



LONG-TERM PLAYER DEVELOPMENT GUIDE

for Softball in Canada

First Edition,
November 2008

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A LETTER FROM THE PRESIDENT

The *Long-Term Player Development Guide for Softball in Canada* has been a huge amount of work over the past three years. Softball Canada has worked hard to be a leader in developing its Long-Term Player Development (LTPD) model and is very pleased to see this important work come to completion.

Our LTPD Steering Committee, led by Mark Smith and Lise Jubinville, has done outstanding work on this document. The assistance from the provinces and territories has been critical to the success of the project.

Our LTPD model is an outstanding piece of work. It is the first step in establishing a curriculum based on scientifically-determined criteria for training players of all ages and both genders. Our coaches have always been exceptional, but it is critically important that we establish a standardized player development process that will allow us to be even more successful. As well, training plans, determined by each player's desires and goals, will spell out where and how far he or she wants to develop in softball.

Before LTPD, there were times when we missed the optimal age at which to train our players in the proper techniques of a particular skill such as running or bunting. It was up to the individual coach to determine when this might be. Now, coaches across our country will all follow a pre-determined schedule of skill development so that the peak periods for training the skills required to be successful in our sport are not missed.

In the past, we did not have a well-defined path for those who wanted to play our sport at a recreational level. This was true whether the players were at an early or later stage in their careers. That path has now been defined and an established training plan developed. This will help to increase our numbers and the length of time that players participate, helping to make our sport more attractive to larger numbers.

The document is developed and the tools are in place to alter the terrain on which our sport will be trained. We now need to work together with our partners in the provinces and territories to ensure that the LTPD model is rolled out in a very cohesive manner. We look forward to working with our partners in presenting our new model to all of our coaches and players. This will, without a doubt, help to define the future face of the sport of softball in Canada.

Kevin Quinn
President — Softball Canada



A LETTER FROM THE LTPD PROJECT LEADERS

Softball Canada and the members of the LTPD Steering Committee are pleased to present the *Long-Term Player Development Guide for Softball in Canada*. This document provides a valuable framework for developing softball players and is based on the latest scientific information and best practices. It will significantly influence the future of the game and is already having an impact on decision making.

The LTPD Guide is an important step in aligning player development and program delivery across the country, at all levels, and for all ages. It will help us to meet two goals: to ensure that Canada remains among the top softball nations in the world and to introduce more players to softball and keep them in the game for a lifetime. The core of everything we do in sport is player enjoyment and development.

LTPD represents a systematic and integrated approach to developing players by identifying appropriate levels of training, competition, and recovery at each stage. LTPD is about developing all players to their full potential in order to optimize the chance of success at whatever level they pursue.

From a strategic planning perspective, LTPD identifies where we want to be as a sport and identifies the gaps in our support structure that need to be addressed in order to produce well-rounded players. The benefits of LTPD are many and include

- role identification that describes where all stakeholders fit in the overall plan.
- resource development, especially for coaches, that outlines program needs at all ages and levels.
- a clear framework to be used throughout Canada to evaluate the current state of the game and to suggest improvements.
- recognition of the importance of recreational softball programs in the development of players and the inclusion of guidelines for both the community and competitive levels.

We believe that consistent implementation of the principles contained in the LTPD Guide will drive the future successes of our players and our sport, whether internationally or by fostering lifelong involvement in softball. All stakeholders from all levels of the game need to work together in the best interests of our sport if we are to be successful.

Mark Smith
Chair, LTPD Steering Committee

Lise Jubinville
Manager - LTPD and Coaching Services



WHAT IS LTAD?

In 2005, as a result of the creation of the Canadian Sport Policy, Canada began a major project to re-invigorate our national sport system. The new approach was in response to concerns about Canadians' lack of physical activity, the growing obesity epidemic, particularly among children, and the perceived poor performance of Canadian teams internationally. Under the direction of Sport Canada, the Canadian Sport Centre-Vancouver and PacificSport (now PacificSport Vancouver and PacificSport Victoria) were charged with the task of transforming the sport system. As a result, a Long-Term Athlete Development (LTAD) Expert Group created the generic Canadian LTAD model for able-bodied athletes followed by the LTAD model for athletes with a disability.

The *Canadian Sport for Life: Long-Term Athlete Development Resource Paper*, which describes the generic LTAD model, is based on a comprehensive review of coaching literature, sport science research, and best practices from effective sports programs within Canada and around the world. Exercise and sport science research and experience provided insight and information regarding the role of growth, development, and maturation in athletic development. These sciences included paediatric exercise science, exercise physiology, sport psychology, psychomotor learning, sport sociology, biomechanics, and nutrition. Analysis of the literature on organizational development also contributed significantly to the development of the generic model. Out of this research came the “10 Key Factors Influencing LTAD” and the “10 S’s of Training and Performance”. The generic model



presents a framework for optimal athlete development with particular reference to growth, maturation, and development, appropriate training, and suitable competition exposure. It provides a clear pathway for the development of athletes that is easily understood by all stakeholders.

The Federal and Provincial/Territorial Ministers of Sport identified LTAD as the framework for sport and physical activity development and agreed to proceed with its implementation in consultation with national (NSOs) and provincial/territorial sport organizations (P/TSOs). As a result, all sports are developing their sport-specific LTAD models through the leadership of their respective NSOs.

In March 2005, Softball Canada formed its Long-Term Player Development (LTPD) Steering Committee, made up of softball experts from across Canada, to lead the development of its model. In April 2005, over 20 of the most prominent and experienced softball coaches, players, and administrators gathered in Ottawa for the LTPD Summit to discuss the current state of our sport, the desired state, and what we need to do to achieve that state. Next, the steering committee began the task of writing the *Long-Term Player Development Guide for Softball in Canada*. Along the way, feedback on the content was solicited from age category sub-committees formed from participants in the LTPD Summit and selected softball experts. The process to develop softball's LTPD guide was extensive, inclusive, and comprehensive.

10 KEY FACTORS INFLUENCING LTPD

The following factors are the research, principles, and tools upon which LTPD is built.



The 10-Year Rule

Scientific research has concluded that it takes a minimum of 10 years or 10,000 hours of deliberate training for a talented athlete to reach elite levels. This translates into an average of more than 3 hours of training daily for 10 years. There are no shortcuts. Athlete development is a long-term process. Short-term performance goals must never be allowed to undermine long-term athlete development.

The 10-Year Rule factor is supported by “The Path to Excellence” (2001), which provides a comprehensive view of the development of U.S. Olympians who competed between 1984 and 1998. The results reveal that

- U.S. Olympians begin their sport participation at the average age of 12.0 for males and 11.5 for females.



- most Olympians reported a 12- to 13-year period of talent development from their sport introduction to making an Olympic team.
- Olympic medallists are younger by 1.3 to 3.6 years than non-medallists during the first 5 stages of development, suggesting that medallists were receiving motor skill development and training at an earlier age. However, caution must be taken not to fall into the trap of early specialization in late specialization sports.

High performance sport for athletes with an intellectual disability is in its infancy, but what we know suggests that a comparable level of commitment, time, and quality of training is required to reach elite standards (Mactavish, 2002).



FUNDamentals

Fundamental movement skills are gross motor movements that involve body parts such as feet, legs, trunk, head, arms, and hands. They form the foundation for all sports and should be introduced through fun and games at an early age. Fundamental sports skills should be developed next and should include universal skills such as running, jumping, and throwing that are a component of almost every sport.



Fundamental movement skills can be broken down into body management skills, locomotion skills and object manipulation skills. See Table 1 for examples of fundamental movement skills that underpin physical literacy. Fundamental movements skills need to be developed in different environments such as on fields or in gyms (land), in water, on ice and snow, and in the air.

Fundamental movement skills plus fundamental sport skills equals physical literacy.

TABLE 1 Fundamental Movement Skills that underpin physical literacy.
They include 4 different environments: land, water, air, and ice.

LOCOMOTION SKILLS	OBJECT MANIPULATION SKILLS	BODY MANAGEMENT SKILLS
Walking	Sending	Agility
Running	<i>Kicking</i>	Balance
Hopping	<i>Punting</i>	Coordination
Skiping	<i>Rolling (ball)</i>	Speed
Jumping	<i>Striking (ball, puck, ring)</i>	Bending
Leaping	<i>Throwing</i>	Twisting
Gallopig	Receiving	Dodging
Sliding	<i>Catching</i>	Landing
Skating	<i>Stopping</i>	Spinning
Chasing, fleeing, and dogding	<i>Trapping</i>	Stopping
Swimming	Traveling with	Swinging
Wheeling	<i>Dribbling (feet)</i>	Stretching
	<i>Dribbling (hands)</i>	
	<i>Dribbling (stick)</i>	
	Receiving and Sending	
	<i>Striking (bat)</i>	
	<i>Striking (stick)</i>	
	<i>Volleying</i>	

The difference between fundamental movement skills, fundamental sport skills, and fundamental softball skills.

Throwing is a fundamental movement skill and a child learning this skill will learn to throw lots of different sized balls with one hand, or with both hands, and will learn to throw the ball at different speeds, sometimes for accuracy using a lot of different targets, and sometimes for distance.

When a child learns to throw a softball to a teammate, he or she has moved from learning a fundamental movement skill to learning a fundamental sport skill. When a child learns to throw a softball using an underhand pitching motion to try to get the ball to pass over home plate for a strike on a batter, she or he has moved from learning a fundamental sport skill to learning a softball-specific skill.

For children to have success in sport either as a health-related recreational activity or in competition, it is important that they master fundamental movement skills before learning fundamental sport skills and learn fundamental sport skills before being introduced to softball-specific skills. This will ensure the laying of a foundation of physical literacy upon which to build athleticism.

Children should develop physical literacy before the onset of the growth spurt. The four activities that are extremely important to the development of physical literacy are

1. Athletics: To develop running, jumping, and throwing
2. Gymnastics: To develop the ABC's of athleticism — agility, balance, coordination, and speed — as well as the fundamental movement patterns of landing, static positions, locomotion, rotation, swing, spring, and object manipulation
3. Swimming: For water safety reasons, for balance in a buoyant environment, and as the foundation for all water-based sports
4. Ice/snow activities: To develop sliding skills.

It is important that children with a disability also have the opportunity to develop fundamental movement skills and fundamental sport skills. Failure to do so severely limits their lifelong opportunities for recreational and athletic success. At the earliest opportunity, physically and intellectually disabled children should enter a variety of programs that involve structured movement education. Children with a disability face difficulty developing the fundamentals because:

- overly-protective parents, teachers, and coaches shield them from the bumps and bruises of childhood play.
- adapted physical education is not well developed in all school systems.
- some coaches do not welcome children with a disability to their activities



because of a lack of knowledge about how to integrate them.

- it takes creativity to integrate a child with a disability into group activities where fundamental skills are practiced and physical literacy developed.

The physical literacy skills needed by children with a disability vary greatly depending on the nature and extent of their disability. However, they should include all skills learned by able-bodied children (modified as required) as well as additional skills required for effective use of assistive devices. Regardless of their previous physical skill, individuals who acquire a disability often have to learn new physical literacy skills such as wheeling,

using a prosthetic limb, or accommodating a restricted range of movement. Even though they may be adults, it is critical that individuals effectively learn the fundamentals of new movement and sport skills so that those skills can be applied to a wide range of sports and recreational activities.

