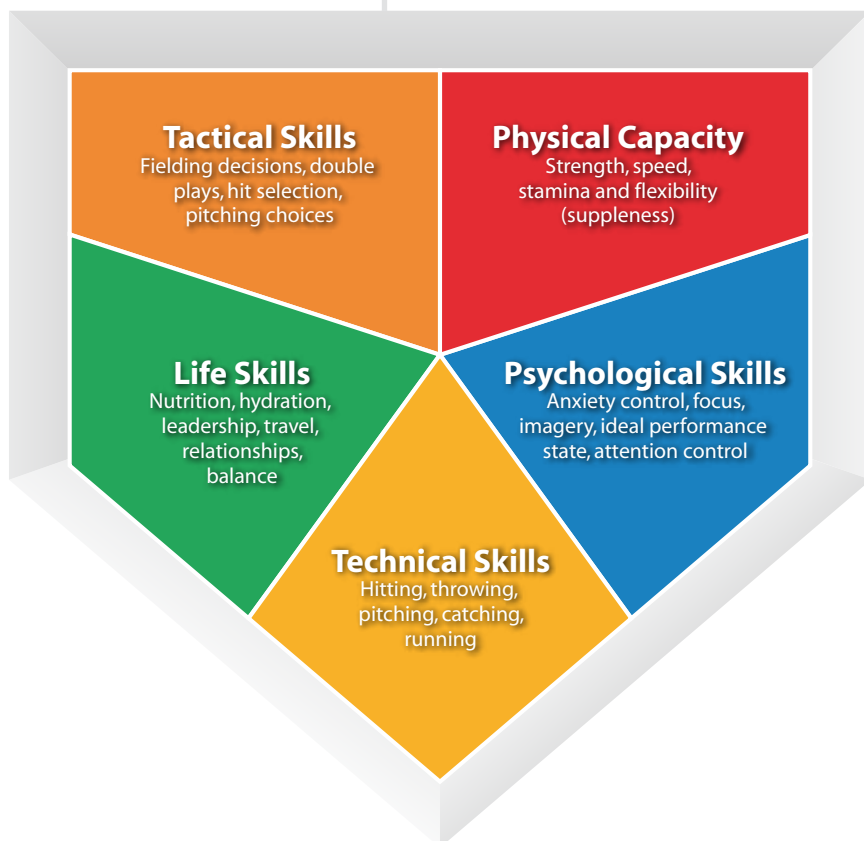
THE FIVE SEGMENT MODEL

To organize the multiple aspects of development in an easy-to-follow format for coaches, Softball Canada's Long Term Player Development utilizes a Five Segment Model..

- ♦ The **sport specific technical skills (hitting, throwing, etc)** required and
- ♦ The **sport specific tactical skills (decisions, double plays, pitching choices, etc)** needed to play the sport
- ♦ The **physical capacities (speed, strength, endurance and flexibility)** required of the sport
- ♦ The **sport psychology (mental, imagery, focus) skills** needed, and
- ♦ The **life skills (teamwork, decision making, etc)** that support effective athlete development.



The **Softball** Matrix was developed by Softball experts, in consultation with experts in adolescent growth and development and sport performance, based on the generic **Sport for Life** Athlete Development Matrix.





Softball Canada's Athlete Development Matrix (ADM)

WHAT'S NEW IN VERSION 2?

As new research and information comes to light, we must continue to update and improve our LTPD framework. Following the lead of Sport for Life and Own the Podium, Softball Canada has incorporated several changes to our model moving forward.

UPDATED SOFTBALL TECHNICAL/TACTICAL SKILLS TABLES

Some of the most significant changes you will see, will be the technical and tactical skills laid out in the tables of each stage of development. These changes stemmed from updates to the generic LTAD model, feedback from softball experts and the greater softball community but in large part by aligning Softball's Athlete Development Matrix with our Gold Medal Profile. The Gold Medal Profile (GMP) defines the skills and abilities required to achieve podium performances and recognition at the highest level of play (Olympics, Pan American Games & World Championships).