Unless fundamental movement skills are developed, a child will have difficulty participating in sport and will have fewer opportunities for athletic success and lifelong enjoyment of physical activity. For example, to enjoy softball, basketball, cricket, football, handball, rugby, and baseball, the simple skill of catching must be mastered.

The focus on fundamental skills has implications not only for the development of highly skilled sports people, but also for health. Many modern diseases are due, at least in part, to a lack of physical activity. There is evidence that people are more likely to take up or continue participation in sports if they have adequate degrees of skill. A wide repertoire of fundamental skills obtained in childhood would make more specific skills easier to acquire in adolescence and adulthood.



Specialization

Sports can be classified as early or late specialization sports. Early specialization sports include artistic and acrobatic sports such as gymnastics and figure skating. These differ from late specialization sports in that very complex skills are learned before maturation since they cannot be fully mastered if taught after maturation. Softball is a late specialization sport because players do not reach their peak at the international level until well into their 20s. Many of Softball Canada's national team players

participated in a wide variety of sports and physical activities before focusing on softball. The movement, motor, and sport skills they developed playing other sports helped them to reach the top levels of our sport.

When players in a late specialization sport like softball specialize too early (that is, play only softball year round), the many negative consequences include

- one-sided, sport-specific preparation.
- lack of development of fundamental movement and sport skills.
- overuse injuries.
- early burnout.
- early retirement from training and competition.

Almost all disability sports, including Special Olympics sports, are late specialization sports. According to *Long-Term Athlete Development for Athletes with an Intellectual Disability*, people with an intellectual disability tend to enter physical activity and sport later than the general population. This may be because

- many Special Olympics programs do not start until after the age of 8.
- they may be involved in generic sport programs until a certain age and register with Special Olympics programs when it appears they can no longer keep pace with their peers.

Properly designed softball programs offered at a young age can result in earlier participation in an enriching physical activity if the development of physical literacy is emphasized over the development of softball skills.

4

Biological Age versus Chronological Age

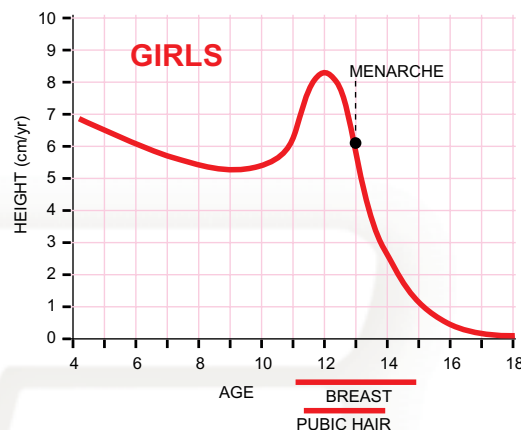
Chronological age refers to the number of years and days elapsed since birth. A group of children of the same chronological age will differ by several years in their biological age and the maturity of physical, motor, cognitive and emotional qualities. LTPD is based on biological age or maturity, not chronological age. All children follow the same stages to maturity, but the timing, rate, and magnitude of maturity of various qualities differs between individuals. LTPD requires the identification of early, late, and average maturation to help design appropriate instruction, training,

and competition programs according to the readiness of the player.

Rapid or slow transit through puberty can also be important. Rapid transit means that the individual goes through the growth spurt quickly (for example, in 1.5 years) while another individual may take 4 to 5 years or more to reach maturity (slow transit). Rapid transit can have a detrimental, but not necessarily permanent, effect on skills, speed, strength, power, and flexibility because of the changes in limb and body length.

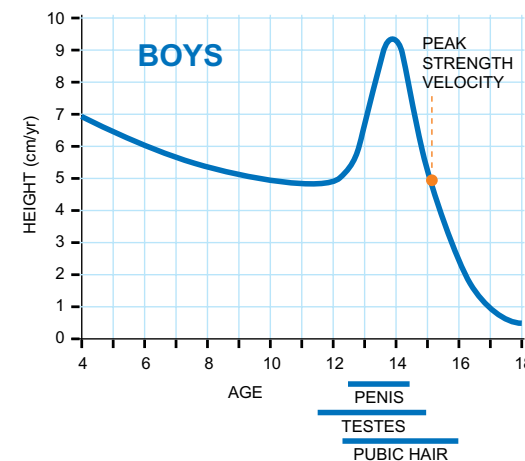
Coaches, parents, and athletes must be well informed about the impact of rapid transit. Some sports have decided that athletes should not compete during the growth spurt, or are highly selective about the number and type of competitions and the goals set for performance during the growth spurt. The beginning of the growth spurt and Peak Height Velocity (PHV) are significant considerations in training and competition program design.

Figure 1. Maturity Events in Girls (Modified after Ross et al, 1977)



On average, PHV in girls occurs at about 12 years of age. Usually the first physical sign of adolescence is breast budding, which occurs slightly after the onset of the growth spurt. Shortly thereafter, pubic hair begins to grow. Menarche, or the onset of menstruation, comes rather late in the growth spurt, occurring after PHV is achieved. The sequence of developmental events may normally occur 2 or even more years earlier or later than average. Peak Strength Velocity (PSV) for girls is just after PHV and at the onset of menarche.

Figure 2. Maturity Events in Boys (Modified after Ross et al, 1977)



PHV in boys is more intense than in girls and on average occurs about 2 years later at 14 years of age. Growth of the testes, pubic hair, and penis are related to the maturation process. Peak Strength Velocity (PSV) comes a year or so after PHV. Thus, there is pronounced late gain in strength characteristics of the male athlete. As with girls, the developmental sequence may occur 2 or more years earlier or later than average. Early-maturing boys may have as much as a 4-year physiological advantage over their late-maturing peers. Eventually, the late maturer will catch up when he experiences his growth spurt.

In order to design a tailor-made training program for the athlete at puberty, it becomes important to determine precisely the onset of the growth spurt and PHV.

Intellectual disability is the leading form of lifelong disability worldwide (World Health Organization, 2002). With over 500 different forms of impairment subsumed within this group, it represents a highly diverse collection of individuals in terms of ability, needs, and interests. We have divided our content into two groups – Down Syndrome (DS) and Non-Down Syndrome (N-DS) – to demonstrate that when intellectual disability has a biological basis, there may be growth and development implications central to LTPD and that these may not apply to individuals with intellectual disability of an unknown origin. An additional challenge is referred to as associated disabilities such as fetal alcohol syndrome, autism, and visual or hearing impairments and includes 10 to 15% of people with an intellectual disability.

For players with an intellectual disability, physical maturity may be a less important issue with respect to ongoing development in sport. The critical windows of adaptation for players without an intellectual disability are often linked to the onset of puberty, yet there is little research to guide coaches on whether participants in programs for persons with an intellectual disability go through puberty faster, slower, earlier, or later than individuals without an intellectual disability. Program design and training must factor in mental, cognitive, and social/emotional maturity when developing training groups and determining which competitions the player with an intellectual disability will attend.

Research has not been conducted to determine fully how growth and maturation varies for individuals with an intellectual disability. What we do know is that individuals with Down Syndrome (DS)

- experience the pre-puberty growth spurt earlier (ages 9 to 10) and less dramatically than in other children.
- may develop sexual maturity earlier than the norm in boys and later in girls.
- develop skills later than children without a disability.
- have a higher variation in the rate of skill acquisition and skill quality.
- display wide variations in skill development, with some aged 10 to 16 reaching levels comparable to norms for children without a disability.
- often have lower levels of cardiac output and lower maximal oxygen consumption ($\text{VO}_2 \text{ max}$) potential, which can affect stamina.
- may have an issue with strength development, which is linked to the neuromuscular system functioning at both the central nervous system and joints levels.
- may have hypotonicity, or low muscle tone/excessive ligament laxity, which has implications for suppleness.

Note: No research specific to speed development has yet been conducted for individuals with Down Syndrome (DS).

For players with an intellectual disability, but who are Non-Down Syndrome (N-DS), the patterns of growth and maturation parallel players without a disability. However, individuals with Non-Down

Syndrome

- display highly variable skill development with some showing delays and others approximating norms for those without a disability.
- display wide variations in skill development.
- have difficulty with closed skills.
- can achieve cardiovascular fitness levels comparable to peers without a disability.

Note: Some research suggests that individuals with Non-Down Syndrome have lower levels of peak muscular strength. No research specific to speed development has yet been conducted for individuals with Non-Down Syndrome.

Despite what is known regarding players with an intellectual disability, it is important to note that no two individuals are the same. For that reason, coaches need to consider various differences when applying the principles of trainability to players with an intellectual disability.



Trainability

The terms “adaptation” and “trainability” are often used interchangeably in coaching. However, the difference between them is significant. Adaptation refers to changes in the body as a result of a stimulus that induces functional and/or morphological changes in the organism. For example, when an athlete completes aerobic training, her or his $\text{VO}_2 \text{ max}$ will increase. Trainability has been defined as the responsiveness of an individual to the training stimulus at different stages of growth and maturation. For example, an athlete who



completes aerobic training has a genetic limit to increase his or her VO_2 max. One athlete can have large increases in VO_2 max while another may only have small changes even though both completed the same training. All physiological systems are always trainable, but there are sensitive periods in development when the body is more responsive to specific training. These are called windows of trainability. Coaches must be aware of and make the best use of these sensitive periods of trainability when planning programs.

Little is known about windows of trainability for individuals with a disability. In the absence of information to the contrary, it is suggested that for children with a congenital disability, the ages of optimum trainability should be adjusted based on the observed age of puberty. Whether there are optimum periods of trainability during post-injury rehabilitation needs to be investigated. For these reasons, coaches need to consult those who are knowledgeable about physical and intellectual disabilities, the parent or guardian, and the individuals themselves to further adapt and individualize programs and training.

THE 5 S's OF TRAINING AND PERFORMANCE

LTPD addresses key periods in the growth and development of young players where training must be carefully planned to achieve optimal adaptation and identifies five physiological factors, known as the 5 S's, as a cornerstone for training and performance (Frank Dick, 1985).

Stamina (Endurance): The sensitive period of trainability for stamina is determined by biological age and occurs at the onset of PHV. Aerobic capacity training is recommended before athletes reach PHV. Aerobic power should be introduced progressively after growth rate decelerates.