ADDITION OF THE AWARENESS AND FIRST INVOLVEMENT STAGES

Awareness promotes an understanding of opportunities to get involved in sport and physical activity. It highlights opportunities for persons of all abilities to participate in sport, become an athlete, and go as far as their ability and motivation will take them. In Awareness, prospective participants and leaders are informed of the range of activities available and how they can take part.

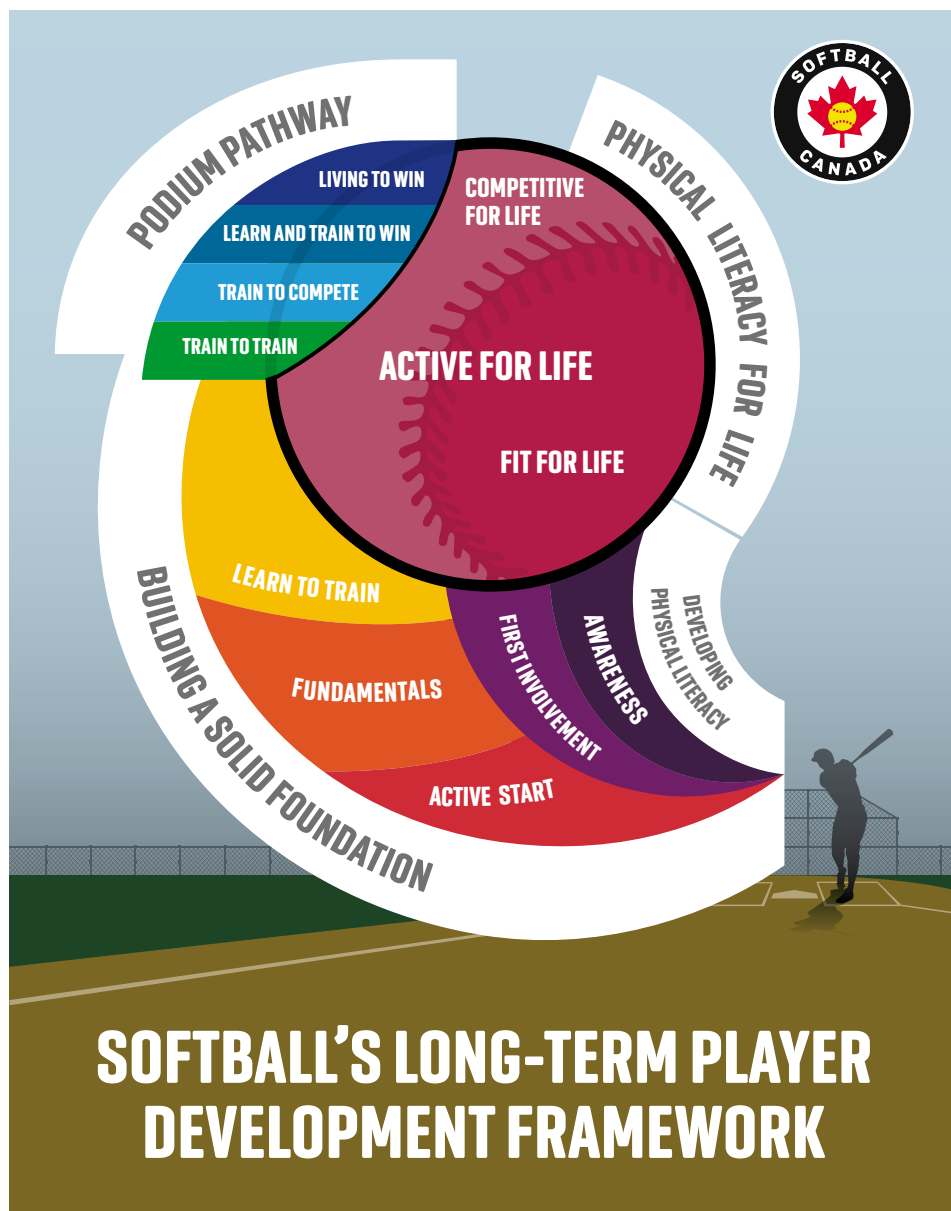
First involvement refers to the first experiences participants have in sport. In this phase it is critical to ensure individuals have a positive first experience in an activity as negative first experiences can lead to non-participation. Organizations and leaders need to create a safe, welcoming, and inclusive environment for participants with developmentally appropriate instruction, adapted equipment, and facilities with a program orientation they will nurture the desire and confidence to participate for life. Clear direction should be provided to participants with regarding their second involvement.

NEW SOFTBALL CANADA LONG-TERM PLAYER DEVELOPMENT FRAMEWORK

As a result of changes being made to the overall Long-Term Development in Sport and Physical Activity framework – Softball's model has also updated some important pieces:

- ♦ First Involvement and Awareness are integral to everyone's initial experiences in sport and physical activity.
- ♦ Physical Literacy is not confined to the early stages of development and can happen throughout a participant's life.
- ♦ The Podium Pathway describes Softball's excellence stages and specifically applies to athletes on a trajectory towards podium results at the highest level of Softball. It encompasses both the Gold Medal Profile and Winning Style of play (WSP). The WSP is derived from competition results and is the progression of performance benchmarks required to move through the Podium Pathway and successfully reach the Olympic podium as it applies to team sports.

Our updated Long Term Player Development Model graphic reflects these changes.





Softball Canada's Athlete Development Matrix (ADM)

GOLD MEDAL PROFILE STANDARDS (FEMALE)

The Gold Medal Profile (GMP) defines the skills and abilities required to achieve podium performances and recognition at the highest level of play (Olympics, Pan American Games & World Championships). The Winning Style of Play is the progression of performance benchmarks required to move through the pathway and successfully reach the podium as it applies to team sports - like softball. The GMP and WSP skills and attributes for softball have been identified within the Athlete Development Matrix (ADM) with this 🍁. The Gold Medal Profile Standards table outlines the average and exceptional standards as laid out by Softball Canada. The table (available for download at softball.ca) includes not only technical and tactical skills but also life, mental and physical skills, all of which hold equal importance. They are based on validated metrics and benchmarks collected by experts in softball. These standards are only applicable to competitive, not recreational athletes and can give coaches, parents and athletes the ability to recognize where areas of improvements in their skill development can be made.

These standards can and should act as goals to work towards as an athlete's development progresses, but it is incredibly important to note that an athlete will not get to the highest level of play by only focusing on these skills. Each of these standards are influenced by a number of variables, and that should be kept in mind when interpreting these standards. In softball, it is vital that athletes play multiple positions and realize that the skills needed to achieve a podium performance need be fostered during an athlete's early development.

Coaches should also note that these standards are based on average developing athletes, it is important that late developers not be overlooked especially during sensitive periods of maturation. While the GMP standards begin within the Train to Train stage, it is in the best interest of athletes to apply these standards during the latter part of the stage in order to allow athletes as much time as possible to mature.

Softball Canada is working with our Men's National Team Program to collect and analyze data comparable to the Women's Program in order to make it available to our members in the same manner.

THINGS TO REMEMBER:

The ADM is a roadmap of what players need to learn, develop and build as they advance and become more skilled in the sport. It provides a guide for individual coaches regardless of the level of player they coach. It will need to be updated regularly to incorporate emerging knowledge, and accommodate any changes in skill, tactics and strategies that are seen in Softball. Information in the ADM will be coordinated with the NCCP coaching program and updated accordingly. The ADM is intended to be an ongoing working document that will evolve with the sport.



ATHLETES WITH A DISABILITY (AWAD)

Information is available in every stage of development pertaining to Athletes With a Disability. This information includes tips on inclusion, how to minimize barriers, and ways to adapt softball to create more meaningful sport opportunities for all athletes.



Softball Canada's Athlete Development Matrix (ADM) is a part of Long-Term Player Development (LTPD) in Softball in Canada.



Softball Canada's Athlete Development Matrix (ADM)

HOW SHOULD THE ADM BE USED?