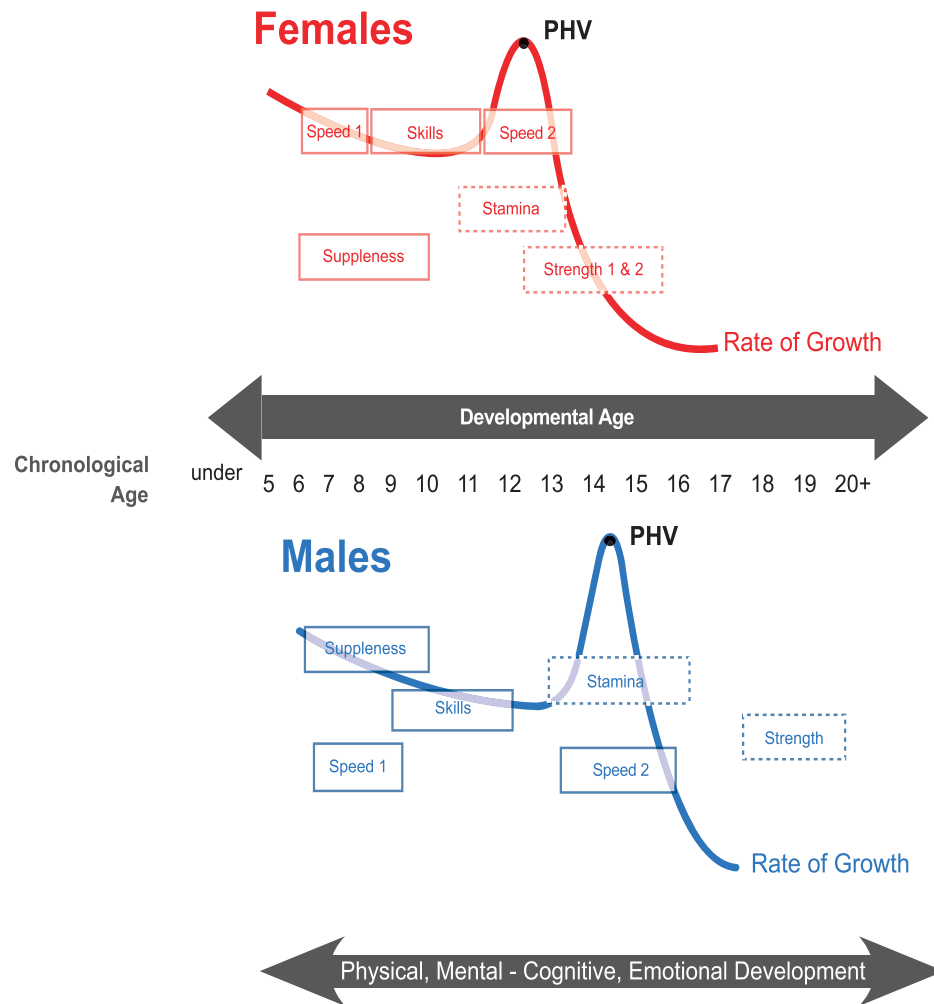
Strength: The sensitive period of trainability for strength is determined by biological age. Girls have 2 windows, immediately after PHV and at the onset of menarche. Boys have 1 window that occurs 12 to 18 months after PHV. Speed strength and endurance strength can be developed prior to puberty using body weight, lighter loads, medicine balls, and Swiss balls.

Speed: The sensitive period of trainability for speed is determined by chronological age. For boys, the first period occurs between the ages of 7 and 9 and the second between the ages of 13 and 16. For girls, the first period occurs between the ages of 6 and 8 and the second between the ages of 11 and 13. The duration of the stimulus is up to 5 to 6 seconds for the first window of trainability and extends to 20 seconds for the second window.

Skill: The sensitive period of trainability for skill is determined by chronological age. The period for boys is between the ages of 9 and 12; for girls it is between the ages of 8 and 11. This assumes that a foundation of fundamental movement skills has been developed prior to these ages, which will help to increase the trainability of new sport-specific skills.

Suppleness (Flexibility): The sensitive period of trainability for suppleness is determined by chronological age. The period for both boys and girls occurs between the ages of 6 and 10. Special attention should be paid to flexibility during PHV.

Figure 3. Optimal Windows of Trainability (Balyi and Way, 2005)



5 Additional S's of Training and Performance

Building on the 5 S's that deal with the physical development of softball players, 5 additional S's must be considered in their holistic development.

Structure/Stature: The structure/stature component links the 6 stages of growth to the windows of optimal trainability. Coaches and parents can use stature measurements (height) before, during, and after maturation as a guide to tracking biological age. Such tracking allows coaches to address the critical periods of physical development — stamina, strength, speed, suppleness, and skill development. Diagnostics to identify individually relevant critical windows of accelerated adaptation to training are essential to design and implement optimal training, competition, and recovery programs.

pPsychology: Sport is a physical and mental challenge. The ability to maintain high levels of concentration while remaining relaxed and confident is a skill that transcends sport and enhances everyday life. To develop the mental focus for success at high levels, young players need mental training that complements their physical training and is designed specifically for their gender and LTPD stage. Even at young ages, mental training is critical since dealing with success and failure affects children's continuation in sport and physical activity. This is especially true in softball where a player can fail more than he or she succeeds yet still is considered successful. For example, a player who gets a hit 3 out of 10 at bats is considered a great hitter.

Sustenance: When the body performs physical activity, it must be replenished with a broad range of components. Sustenance prepares players for the volume and intensity required to optimize training and live life to the fullest. Sustenance includes nutrition, hydration, rest, sleep, and regeneration, all of which need to be applied differently to training and lifestyle plans depending on the LTPD stage. In managing sustenance and recovery, parents can assist coaches by identifying fatigue. Fatigue can come in many forms, including metabolic, neurological, psychological, environmental, and travel fatigue. While over-training or over-competition can lead to burnout, improperly addressing sustenance can produce the same result.

Schooling: In designing training programs, school demands must also be considered. Programs should account for school academic loads, timing of exams, and school-based physical activities. When possible, training camps and competition tours should complement, not conflict, with the timing of major academic events at school. Overstress should be monitored carefully, including the everyday stresses related to schooling, exams, peer groups, family, boyfriend or girlfriend relationships, and increased training volume and intensities. Coaches and parents should work together to establish a good balance between all factors.

Socio-Cultural: Sports and physical activities often present children with social and cultural experiences that can enhance their holistic development. These experiences can broaden their socio-cultural perspective by providing increased awareness of

- ethnicity
- geography
- literature
- diversity
- architecture
- music
- history
- cuisine
- visual art

Through periodized annual planning, a child's activity or sport can offer much more than a simple commute between the activity venue and the home or hotel room.



A Holistic Approach - Physical, Mental, Cognitive, and Emotional Development

A major objective of LTPD is a holistic approach to player development. Coaches must understand that physical, mental, cognitive, and emotional traits mature at different rates and, in the case of players with a disability, may depend on the nature and severity of their disability or associated disabilities such as fetal alcohol syndrome, autism, and visual, physical, or hearing impairments. The coach must consider the whole athlete and not focus solely on the technical/tactical and physical aspects of softball. Cognitive, mental, and emotional (affective) elements are critical for athlete performance and must be prioritized in LTPD in addition to training the physical elements. It is particularly important when working with athletes with an intellectual disability that a coach considers mental and biological age rather than chronological age when making decisions on training and competition.

Coaches should also consider equipment and environmental factors that have an impact on performance and safety. Ethical behaviour, fair play, and character development should be fostered within all stages of LTPD and consideration given to players' ability to understand and apply these concepts.



Periodization or Annual Training, Competition, and Recovery Plan

Simply put, periodization — designing a yearly plan — is time management. It provides a detailed plan for arranging the complex array of training factors into a logical and scientifically-based schedule to produce optimal improvements in performance. It means planning the right activities with an adequate degree of difficulty and in the right sequence to reach the coach's training and competition objectives for each player and the team.

There is no evidence that periodization for players with a disability is substantially different from that for able-bodied players. Since disability may reduce functional muscle mass and aerobic capacity, fatigue in players with a disability should be carefully monitored and rest and recovery periods adjusted accordingly.

Periodization is an essential component in optimal sports programming and player development at all levels. Planning adequately for training, competition, and recovery is the critical blueprint for success.

The plan must be broken down into workable units (weeks, days, and sessions) that must be properly sequenced. In order to reach optimal performance in a competition environment, the training units have to be sequenced to

- develop the athlete's performance capacity. The performance factors are softball-specific skills, tactics and strategies, physical components, and **mental skills**.
- **integrate** the performance factors into a complex and harmonious blend.



- prepare the athlete to perform at identified competitions.

In order to design an annual plan, the coach must understand

- how to develop an athletic form for softball.
- the demands made on players in a softball competition.
- the competition calendar and the relative importance of each competition.
- the actual training state of the player at the start of a yearly plan.
- the current reality the coach and player have to cope with. For example, is the player preparing for final exams?
- the LTPD model for softball.



Calendar Planning for Competition

Optimal competition calendar planning at all stages is critical to player development. The structure of competition has implications for selection, talent identification, safety, cost, and adolescent periodization that are tailor-made to the athletes' biological age and health. The domestic competitive calendar must support and be consistent with LTPD. The stages of development and levels of participation have

different requirements regarding the type, frequency, and level of competition. At some stages, training and development take precedence over competition and short-term success. At later stages, it becomes more important for players to experience a variety of competitive situations and to perform well at international and other high-level events. To ensure that players with an intellectual disability are challenged to be the best that they can be by using a fair and meaningful system of competition, Softball Canada suggests consulting with Special Olympics Canada regarding fair competition based on abilities.

Regional, provincial, and national competitions and event calendars must be coordinated and selected according to the priorities of the specific stage of development of the players involved.



System Alignment and Integration

LTPD can be a tool for motivating change towards effective system organization, alignment, and integration. LTPD recognizes that enjoying a lifetime of physical activity and achieving athletic excellence depend on a foundation of physical literacy and fitness. It is important that all components of the softball community — players, coaches, parents, officials, administrators, spectators, sponsors, and supporting national, provincial/territorial, and multi-sport organizations — as well as the sport community as a whole, work together to implement the right programs and establish a sport system that produces optimal conditions for training and competition.



An example of system alignment is the partnership between Softball Canada, Provincial/Territorial Softball Associations (P/TSAs), and the Coaching Association of Canada, working hand in hand in developing a leading-edge coaching certification program. Softball Canada also communicates with partners like Special Olympics Canada to discuss how to support development and competition opportunities for players with physical and intellectual disabilities. The Canadian sport system should include the school system (physical education and school sports), recreation departments, competitive sport, sport facilities, and coaching organizations. All parts of the sport community must be integrated and aligned. With so many partners across so vast a country and with different demographic compositions, system integration and alignment are major challenges. Each element in the system plays a crucial role in player development. The system must be clear, seamless, and based upon a consistent set of principles.



10

Continuous Improvement

The concept of continuous improvement, which permeates LTPD, is drawn from the respected Japanese industrial philosophy known as Kaizen. Continuous improvement ensures that LTPD responds and reacts to new scientific and sport-specific innovations and observations and is subject to continuous research in all its aspects. Periodic updates and changes to the LTPD model will occur at regular intervals, based on feedback from players, coaches, officials, parents, administrators, scientists, other leaders in the sport community, and partners on ways to promote softball and physical activity for all players. LTPD is a dynamic framework that needs continuous adjustments based on key principles:

- LTAD responds and reacts to new scientific and sport-specific innovations and observations and is subject to continuous research in all its aspects.
- LTAD, as a continuously evolving vehicle for change, reflects all emerging facets of physical education, sport, and recreation to ensure systematic and logical delivery of programs to all ages.
- LTAD promotes ongoing education and sensitization of all partners to the interlocking relationship between physical education, school sport, community recreation, lifelong physical activity, and high performance sport.



WHY SOFTBALL NEEDS AN LTPD MODEL

“The health and well-being of the nation and the medals won at major Games are simple by-products of an effective sport system.” Istvan Balyi, Sport Canada LTAD Expert

The sport of softball is a game for a lifetime, played by one and all from the ages of 5 to 95. Literally hundreds of thousands of Canadians are playing softball as members of Softball Canada and millions of other players are potential members. Softball has a place for everyone who wants to play. Each of the different disciplines of the game — Slo-Pitch, Fast Pitch, and Orthodox — provides a different style and different playing levels, be it community or competitive softball. In addition, the game can be played separately by both genders or in co-ed versions.

Softball is also an inclusive sport that offers programs for players with an intellectual disability through Special Olympics Canada and for players with a physical disability through wheelchair softball and deaf softball.

Canada has enjoyed tremendous international success at world championships, the Pan American Games, and the Olympic Games. Women’s softball was added to the Olympic program in 1996 and Canada’s senior women’s team qualified for all four Olympiads through to 2008. Since 1985, the junior women’s national team has consistently placed in the top 6 at world championships. The senior men’s national team has been extremely successful, finishing in the top 2 at 16 out of 18 international events since 1968.

Their successes include 7 straight gold medals at the Pan American Games. The junior men’s national team has won medals at the last 5 world championships. Softball’s large participant base, popularity, versatility, and international success are huge strengths.

However, the sport faces many challenges. In addition to well-documented shortcomings, which include insufficient government funding support and the lack of physical education and sport in schools, the game is affected by issues directly related to training and competition, coaches, parents, clubs, and administrators. Over the years, membership rates have declined, particularly on the male side of the game. Softball has been dropped from the program of several multi-sport Games, including women’s softball from the 2012 Olympics and men’s softball from the 2007 Pan American Games and the 2009 and 2013 Canada Summer Games.

Although Canada’s teams have consistently qualified for international events, other countries are starting to close the gap and are committing more resources to their national team programs. Canada’s national team programs have had success in getting the most from our players once they reach that level. However, the softball community must do a better job of delivering



players to the national team program by having a more systematic and integrated LTPD strategy. A blueprint for developing softball players that reflects what skills and tactics should be taught and at what ages does not exist.

Another shortcoming is that traditionally, school physical education, recreational sport, and competitive sport operate independently. This approach fails to ensure that all children, from the recreational player to the elite player, are given a solid foundation and knowledge in the areas of physical, technical, tactical, and mental development upon which to build their athletic abilities. A national strategy for identifying talented softball players and providing them with enrichment programs to aid in their development does not exist. Furthermore, current player development programs are not well linked to Softball Canada’s national team programs. More

examples of shortcomings can be found in Table 2 along with the consequences that result from these shortcomings.

LTPD provides the framework to address these issues and ensure that the sport continues to grow. LTPD principles will help to build the athletic ability of softball players by developing a foundation of fundamental movement skills and introducing fitness and softball skills at the appropriate biological and chronological age.

As well, with ever-increasing obesity rates in Canada and the associated health costs, it is imperative to encourage lifelong participation in physical activity to ensure the health of the nation. Softball can play an important role because it is a game that can be enjoyed by all Canadians — male and female, young and old — at their chosen level of competitiveness. By improving physical literacy, the LTPD model will help to develop lifelong involvement of Canadians in physical activity and sport participation as well as produce future national team players.

If we want to encourage our children to participate in sport and lifelong physical activity, as well as create the potential to compete internationally, we need to build our softball programs around LTPD principles that respect the developmental needs of all children. The LTPD Guide is a progressive pathway of development that recognizes the distinct stages of the physical, mental, cognitive, and emotional development of young players. It addresses the needs of those who are able-bodied and those who have a disability, and it also addresses both early and late developers.

For softball to remain successful and contribute to the health of the nation, the sport must continue to learn and evolve. What can we do to improve our performances and make our softball programs consistently strong year after year? How and to what extent does the existing system enhance player development, player performance, and the health of the nation? How does it hinder? Where can we improve? LTPD will guide us in analyzing the Canadian softball system and in highlighting its gaps and shortcomings, and will aid in developing solutions. The implementation of the LTPD principles will enable softball organizations in Canada to provide participants with positive sport experiences.



TABLE 2. Shortcomings and Resultant Consequences Impeding the Canadian Softball System

Shortcomings	Consequences
COMPETITION/TRAINING	
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Children and youth over-compete and under-train because the focus is on the short-term goal of winning now and not on the long-term goal of player development. • Adult training and competition programs are imposed on children and youth. • Chronological age rather than biological age is used in training and competition planning. • Training methods and competition programs designed for male players are superimposed on female players. • Climate and tradition dictate outdoor training and competition calendars that interfere with player development. • The competition structure interferes with player development, skewing or reducing training. • Across Canada, there are too many variations of the rules for children and youth and they do not properly reflect the difference between the needs of children and the needs of youths and adults. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Softball skills and physical skills, including strength, stamina, suppleness, and speed are not well developed because players are competing too often and not training enough. • Because physical literacy is not well developed, players do not reach their genetic potential, which limits the talent level of players who take up the game and restricts the potential for individuals to enjoy physical activity. • There is a lack of systematic development of the next generation of successful international players. • National teams at international competitions are experiencing decreasing success. • Female athletic potential is not reached due to inappropriate programs. • Provincial and national team coaches devote precious time on remedial programs to counteract the shortcomings of player preparation.
COACHES	
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Male coaches greatly outnumber women coaches. • Coaches are not well educated about the critical periods of accelerated adaptation to training or how to develop these athletic abilities — strength, speed, suppleness, stamina, and skill. • Lifelong learning and continual professional development are not embraced. • Typically, the most knowledgeable coaches work at the elite level with older players. • Finding volunteer coaches is becoming more difficult. • Fundamental movement skills and softball technical skills are not taught properly. • Early developers are often selected for teams because they are bigger and stronger. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • There is a lack of coach role models for female players. • Players do not reach their genetic athletic potential due to a lack of proper fitness training and skill development. • Burnout occurs because the same volunteers do all the work. • Late developers drop out of softball; had they stayed in the game, they could have become better athletes than early developers. • Less experienced and less trained coaches work with children and youth at the developmental level where quality coaches are crucial to a player's development.

PARENTS

- Parents are not well educated about the stages of player development and LTPD principles.
- A clear pathway for players is not in place.
- Players specialize too early and parents need to be educated to resist this tendency.
- Parents may not understand the Canadian softball system and which organization does what.
- Parents are not able to critically reflect on what is best for their child's sport experience and select appropriate sport programs.

CLUBS AND ASSOCIATIONS

- Minor Softball Associations and Adult Softball Associations are not well linked.
- Finding volunteers is getting more difficult, which leads to volunteer burnout.
- Access to affordable indoor facilities and outdoor fields is limited.
- There is a lack of a national system for talent identification.
- There is a lack of a direct communication system with all softball members at all levels across Canada.
- The competition structure across Canada is not well aligned.
- There is no integration between school physical education programs, recreational community programs, and elite competitive programs.
- There is a lack of financial support because the sport is not currently self-sustaining through membership fees, has restricted opportunities for revenue generation, and is overly reliant on government funding. These shortcomings create conflicts between our mission and mandate and those of funding agencies.
- Without proper communication channels, all stakeholders lack the necessary information needed to make decisions.
- Players are missed due to the lack of a talent identification system and enrichment programs.
- Individuals who are introduced to softball through the school system do not know where to go to continue in the sport.
- With the differences between the funding priorities of agencies like governments and the priorities identified by softball's governing bodies to grow the game, many softball associations and clubs do not currently have the money to provide essential programs and services.





A NEW DIRECTION FOR SOFTBALL IN CANADA

The LTPD Guide presents a framework for optimal player development with special reference to growth, maturation and development, appropriate training, and suitable competition exposure. It provides a clear pathway for the development of softball players that is easily understood by all stakeholders. It presents a method for qualified instruction and coaching at all levels of participation within the Canadian softball system. And it should inspire all of those involved in softball to question and challenge conventional thoughts and traditions in all areas, from equipment selection to competition structure and from coaching education to rules of play.

The LTPD process is an inclusive model that encourages everyone to be involved in lifelong physical activity as well as striving to ensure that all players, particularly those with the capability and desire to become elite, are given a solid foundation in the physical, technical, tactical, and mental capacities upon which to build their performance abilities. Softball Canada is one of the first NSOs to incorporate community sport within each stage of development and not only within the Active for Life stage of its LTPD model. This was done in recognition of the importance of the recreational aspect of the sport in terms of contributing to the health of the nation.

The Principles of Softball Canada's LTPD Guide

- Adopts a 'Made in Canada' approach that not only recognizes international best practices and research, but clearly understands the cultural, social, and political factors that make Canada unique.
- Incorporates sport research and sport science principles that have been widely studied all over the world.
- Supports the four goals of the Canadian Sport Policy: Enhanced Participation, Enhanced Excellence, Enhanced Capacity, and Enhanced Interaction.
- Encourages lifelong physical activity that contributes to and promotes a healthy, physically literate nation through participation in community softball programs and provides a training pathway for competitive players at the high performance level.
- Ensures that optimal training, competition, and recovery programs are developed, available, and accessible throughout a player's career and are appropriate for the various stages of development.
- Considers the physical, mental, emotional, and cognitive development of children and adolescents and recognizes the differences between biological development and maturation and chronological age, understanding that although young players may be the same age, their bodies can be at very different levels of development.
- Recognizes the need to involve all Canadians in the LTPD process, including players with a disability.
- Optimizes the involvement of all stakeholders, including players, parents, coaches, officials, schools, community and recreation programs, and all levels of governance from Softball Canada to Provincial/Territorial Softball Associations to local softball associations, clubs, and leagues.
- Is player-centred, coach-driven, and supported by sport administrators and sponsors.

Softball Canada and all 13 Provincial/Territorial Softball Associations are pleased to present the LTPD Guide. It provides a valuable roadmap as we develop a pathway to creating champions for life. Not only will the guide assist in reaching our goal of keeping Canada among the top softball nations in the world, it will also be the framework by which the entire softball community can evaluate programs and services for players at all levels of the game, from grassroots to high performance.

To achieve these goals we need to

- improve partnerships and cooperation between Softball Canada, Provincial/Territorial Softball Associations, local softball associations, and softball clubs.
- develop long-term strategies rather than short-term solutions.
- create systematic talent identification and monitoring processes.
- integrate LTPD principles into softball's National Coaching Certification Program (NCCP) and create a systematic coaching development program that includes better support and resources for coaches at all levels.
- utilize the LTPD framework to evaluate and improve existing programs and services for players from the grassroots to elite levels and to create new programs and services where gaps exist.
- create training programs and competition structures that are designed specifically for each stage of development rather than based on chronological age.



The LTPD Guide is the key to achieving long-term growth of softball and fostering a lifelong love for and involvement in the sport by as many Canadians as possible. It provides a solid framework while clearly outlining the roles and responsibilities of everyone involved in the game. The ultimate goal is to create a model for success that is effective, repeatable, and sustainable. Through proper implementation and annual monitoring of the guide and the principles of development it advocates, all stakeholders will recognize these challenges and develop cooperative strategies to overcome them. We have adopted “Kaizen”, the respected Japanese industrial philosophy that suggests never-ending efforts for improvement involving everyone in the organization. For that reason, the guide is intended to be a living document that changes over time as our Canadian softball player development system evolves and improves.