The Athlete Development Matrix recognizes that skills are not taught just once, but rather develop as the child's body grows and strengthens, and the child's brain develops greater capacity for thought and greater control over musculature. Most skills go through a well-recognized sequence:

LEGEND FOR SKILL DEVELOPMENT: ■ **I** - Introduce, ■ **D** - Develop, ■ **C** - Consolidate, ■ **R** - Refine, ■ **M** - Maintain
Bold text – skill/tactic is a priority at this stage

■ **INTRODUCE (FIRST EXPOSURE)**

Introduce means that the player is learning an element (skill or tactic) for the first time and is given a global idea of what the skill is and how to perform it (key movements). Players should be introduced to a skill or tactic under controlled, constant, easy and predictable conditions. The pursuit of this objective requires concentration in a rested state. The focus or emphasis is on a global execution of the skill/tactic at much less than game-like speed.

The skill is **introduced** and the player has a basic understanding of why it is performed and how to do it.

■ **DEVELOP (LEARN)**

After players have been introduced to a skill/tactic and have a fairly good understanding of what it should look like, the skill/tactic must now be repeated continuously and correctly in order to make it reliable. This is still an early stage of learning where the athlete is learning to coordinate the key components of the movement and execute them in the correct order to perform a rough form of the skill/tactic. The movements are not well synchronized or under control and lack rhythm and flow. The execution is inconsistent and lacks precision. The athlete must think about what they are doing while performing the skill. Both form and performance tend to deteriorate markedly when the athlete tries to execute movements quickly or is under pressure, as may be the case in a competitive situation. The develop stage is still part of the learning process with the focus on improving the success rate (outcome).

The athlete **develops** the basics of the skill – and can perform it in a way that others would recognize.

■ **CONSOLIDATE (STABILIZE)**

During this skill development stage, the athlete can now execute the movements of the skill/tactic with correct form, good movement control, synchronization, and rhythm when performing the skill under easy and stable conditions. The movements can be repeated consistently and with precision under these conditions. Some elements of the performance can be maintained when the athlete is under pressure, when conditions change, or when demands increase, but performance remains inconsistent.

A **consolidated** skill is one that has been learned well, and can be executed without conscious thought by the player.





Softball Canada's Athlete Development Matrix (ADM)

REFINE (PERFECT)

This skill development stage is achieved only by the best athletes. The performance of the skill/tactic is highly automated which enables the athlete to focus on the environment to pick up visual cues in order to make rapid adjustments as necessary. The athlete can now execute the skill/tactic or movements in a way that is very close to the ideal in terms of form and speed but may also develop a personal style that is efficient for their physical make-up. For example, two players may possess the same variety of skills, but they will use different skills in a given situation due to differences in stature, speed, stamina, strength, and suppleness. At this stage, the execution of the skill may look different from another player's execution. Personal interpretation of movements or personal movements may also be combined into unique patterns in response to specific competitive situations. The performance is very consistent and precision is high, even under very demanding conditions and in situations that are both complex and varied. Only minor finetuning may be necessary to achieve optimal execution. The athlete can also reflect critically on his or her performance to make in-game corrections. It is expected that players involved in drills/games will read and react appropriately to changing tactical situations.

Once a skill is **refined**, the player can execute the skill at will, in game situations, and with variations that are triggered by "in game" situations that the player recognized and responds to.

MAINTAIN (PRESERVE)

Once a skill/tactic is refined or a capacity has been achieved, there is a need to ensure it does not deteriorate or is not de-trained during different points within a season. Players in this stage of skill development can preserve consistency in the execution of the skill/tactic or level of conditioning usually with a lower level of training or practice than was necessary to reach the refined stage.

When a skill has been refined, there is a need to **maintain** it at an appropriate level, through specific training, through repeated in-game use, or both.

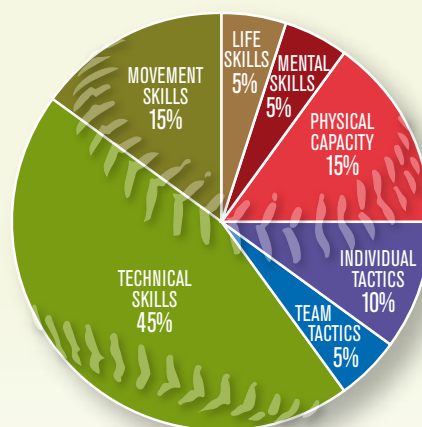
Keep the above definitions in mind as you work your way through the document.