The implementation of LTPD principles across all of Canadian sport is likely to have profound implications for all sport organizations. LTPD could be a catalyst for the improvement of the entire Canadian sport system if all partners, including Softball Canada, Provincial/Territorial Softball Associations, clubs, coaches, officials, players, parents, and administrators, do their part to ensure success.

In a word, that means change — planning and implementing changes in the way we operate to create new opportunities for Canadian softball players. The details of implementation, the technical resources required for delivering the new model, and the programs to train and support officials, coaches, and players will be developed in the next phase. Successful implementation of the LTPD model will lead to more skilled players, more knowledgeable coaches, and more parents educated about what is truly best for their child's development at different ages and stages of development. The LTPD Guide will enable Canadians to make use of our resources and love for the game to empower players, coaches, officials, administrators, parents, and associations to create a model for success and sustainability for the game for years to come.

**ONE VISION
ONE VOICE
ONE SPORT**

ENTER, ENJOY, AND EXCEL

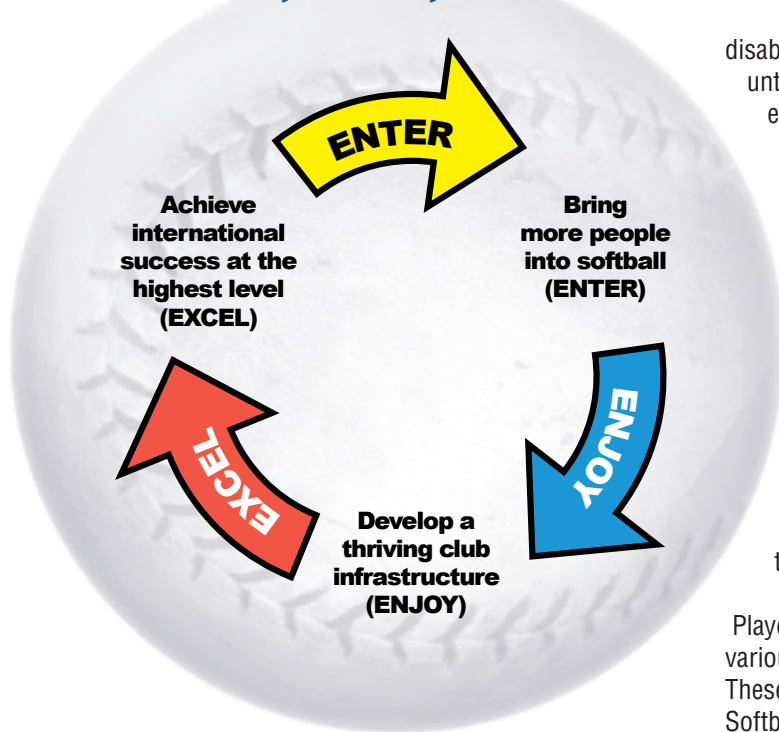


Figure 4. Player involvement in Softball

The terms “Enter”, “Enjoy”, and “Excel” describe softball participation in broad terms and categorize player involvement at all ages and levels, both recreational and competitive.

“Enter” describes a player being introduced to softball for the first time. This generally occurs in childhood between the ages of 5 and 10, but can also occur later in life. People with an intellectual disability tend to enter physical activity programs at an older age than those without an intellectual

disability. Many may not enter sport programs until well into adulthood. New Canadians may be exposed to softball for the first time if the sport wasn’t played in their countries.

After “Enter”, a player chooses to pursue one of two streams, “Enjoy” or “Excel”.

“Enjoy” is the stream chosen by the vast majority of softball participants. Here the objectives are all-encompassing: friendly competition, fun, and socializing.

In “Excel”, players are devoted to pursuing the ultimate performance and invest more time, energy, and, in most cases, money, in their pursuit of excellence.

Players can move between “Enjoy” and “Excel” at various times throughout their playing career. These 3 broad terms are further broken down in Softball’s LTPD Stages of Development. By understanding how and why our players participate in softball, all stakeholders can work together to ensure they offer the programs and services players need and want.

Incorporating LTPD principles into softball’s LTPD model ensures that the sport can attract young players as well as youth and adults to “Enter” and start off with quality programs that lay the foundation to enjoy the sport for life, provide a retention strategy for players to “Enjoy” softball at their chosen level, and provide opportunities to “Excel” and fulfill their potential by representing Canada in international softball.

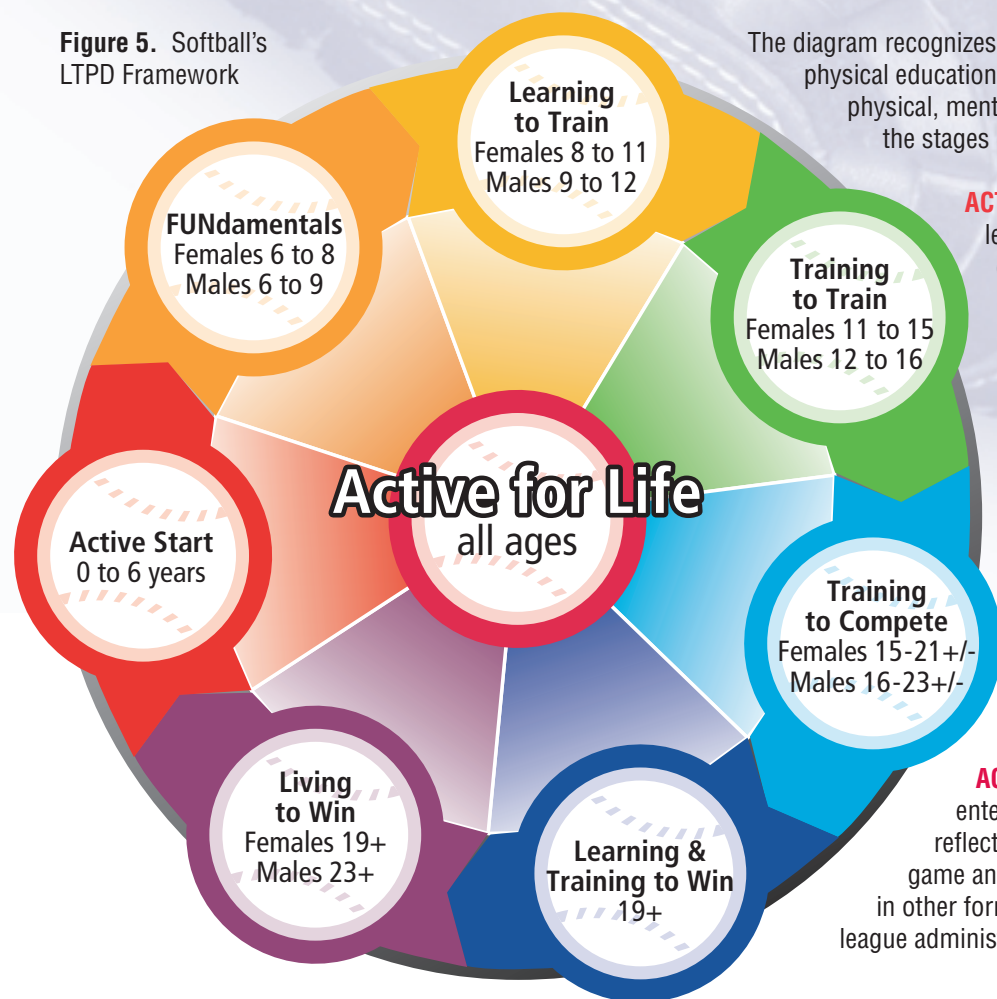
The LTPD Guide provides guidance to players throughout their lives. At the same time, it introduces children to the skills and progressions that allow them to strive to become the best they can be, whether as a competitive player or a recreational player who is active for life. The guide also allows those with great aptitude to reach the highest levels in a sequential fashion supported by an integrated system involving skill instructors, coaches, clubs, organizations, and facilities, rather than by chance.



STAGES OF PLAYER DEVELOPMENT

In keeping with the generic Canadian LTAD model, Softball's LTPD model, outlined in Figure 5, consists of eight seamlessly linked stages — Active Start, FUNDamentals, Learning to Train, Training to Train, Training to Compete, Learning and Training to Win, Living to Win, and Active for Life. The model has a softball-specific focus that reflects the realities and demands of the game at the highest level while retaining at its core the notion of age- and ability-appropriate programming and evaluation. The titles of the various stages imply the general intent of the programming within each stage. Learning to Train, for example, refers to systematic programming aimed at establishing key skill elements of softball while Living to Win refers to a period of time where the focus is on performing skills at a very high level in order to win medals.

Figure 5. Softball's LTPD Framework



The diagram recognizes that during the early stages, other settings such as elementary school physical education programs and community sport programs may contribute to a child's physical, mental, emotional, and social development. As well, it should be noted that the stages overlap as players progress at different rates.

ACTIVE START is about getting children interested in physical activity, learning the fundamental movement skills of running, jumping, catching, twisting, kicking, and throwing, and linking them in play.

FUNDamentals emphasizes further development of fundamental movement skills and lays a general foundation of physical capacities.

LEARNING TO TRAIN, **TRAINING TO TRAIN**, and **TRAINING TO COMPETE** focus on developing softball-specific skills, ensuring an appropriate level of fun while adding the competitive aspects of the game.

LEARNING AND TRAINING TO WIN emphasizes a shift towards true high performance, including an increased focus on individualized training and performance results at competitions.

LIVING TO WIN emphasizes performance results and international excellence.

ACTIVE FOR LIFE is the final stage of the continuum and may be entered at any time after a player becomes involved in softball. This stage reflects an individual's desire, competency, and personal interest in the game and emphasizes lifelong participation and activity, not only in softball but in other forms of physical activity. Participation can be as a player, coach, official, league administrator, or board member.

Two additional stages in softball's LTPD model — **AWARENESS AND FIRST CONTACT/RECRUITMENT** — focus on the needs and interests of players with a disability. The purpose is to inform individuals and their parents or guardians of the range of activities in which they can participate and to provide ways to experience those activities. It may not be easy for an individual with a disability to make the first approach to a sport. Research shows that if they don't have a positive initial experience, they may be lost to the sport and to a healthy lifestyle. Awareness plans help to ensure that people with a disability become aware of opportunities offered by softball.

The second component of the model is the focus on long-term thinking. Softball is a late specialization sport, meaning that players do not peak until their late 20's. Players who enter softball later than most can still rise to international stardom if they have developed a strong foundation of physical literacy. They can first develop as an athlete and then as a softball player because complex softball skills can be learned after maturation.

To build physical literacy, Softball Canada strongly discourages early specialization in any sport and strongly encourages players to participate in a number of different sports until at least 15 to 16 years of age. Coaches need to understand LTPD principles and the positive results of multi-sport participation in terms of developing all the athletic abilities of their players. Concessions in terms of player attendance should be made to allow this. Players should not be cut from a team because of conflicts between training and competing in other sports that overlap with the softball season.