BEST USE OF SOFTBALL TIME

Once skills have been identified, it is important to decide where to spend valuable and **LIMITED** training time and that this time changes as the athlete develops. The ADM provides some guidance in every stage of development, the overall best use of softball time. Although, the amount of time spent will ultimately depend on the individual athlete and their specific strengths and weaknesses.

This is an Example





Active Start (AS)

ABOUT THE ACTIVE START STAGE

Very rapid development of physical skills with some functional abilities like Executive Function occur in this stage. Executive Function is a set of closely related skills that allow a developing child to work effectively with the information in their brains, focus their attention, filter out distractions, and quickly switch mental gears from one task to another. Children who miss out on opportunities to develop these abilities may have a more difficult time later in life.

In this stage, it is important for children to be encouraged to lead a healthy and active lifestyle by making physical activity fun. Physical Literacy is the motivation, confidence, physical competence, knowledge and understanding to value and take responsibility for engagement in physical activities for life. It begins to develop in early childhood and grows during adolescence and adulthood. In Active Start, the development of a wide repertoire of basic human movements and Fundamental Movement Skills (FMSs) will not only make the acquisition of more sport-specific skills possible later in development, but more importantly will provide the tools required to develop healthy habits of physical activity through their lifetime. Children should be provided with an abundance of opportunities to develop a variety of FMSs such as locomotion (travel) skills, object manipulation skills and body management skills in all environments (on land, in/on water, on ice/snow and in the air).

The Participants

These are young children who are generally not involved in organized softball activities until very late in this stage. Softball Canada has an interest in starting kids off on the right foot, and ensuring that they develop the skills, capabilities, and attitudes that will allow them to grow into proficient softball players as they mature. The Timbits Softball Program was created to do just that.

SEASON STRUCTURE

Late in this stage players are introduced to fun, playground games with a softball twist using the Timbits Softball Program.

- Pre-Season: No pre-season suggested
- Competitive Season: 8-10 weeks with 10-20 combined practice/modified game sessions lasting 60 minutes each
- Softball-specific activities per week: 1-2 times
- Daily participation in unstructured and structured physical activities or sports

Long-Term Player Development in Softball

Softball Canada has a plan to systematically develop players once they enter the sport up until they reach their full potential. We call this process Long-Term Player Development (LTPD). This means:

- *Teaching the right skills at the right time;*
- *Developing appropriate speed, strength, endurance and flexibility, and;*
- *Holding competitions suited to the developmental age of the players.*

It's all about doing the right things, at the right time and in the right way.

For more information about LTPD and more details about this stage, visit:

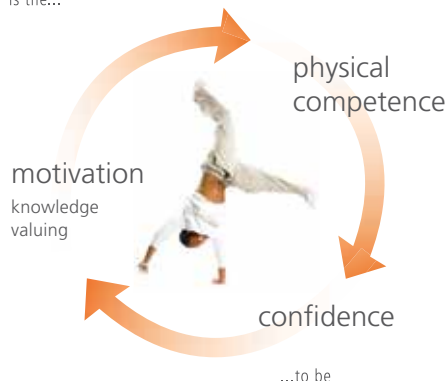
<https://softball.ca>

Active Start Basics:

- ✓ Create a safe and stimulating environment with minimal adult interference where a child's love of being physically active for a life time is developed. This means setting up opportunities for active play, and letting children both control what and how they play, but also negotiate with other children about how to play together. Too much adult intervention in minor disagreements prevents children from learning important communication and social skills.
- ✓ Provide organized physical activity opportunities for at least 30 minutes a day for toddlers and 60 minutes for preschoolers.
- ✓ Provide unstructured play opportunities for at least 60 minutes per day and up to several hours per day for toddlers and preschoolers with no child inactive for more than 60 minutes at a time except while sleeping.
- ✓ Use a wide range of equipment and regularly rotate for variety and experience.
- ✓ Emphasize fundamental movement skills (FMSs), agility, balance, coordination and speed (ABCs).
- ✓ Be patient and understand that children will master fundamental movement skills at different rates.
- ✓ Develop habits of being physically active every day.
- ✓ Increase executive function, along with communication and social skills.
- ✓ But most of all - Keep it **FUN!** Ensure children **ENJOY** being physically active with friends and family.

Physical literacy

is the...



 **Sport for Life** **active for life**

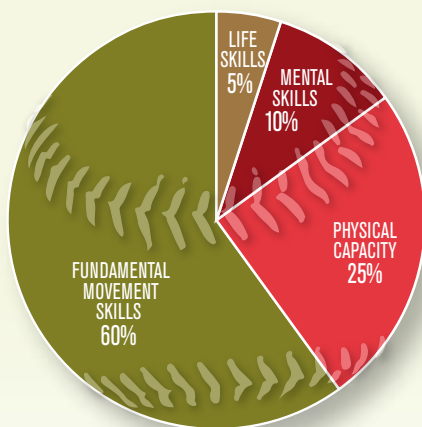


Active Start (AS)

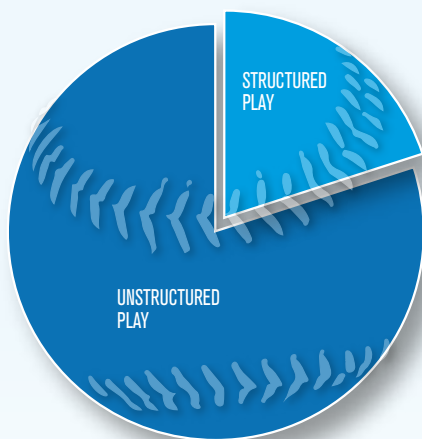
THE FIVE-SEGMENT MODEL

At every stage of LTPD, players need to develop stage and age appropriate skills and capacities in each of the following areas: technical skills, tactical skills, physical capacities, mental skills and life skills. Each capacity has different levels of importance at different points in a player's development. For the Active Start stage this means:

Best Use of Softball Time



Best Use of Activity Time



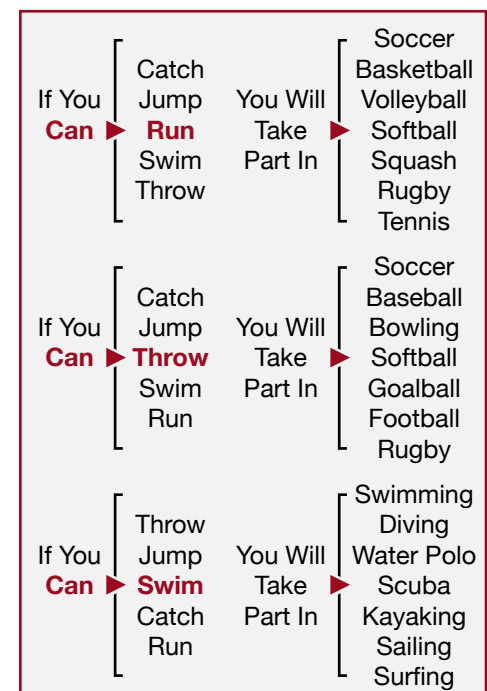
- Active play is a combination of unstructured play and structured play
- Suggestions for activities:
 - Alternate active play and rest throughout the day
 - Accumulate a minimum of 60 min. of active play every day
 - Ensure kids have active, adult role models

FUNDAMENTAL MOVEMENT SKILLS (FMSs)

The objective of this stage is to introduce and develop fundamental movement skills that lay the foundation for motor patterns that can then evolve into sport-specific skills later in a child's development. The focus should be on making activities fun, on learning multiple fundamental movement skills and developing athleticism by improving agility, balance, coordination, and movement speed. This is a time during which basic human movement patterns are developed, executive function increases, habits of daily physical activity are established and a positive attitude towards physical activity and vigorous play is created. Learning should occur through play rather than instruction, with unstructured play being more effective. Playing outside in natural settings has been shown to be very effective in meeting these objectives.

Key fundamental movement skills to develop at this stage are:

- **ON LAND:**
 - Running, starting, stopping, changing direction, forward, backward and sideways movements; falling and rolling.
 - Catching, throwing, striking, and kicking to develop hand-eye coordination (using a wide variety of equipment and sizes of equipment with both the left and right hand/foot).
 - Agility, balance and coordination along with speed of movement.
 - Hitting different objects of various sizes (balls, shuttles, etc.) with a bat or racquet.
- **IN WATER:**
 - Floating, swimming and diving to develop body orientation skills and enhance child safety.
- **ON SNOW AND ICE:**
 - Skating, sliding and skiing.
- **IN THE AIR:**
 - Jumping and twisting, learning to control the body when not in contact with the ground.