And finally, the model provides information for those working with players who are pursuing a recreational focus. Other sport-specific LTAD models have focused on the elite side of their sport. Softball has chosen to describe the community softball side because

- over 85% of our participants play softball recreationally and need guidelines for training, competition, and recovery programs.
- ensuring proper guidelines for community softball allows more late-developing players the opportunity to make the jump to competitive softball because the gap will not be as large.

The following sections provide an overview of each stage, the corresponding softball age category, and the relative importance of chronological and biological age together with a summary of the key objectives and performance indicators.



TABLE 3. Summary of Softball's LTPD Stages

	ENTER		ENJOY					
STAGE FEATURE	ACTIVE START AS	FUNDAMENTALS FUN	LEARNING TO TRAIN L2T	TRAINING TO TRAIN T2T	TRAINING TO COMPETE T2C	LEARNING & TRAINING TO WIN LT2W	LIVING TO WIN L2W	ACTIVE FOR LIFE A4L
Overall Goal	Fun and active	Fun and participation	Develop overall sports skills and introduce softball skills	Develop physical capacities and softball skills Programming is growth spurt dependent	Consolidate softball skills and further develop fitness	Refine softball skills and further develop fitness to sustain high volume and high intensity training	Optimize performance to peak at major competitions	Fun and active
Chronological Age	Males: 0-6 Females:0-6	Males: 6-9 Females: 6-8	Males: 9-12 Females: 8-11	Males: 12-16 Females: 11-15	Males: 16-23± Females: 15-21±	Males: 19+ Females: 19+	Males: 23+ Females: 19+	All ages
Softball Age Category	Learn To Play Level 1, Mite	Learn To Play Level 1, 2, and 3, Mite	Learn To Play Level 2 and 3, Mite, Squirt	Squirt, Pee Wee, Bantam	Bantam, Midget, Junior	Midget, Junior, Senior	Midget (Women only), Junior, Senior	All age categories
Focus	Enjoy	Play	Learn	Compete	Specialize	Refine	Optimize	Active
Goals	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• General, overall development by participating in a variety of sports and activities• Learn fundamental movement skills• Encourage love of being physically active	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• General, overall development by participating in a variety of sports and activities• Learn fundamental movement skills & ABCs of athleticism• Use own body weight exercises to develop strength and fun games to develop physical capacities• Introduce simple rules and ethics of sport• Introduce simple tactics	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Major skill learning phase: fundamental sport skills should be learned before entering next stage• Introduce general mental skills• Use medicine ball, Swiss ball, and own body weight exercises to develop strength• Participate in complementary sports• Monitor PHV	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Major fitness development phase for stamina and strength with PHV as the reference point• Further develop mental skills• Introduce formal weight training• Introduce ancillary capacities• Participate in complementary sports• Monitor PHV	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Develop softball-specific technical and tactical abilities and physical fitness• Develop softball skills under varying competitive conditions• Develop advanced mental skills• Further develop ancillary capacities• Specialize in softball	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Further develop softball-specific and position-specific technical and tactical abilities, mental skills, and physical fitness• Model all possible aspects of high performance training and performance• Refine ancillary capacities• Monitor recovery and regeneration	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Refine softball-specific and position-specific technical and tactical abilities, mental skills, and physical fitness• Model all possible aspects of high performance training and performance• Ensure planned breaks• Maximize ancillary capacities	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Lifelong participation and involvement in softball• Maintain and improve overall health through physical activity
Windows of Trainability	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Fundamental movement skills• Speed• Suppleness	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Fundamental movement skills• Speed• Suppleness	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Suppleness• Speed• Sport-specific skills	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Suppleness• Speed• Strength*• Stamina*	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Speed• Strength*• Stamina*			
Periodization	No periodization, but well-structured programs	No periodization, but well-structured programs	Single periodization	Single or double periodization	Double or multiple periodization	Double or multiple periodization	Multiple periodization	Single periodization
Practice to Competition Ratio The proposed ratios represent an average throughout the year.	No ratio recommended (wide range of activities)	No ratio recommended (wide range of activities)	70:30	Community Early: 70:30 Late: 60:40 Competitive 60:40	Community 40:60 Competitive 50:50	Community 40:60 Competitive 40:60	Competitive 25:75	As desired by player Recommend: 10:90

* The onset of PHV and the actual point of PHV are the reference points for when to begin training Strength and Stamina.



Active Start

Males and Females: Ages 0 to 6 years

Objective

- *Introduce and develop fundamental movement skills such as locomotion skills, object manipulation skills, and body management skills in a fun and safe softball environment that promotes self-confidence.*

Guiding Principles

- Fun, participation, and learning
- All players with various skill levels play together.
- Fundamental movement skills are learned through the process of “play” with limited technical instruction.

Physical activity should be fun and a part of a child’s daily life. Physical activity is essential for healthy child development. Physical activity

- enhances the development of brain function, coordination, social skills, gross motor skills, emotional control, leadership, and imagination.
- helps children to build confidence and self-esteem.
- helps to build strong bones and muscles, improves flexibility, develops good posture and balance, improves fitness, reduces stress, and improves sleep.
- promotes healthy weight.
- helps children learn to move skillfully and enjoy being active.

At the Active Start stage, physical activity should involve both unstructured play (active play) and structured activities. Toddlers should participate in organized physical activity for at least 30 minutes a day and preschoolers for at least 60 minutes a day. Toddlers and preschoolers should be involved

in unstructured physical activity for at least 60 minutes a day, and up to several hours per day. Toddlers and preschoolers should not be sedentary for more than 60 minutes at a time except when sleeping.

Children typically become involved in softball towards the end of the Active Start stage (ages 5 to 6). Softball Canada’s Learn to Play Program, which has involved more than 280,000 boys and girls since its inception in 2004, uses fun playground activities to develop fundamental movement skills like running, throwing, catching, striking an object, agility, balance, coordination, and speed.

For children with a disability, the opportunity to acquire the habit of lifelong activity, to participate in organized physical activity, and to participate in active play is particularly important. Children with sensory disabilities like visual impairment or hearing loss often require more repetitions to learn movement skills, and different ways of

getting information from the coach. Because this is a period when children with a disability rapidly outgrow their mobility aids, communities need to find effective ways – equipment swaps or rentals, for example – to ensure that all children have access to the equipment they need in order to be active. Fundamental movement and sport skill development for children with a physical or intellectual disability do not always parallel chronological age and physical development.

“The Active Start stage is a time to develop a child’s love of being physically active for a lifetime. This involves participating in unstructured play such as riding a bike around the neighbourhood or joining the neighbourhood kids for a game of hide’n’sseek as well as structured play such as playing on a softball team. This love of physical activity will help to develop physical, mental, emotional, and social skills and lead to a healthy lifestyle. But at the core, this stage must teach children that being active is fun.” – Lise Jubinville, Softball Canada



Active Start Benchmarks

Softball Age Categories

Learn To Play Level 1, Mite

Optimal Windows of Trainability

Fundamental Movement Skills:

- Males: Ages 6 to 9
- Females: Ages 5 to 8

Speed:

- Window 1
 - Females: Ages 6 to 8

Suppleness (Flexibility):

- Males and Females: Ages 6 to 10

Physical Development

- Enter gymnastics, athletics, skate/ski and swimming programs.
- Focus on learning fundamental movement skills.

Psychological Development

- Use imagination to develop visualization skills.
- Introduce concepts of team building.
- Introduce social skills.
- Encourage confidence and positive self-esteem.
- Design activities that help players to feel competent and comfortable participating in a variety of fun and challenging sports and activities.

Periodization

No periodization. Provide well-structured programs with appropriate skill progressions, high levels of activity, and learning opportunities for all in a well-planned, positive environment.

Pre-Season: No pre-season suggested

Competitive Season: 8 to 10 weeks

Number of Practices and Games: 10 to 20 combined practice/modified game sessions lasting 60 minutes

Frequency: Softball-specific activities: 1 to 2 times per week for 60 minutes per session
Daily participation in unstructured and structured physical activities or sports.



Active Start

Learn To Play Level 1, Mite

Game Modifications

- Use modified equipment and distances.
- Play in an open space or ball field.
- Involve more than 2 teams on the field at one time.
- Include a variety of fundamental movement skills, not just softball-specific skills.
- Include lead-up games with lots of action and repetition involving all players.
- Ensure a maximum of 6 versus 6 for games.
- Encourage throwing velocity and proper technique by having an adult catch thrown balls.

Competition Formats

- Introduce active, small group lead-up activities with no formal league competition or tournaments.

Specialization

- Rotate players through all positions.
- Ensure equal playing time.
- Teach all players to pitch.
- Encourage children to play a wide variety of sports.
- Avoid softball activities in the off-season.

Character Development (ethics, values, life skills)

- Encourage personal growth and development through teachable moments and acknowledge players doing something well.
- Introduce fair play attitudes and behaviours:
 - respect for self and others
 - fun
- Encourage the development of positive individual values:
 - honesty, kindness, responsibility
 - disciplined behaviour
- Introduce concepts of team play and fair play:
 - social interaction
 - positive attitude
 - good effort
 - confidence
 - attentiveness



NCCP Context

Community Sport - Initiation



FUNdamentals

Males: Ages 6 to 9 years

Females: Ages 6 to 8 years

Objectives

- *Develop fundamental movement skills such as locomotion skills, object manipulation skills, and body management skills in a fun and safe softball environment that promotes self-confidence.*
- *Introduce fundamental softball skills when fundamental movement skills are mastered.*
- *Use modified games to reinforce fundamental movement skills learned in practice.*
- *Use warm-ups as additional skill development sessions.*
- *Focus on fun and participation.*

Guiding Principles

- *Fun, participation, and learning*
- *All players with various skill levels play together.*
- *Fundamental movement skills are learned through the process of “play” with limited technical instruction.*
- *Practice time provides repetitions through active “play” rather than just drills.*
- *An appropriate Achievement Award Program is in place.*

Most softball programming begins at the FUNdamentals stage. The primary focus is fun, participation, and fundamental movement skill development. Children must practice and then master fundamental movement skills before fundamental softball skills are introduced. For example, children learn to catch with both hands together and then with one hand. They catch a variety of balls of different sizes and weights and learn to catch the ball while standing still, and then moving towards the ball. Only then would a child be taught to catch a thrown softball and then a batted ball with a glove.

Fundamental movement skills are the building blocks for more complex movements that will be learned later. Without fundamental movement skills, children will have difficulty participating in any sport let alone softball. For example, to enjoy softball, baseball, basketball, football, handball, and rugby, the simple skill of catching must be mastered. If a child later decides to leave the competitive stream, the skills acquired during the FUNdamentals stage will benefit her or him when participating in recreational activities, enhancing the quality of life and health. If a child decides to pursue softball, he or she will have the necessary athletic tools to maximize the softball experience.

“In elementary and secondary school, I played a number of sports. As an athlete in general, playing other positions gives you more to work towards. There are different demands and disciplines for every sport. Participating in lots of activities helps to make you a better athlete and gives you a broader skill set.” – Robin Mackin, Senior Women’s National Team Player and 2008 Olympian

Programs should keep children very active, allow for a high number of repetitions, and ensure that participants experience a high level of success. Games should be modified to meet these



objectives with warm-ups providing an additional opportunity for skill development. Simple rules, basic tactics, decision making, and ethics of sport should be introduced. The focus of competition should be on having fun rather than on winning.