Structured Play

Is organized and led by an adult who decides when and where the child will play and what equipment or toys they will play with. The child follows the adult lead, and, if more than one child is playing the adult mediates any disputes. The child makes few, if any decisions and may come to rely on others telling them what to do. This is not ideal for developing Executive Function.

Unstructured Play

Is when children decide when, where and how they will play and what equipment or toys they will play with. The role of the adult leader is to ensure safety and provide a stimulating environment. If more than one child is playing, the adult mediates any disputes only when it is clear the children involved cannot resolve it themselves. The child makes most decisions, and negotiates conflict which assists in developing Executive Function.

**Active Start (AS)**MALES: 0 - 6 YEARS
FEMALES: 0 - 6 YEARS**PHYSICAL CAPACITY**

	Developed through Active Play		
	Low	Med.	High
Endurance	<input type="checkbox"/>		
Speed - Hand/Foot	<input type="checkbox"/>		
Speed - Whole Body	<input type="checkbox"/>		
Speed - Endurance	<input type="checkbox"/>		
Relative Strength	<input type="checkbox"/>		
Strength - Endurance	<input type="checkbox"/>		
Explosive Power	<input type="checkbox"/>		
Flexibility	<input type="checkbox"/>		

NOTE

Physical capacity is developed through active play. Unstructured play (led by the children) is most effective with adults ensuring safety. Outdoor play on different surfaces is recommended as this encourages development of agility, balance and coordination.

MENTAL SKILLS

Ensure a positive physical activity environment and active adult role models.

Focus on development of Executive Function through games and activities that require rapid change in the player's focus (cognitive flexibility), holding multiple pieces of information in mind at the same time (working memory) and readiness to move - without moving until a signal is given (inhibition control).

Games of "make believe" expand children's thinking.

Ask children to feel their heart beat, and listen to their breathing.

Encourage children to cooperate in play towards the end of this stage.

Provide a visually stimulating environment, and brightly coloured physical activity equipment.

LIFE SKILLS

Learns to interact with adults other than parents/caregivers, and understands that different adults have different roles.

Actively takes part in group activities, can follow simple instructions, and imitates actions in "follow-the-leader" activities.

Learns to take turns during activities, and cooperates with others who are playing.

Learns to share toys and activity equipment.

Understands, remembers and can follow simple rules (particularly safety rules) for activities.

Can articulate what is dangerous about different areas (near roads for example) when engaged in physical play.

**Athletes with Disabilities**

Children with a disability should be encouraged to take part in dynamic physical play with their able-bodied peers.

- Provide opportunities to learn fundamental movement skills like running/wheeling, throwing, catching, and striking.
- Minimize barriers, and be cognisant of adaptive devices/equipment and support needs.
- Develop a "can do" expectation of success when a child tries an activity.
- Have fun!

SOFTBALL TECHNICAL / TACTICAL SKILLS

Some children who are developmentally ready may be introduced to softball late in the Active Start stage. However, it is not the right time to start softball-specific training. Children who pick up a bat and ball and imitate parents or older siblings should not be discouraged, but organized softball is not recommended until the child is ready. When a child is ready, parents should look for programs that focus more on fundamental movement skill development with a softball flavour like the Timbits Softball Program.

SLEEP

Sleep Duration: 10-12 hours

- Establish stable sleep routines and bedtime routine
- Introduce independent sleep initiating behaviours



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The current Softball Athlete Development Matrix is and will always be a “work in progress”. As new information emerges, the document will be updated and revised based on the best available information from softball experts, experts in growth and development and sport performance.

The ADM will change as the softball community continues to identify different or new needs. This document will evolve to better serve the softball community in Canada with your feedback so please **visit softball.ca to tell us your thoughts.**



OTHER RESOURCES

Softball Canada offers additional resources to aid in the development of the skills listed in this document. To find out more about what is available visit **www.softball.ca**

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