The first window of trainability for speed, particularly hand and foot speed, occurs at this stage. Linear, lateral, and multi-directional speed should be developed and the duration of the repetitions should be less than 5 seconds with a low volume of training. This is often called the 'agility, quickness, change of direction' window. The windows of trainability for suppleness (flexibility) and fundamental movement skills also occur in this stage. Fun games should be used for

speed, strength, suppleness and stamina training. Bypassing these windows of trainability is detrimental to a child's future potential and involvement in physical activity and sport.

Children at this age should be active daily in unstructured play with friends. They should not specialize in a single sport. Although they may take part in a preferred sport once or twice a week, they should be exposed to a number of different sports and activities at least 3 to 4 times per week to ensure the development of a wide spectrum of athletic abilities and a lifelong love of sport and physical activity. They should be encouraged to take part in land-based, water-based and ice- and snow-based activities at different times of the year.

“Softball Canada’s Learn to Play Program has met the challenge of creating modifications, variety, and repetitions necessary for skill acquisition in a ‘games-like’ format that is active and fun for young children. Meeting the standards of a healthy fundamentals program for children, it encourages the philosophy that puts the holistic development of the child as the number one priority – focusing on process, not the outcome of the competition. Many fundamental movement skills are practiced, in addition to softball-specific skills, so it helps build the blocks necessary for future lifelong participation in sport.” – Shirley Kowalski, creator of the Learn to Play Program

FUNDamentals Benchmarks

Softball Age Categories	Learn To Play Level 1 & 2, Mite	Learn To Play Level 2 & 3, Mite
Optimal Windows of Trainability	<p><i>Fundamental Movement Skills:</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Females: Ages 5 to 8 • Males: Ages 6 to 9 <p><i>Speed:</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Window 1: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Females: Ages 6 to 8 - Males: Ages 7 to 9 <p><i>Suppleness (Flexibility):</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Males and Females: Ages 6 to 10 <p><i>Sport-Specific Skills:</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Females: Ages 8 to 11 	<p><i>Fundamental Movement Skills:</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Females: Ages 5 to 8 • Males: Ages 6 to 9 <p><i>Speed:</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Window 1: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Males: Ages 7 to 9 <p><i>Suppleness (Flexibility):</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Males and Females: Ages 6 to 10 <p><i>Sport-Specific Skills:</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Females: Ages 8 to 11 • Males: Ages 9 to 12
Physical Development	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Teach the ABC's of athleticism: agility, balance, coordination, and speed. • Teach fundamental movement skills: running, jumping, throwing, and catching. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Teach general physical conditioning, speed, agility, and quickness development with fun games and play activities. • Develop strength and power through own body weight exercises. • Develop flexibility.

FUNDamentals

Psychological Development

- Use imagination to develop visualization skills.
- Introduce guided decision making with coach assistance on the field.
- Introduce team-building activities.
- Introduce self-control expectations.
- Introduce simple rules and ethics in sport.

Periodization

No periodization. Provide well-structured programs with appropriate skill progressions, high levels of activity, and learning opportunities for all in a well-planned, positive environment.

Pre-Season: No pre-season suggested

Competitive Season: 8 to 10 weeks

Number of Practices and Games: 10 to 20 combined practice/modified game sessions that include a 45-minute structured pre-game training session followed by a 45-minute modified game

Frequency:

Softball-specific activities: 1 to 2 times per week for 90 minutes per session

Daily participation in unstructured and structured physical activities or sports.

Game Modifications

- Use modified equipment and distances.
- Use modified rules to ensure
 - maximum scoring opportunity for all.
 - maximum action for all.
 - nobody is sitting out on offence or defence.
 - learning opportunity and high success for all.
 - flexibility to keep game close, active, and avoid dominance by higher skilled players.
- Allow coaches on field during modified game to help direct play.
- Include a variety of fundamental movement skills in warm-up activities.

Learn To Play Level 2 & 3, Mite

- Use imagination to develop visualization skills.
- Introduce guided decision making with coach assistance on the field.
- Introduce team-building activities.
- Introduce self-control expectations.

No periodization. Provide well-structured programs with appropriate skill progressions, high levels of activity, and learning opportunities for all in a well-planned, positive environment.

Pre-season: 8 to 12 practices

Competitive Season: 8 to 10 weeks

Number of Practices and Games: 10 to 20 combined practice/modified game sessions that include a 30-minute structured pre-game training session followed by a 60-minute modified game

Frequency:

Softball-specific activities: 1 to 2 times per week for 90 minutes per session

Daily participation in unstructured and structured physical activities or sports.

- Use modified equipment and distances.
- Use modified rules to ensure
 - more participation.
 - more action.
 - no walks.
 - flexibility to avoid dominance by individuals or team.
- Allow coaches on field during modified game to help direct play if necessary.

FUNdamentals

Learn To Play Level 1 & 2, Mite

Learn To Play Level 2 & 3, Mite

Competition Formats

- Combine practice session with competition.
- Avoid league standings or statistics that emphasize wins/losses rather than process.

- Avoid league standings or statistics that emphasize wins/losses rather than process.
- Host Achievement or Skills Days, Jamborees, Festivals.

Specialization

- Rotate players through all positions.
- Ensure equal playing time.
- Teach all players to pitch.
- Encourage children to play a wide variety of sports.
- Avoid softball activities in the off-season.

- Rotate players through all positions.
- Ensure equal playing time.
- Teach all players to pitch.
- Encourage children to play a wide variety of sports.
- Avoid softball activities in the off-season.

Character Development (ethics, values, life skills)

- Encourage personal growth and development through teachable moments and acknowledge players doing something well.
- Introduce fair play attitudes and behaviours:
 - respect for self and others
 - fun
- Encourage development of positive individual values:
 - honesty, kindness, responsibility
 - disciplined behaviour
- Introduce concepts of team play and fair play:
 - social interaction
 - positive attitude
 - good effort
 - confidence
 - attentiveness



- Encourage personal growth and development through teachable moments and acknowledge players doing something well.
- Continue developing fair play attitudes and behaviours:
 - respect for self, teammates, coaches, opponents, officials, rules, and sport
- Continue developing positive individual values:
 - honesty, kindness, responsibility
 - integrity
 - trustworthiness
 - fairness
 - self-discipline
 - self-esteem
- Continue developing team concept:
 - teamwork
 - work ethic – giving best effort
 - dealing graciously with defeat and victory
 - playing safely



NCCP Context

Community Sport - Initiation

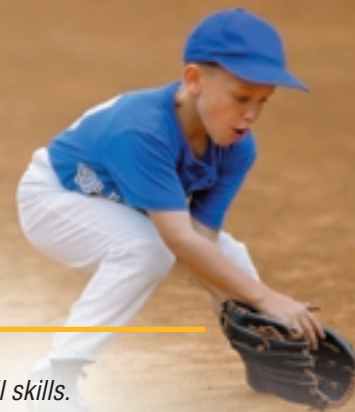
Community Sport - Initiation



Learning to Train (L2T)

Males: Ages 9 to 12 years

Females: 8 to 11 years



Objectives (Ages 8 to 10)

- Develop fundamental movement skills in a fun and safe environment that promotes self-confidence while introducing fundamental softball skills.
- Modified games reinforce fundamental movement skills learned in practice using pre-game warm-ups as additional skill development sessions.
- Focus on fun, participation, and overall fundamental movement skill development.

Objectives (Ages 11 to 12)

- Further develop fundamental softball skills and introduce simple softball tactics/strategies in training that will be used in modified games.
- Introduce general physical fitness training and mental skills training.
- Focus on fun, participation, and fundamental softball skill development.

Guiding Principles (Ages 8 to 10)

- Fun, participation, and learning
- All players with various skill levels play together.
- A stimulating learning environment is organized, active, game-like, and includes a variety of activities.
- An appropriate Achievement Award Program is in place.

This is the time to develop and refine all fundamental movement skills, and to learn overall sport skills. This is the most important stage for the development of fundamental softball-specific skills as it is a period of accelerated learning of coordination and fine motor control. Children are now developmentally ready to acquire the general sports skills that are the cornerstones of all athletic development. This window of trainability

for skill development is between the ages of 8 and 11 for girls and 9 and 12 for boys. Late developers (those who enter puberty later than their peers) have an advantage when it comes to learning skills as this stage lasts longer for them. The emphasis is on teaching fundamental softball skills and tactics as well as other abilities such as how to achieve optimum balance, flexibility, posture, strength, and power.

Guiding Principles (Ages 11 to 12)

- Fun, participation, and learning
- Players are divided into teams based on skill levels if possible.
- Player autonomy is introduced.
- Players play 2 to 3 complementary sports and play 3 to 4 positions in softball.
- The focus is on the process of individual and team development rather than on the competitive outcome.
- Practices are well organized, varied, game-like, and active.
- An appropriate Achievement Award Program is in place.

“The Learning to Train stage of development is critical as players pass through a significant window of trainability for sport-specific skill development. If this training opportunity is not optimized, it will compromise the ability of the player to reach his or her full potential in later years, regardless of future training programs.”
– Charles Cardinal, Sport Canada LTAD Expert

Because of this skill development window, it is extremely important to provide players with sufficient time and repetitions to practice and master fundamental softball skills. During this stage, 70% of the time a child is participating in softball should be devoted to practice and only 30% of the time to competing in a game. Coaches should design drills in practice to simulate game situations to ensure fun and appropriate challenges. The focus of games should be to utilize the skills learned in practice in a competitive situation. The focus is not on winning the game.

Daily participation in physical activity and/or organized sport is encouraged. Children will start to have a clear idea about the sports they like. However, they should still participate in at least 2

to 3 sports that complement softball. In addition, they should be playing 3 to 4 different positions in softball to ensure their overall development.

The end of this stage is signaled by the onset of Peak Height Velocity.

Learning to Train To-Do List

- Develop all fundamental movement skills and fundamental softball skills.
- Develop strength using exercises that incorporate the child's own body weight, medicine balls, and Swiss balls.
- Introduce hopping and bounding exercises or routines, or wheeling up gradients, to aid in strength development.

- Further develop stamina through games and relays.
- Further develop flexibility through exercises.
- Further develop speed by using specific activities that focus on agility, quickness, and change of direction especially during the warm-up.
- Introduce general mental skills.
- Structure competition to address differences in training ages and abilities.
- Apply a ratio of 70% training to 30% competition and competition-specific training. These percentages vary according to individual specific needs. Players undertaking this type of preparation will be better equipped for competition in both the short-term and long-term than those who focus solely on winning.

Learning to Train Benchmarks

Softball Age Categories	Learn To Play Level 2 & 3, Mite	Squirt
Optimal Windows of Trainability	<p><i>Fundamental Movement Skills:</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Females: Ages 5 to 8 • Males: Ages 6 to 9 <p><i>Speed:</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Window 1: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Females: Ages 6 to 8 - Males: Ages 7 to 9 <p><i>Suppleness (Flexibility):</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Males and Females: Ages 6 to 10 	<p><i>Speed:</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Window 2: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Females: Ages 11 to 13 <p><i>Suppleness (Flexibility):</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Males and Females: Ages 6 to 10 • Special attention during PHV

Sport-Specific Skills Training:

- Females: Ages 8 to 11
- Males: Ages 9 to 12

Sport-Specific Skills:

- Females: Ages 8 to 11
- Males: Ages 9 to 12

Strength:

- Window 1:
 - Females: immediately after PHV
- Window 2:
 - Females only: onset of menarche

Stamina (Endurance):

- Begins with the onset of PHV
- Females: Ages 10 to 14
- Males: Ages 10 to 15

Physical Development

- Develop general physical conditioning, speed, agility, and quickness with games and play activities.
- Develop strength and power through own body weight exercises, medicine balls, and Swiss balls.
- Develop flexibility.

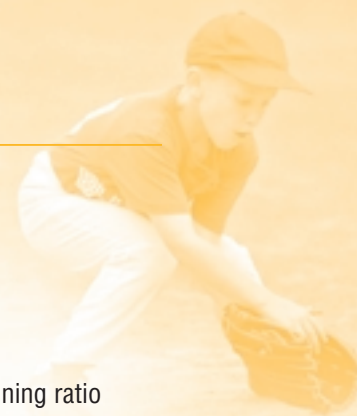
- Develop general physical conditioning, speed, agility, and quickness with games and play activities.
- Develop strength and power through own body weight exercises, medicine balls, and Swiss balls.
- Develop flexibility.
- Monitor PHV especially for females.

Psychological Development

- Use imagination to develop visualization skills.
- Introduce guided decision making with coach assistance on the field.
- Provide team building activities.
- Introduce self-control expectations.

- Introduce visualization skills.
- Develop the demands of autonomous decision making during practice.
- Introduce goal setting.
- Introduce elements of team cohesion.
- Introduce emotional control





Periodization

No periodization. Provide well-structured programs with appropriate skill progressions, high levels of activity, and learning opportunities for all in a well-planned, positive environment.

Pre-season: 8 to 12 practices

Competitive Season: 8 to 10 weeks

Number of Practices and Games: 10-20 combined practice/modified game sessions that include a 30-minute structured pre-game training session followed by a 60-minute modified game

Frequency:

Softball-specific activities: 1 to 2 times per week for 90 minutes per session

Daily participation in unstructured and structured physical activities or sports.

Single Periodization

Pre-season:

Minimum: 8 to 12 practices

Ideal: 12 to 16 practices

Competitive Season: 12 to 15 weeks

Practice to Competition Ratio:

Minimum: 60% Practices: 40% Games (training ratio includes pre-season practices)

Ideal: 70% Practices: 30% Games (Training ratio includes pre-season practices)

Number of Games:

Acceptable: 24 to 29 games plus structured skill development prior to games

Ideal: 18 to 22 games plus structured skill development prior to games

Number of Practices (including pre-season practices):

Minimum: 36 to 44 practices

Ideal: 42 to 52 practices

Frequency:

Softball-specific activities: 2 to 3 times per week for 90 minutes per session

Participation in other sports or physical activities 3 times per week.

Game Modifications

- Use modified equipment and distances.
- Use modified rules to ensure
 - more participation.
 - more action.
 - no walks.
 - flexibility to avoid dominance by individuals or team.
- Allow coaches on field during modified game to help direct play if necessary.

- Use the 11" ball.
- Use modified pitching and baseline distances.
- Make minor rule modifications to
 - ensure pitcher development and avoid pitcher overuse.
 - avoid dominance by one team.
 - provide the opportunity for more players to get into play.

Competition Formats

- Avoid league standings or statistics that emphasize wins/losses rather than process.
- Hold Achievement or Skills Days, Jamborees, Festivals.

- Record league standings but emphasize the process rather than the win/loss record.
- Ensure that tournament and provincial championship formats maximize the number of games for each team based on circumstances such as time and facilities.

Specialization

- Rotate players through all positions.
- Ensure equal playing time.
- Teach all players to pitch.
- Encourage children to play a wide variety of sports.
- Avoid softball activities in the off-season.

- Play 3 to 4 positions.
- Ensure fair and reasonable playing time.
- Develop at least 5 pitchers per team.
- Encourage daily participation in numerous sport or recreation activities.
- Avoid softball activities in the off-season.

**Character Development
(ethics, values, life skills)**

- Encourage personal growth and development through teachable moments and acknowledge players doing something well.
- Continue developing fair play attitudes and behaviours:
 - respect for self, teammates, coaches, opponents, officials, rules, and sport
- Continue developing positive individual values:
 - honesty, kindness, responsibility
 - integrity
 - trustworthiness
 - fairness
 - self-discipline
 - self-esteem
- Continue developing the team concept:
 - teamwork
 - work ethic – giving best effort
 - deal graciously with defeat and victory
 - playing safely

**NCCP Context**

Community Sport - Initiation

Community Sport - Ongoing Participation



Training to Train (T2T)

Males: Ages 12 to 16 years

Females: 11 to 15 years

Programming is dependent upon a change in the height cue (Peak Height Velocity).



Objectives (Ages 11 to 13)

- Further develop and consolidate fundamental softball skills and simple tactics/strategies.
- Introduce more advanced softball skills and tactics/strategies.
- Develop overall general physical fitness.
- Develop general mental skills and introduce softball-specific mental skills.
- Learn to cope with the mental and physical challenges of competition.
- Optimize the skill set and build on competitive experiences.

Guiding Principles – Community Softball

Ages 11 to 13

- Fun, participation, and learning
- Players are divided based on skill levels if possible.
- Player autonomy is developed.
- Players play 1 to 2 complementary sports and play 2 to 3 positions in softball.
- The focus is on individual and team development rather than on a competitive outcome.
- Multiple sport participation is encouraged.
- Enrichment programs are available and open to all.
- An appropriate Achievement Award Program is in place.

Ages 14 to 16

- Fun (socially motivated); balance between participation and competition
- Player autonomy is developed.
- Players play 1 to 2 complementary sports and play 2 to 3 positions in softball.
- Fundamental skills are reinforced in practice using game simulations, but emphasis shifts to performing skills well during games.

Objectives (Ages 14 to 16)

- Further consolidate fundamental softball skills and simple tactics/strategies.
- Develop more advanced softball skills and strategies.
- Further develop overall general physical fitness.
- Further develop general mental skills and softball-specific mental skills.
- Focus on transferring the performance of skills developed in training into a competitive environment. In the competitive stream, there is an additional focus on optimal team performance.

Guiding Principles – Competitive Softball

Ages 11 to 13

- Fun (competitively motivated); balance between participation and competition
- Player autonomy is developed.
- Players play 1 to 2 complementary sports and play 2 to 3 positions in softball.
- A talent identification process selects players for enrichment programs.
- The focus is on individual and team development and coping in a competitive environment.
- Advanced softball skills and strategies are introduced and developed during practices and reinforced in games.

Ages 14 to 16

- Fun (competitively motivated); balance between participation and competition
- Player autonomy is developed.
- Players play 1 to 2 complementary sports and play 2 to 3 positions in softball.
- A talent identification process selects players for enrichment programs.
- Advanced softball skills and strategies are developed during practices and reinforced in games.

The Training to Train stage begins when the child's major growth spurt begins (onset of PHV). The onset of PHV is highly variable but usually begins between the ages of 10 to 14 years for girls and between the ages of 10 to 15 years for boys. On average, PHV occurs at about age 12 for girls and about age 14 for boys. The growth spurt can last between 2 to 5 years. During rapid growth spurts, players may go through an uncoordinated and awkward stage that coaches and players must be aware of as it will affect performance. In addition, coaches must be aware that there may be up to a 4-year physiological advantage for early maturers over late maturers when selecting teams.

In this stage, players are separated into community or competitive softball programs based on their skill level. The development of technical skills revolves around consolidating fundamental softball skills — fielding, throwing, pitching, hitting, and baserunning, including sliding — and introducing advanced skills and tactics. Position-specific skills are developed but with players still learning at least 2 to 3 positions. During competitions, teams play to win and do their best, but the major focus is on learning softball skills and tactics and successfully applying them in competitions rather than on wins and losses. Players should be introduced to ancillary capacities that enhance their performance. Players are encouraged to participate in 1 to 2 complementary sports throughout the year to develop all their athletic abilities.

Training to Train is the most important stage for athletic preparation in terms of building the player's "engine". This is a major fitness development stage for speed, strength, and stamina. The second window of trainability for

speed occurs in this stage and should include intervals between 5 to 20 seconds. The onset of PHV and the actual point of PHV are the reference points for when to begin training stamina and strength. Aerobic capacity training is recommended before players reach PHV. Aerobic power should be introduced progressively after the growth rate decelerates. Strength training should occur immediately after PHV for females and 12 to 18 months after PHV for males. Females have a second window of trainability for strength with the onset of menarche. Coaches should adjust the training program for each player, depending on whether they mature early, average, or late. Accommodating different rates of maturation can be challenging in a team-based sport like softball. Coaches may wish to group players in training based on their maturation (pre-PHV, PHV, and post-PHV). To properly accommodate all the development that should be completed in this stage, an increase in time commitment in the training schedule will be required.

"This stage is critical in the physical development of young softball players and can definitely have a long-term impact on their softball career. It's during this period that the qualities of speed, strength, and power, three of the most important physical qualities in softball, are most responsive to training because the body is in 'growing up' mode. So, it's vital that young softball players in this stage of development be exposed to activities and exercises that will challenge the development of these important physical qualities." — Marc Dagenais, Strength and Conditioning Coach for Softball Canada's National Teams

Training to Train To-Do List

- Consolidate all fundamental softball skills and tactics/strategies and introduce advanced softball skills and tactics/strategies.
- Develop strength using formal weight training under the supervision of a qualified fitness instructor.
- Develop aerobic capacity prior to PHV and aerobic power after PHV.
- Give special attention to flexibility training due to sudden changes in stature and structure.
- Further develop speed by using specific activities that focus on agility, quickness, and change of direction especially during the warm-up.
- Introduce and develop softball-specific mental skills.
- Structure competition to focus on development rather than on wins and losses.
- Shift the ratio to 60% training to 40% competition and competition-specific training. These percentages vary according to individual specific needs.



Training to Train Benchmarks - *Community Softball*

Softball Age Categories	Squirt, Pee Wee	Bantam
Optimal Windows of Trainability	<p><i>Speed:</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Window 2: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Females: Ages 11 to 13 Males: Ages 13 to 16 <p><i>Suppleness (Flexibility)</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Special attention during PHV <p><i>Sport-Specific Skills:</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Females: Ages 8 to 11 Males: Ages 9 to 12 <p><i>Strength:</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Window 1: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Females: immediately after PHV Males: 12 to 18 months after PHV Window 2: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Females only: onset of menarche <p><i>Stamina (Endurance):</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Begins with the onset of PHV Females: Ages 10 to 14 Males: Ages 10 to 15 <p>Stamina, strength, speed, suppleness, and skills are always trainable.</p>	<p><i>Speed:</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Window 2: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Males: Ages 13 to 16 <p><i>Suppleness (Flexibility)</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Special attention during PHV <p><i>Strength:</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Window 1: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Females: immediately after PHV Males: 12 to 18 months after PHV Window 2: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Females only: onset of menarche <p><i>Stamina (Endurance):</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Begins with the onset of PHV Males: Ages 10 to 15 <p>Stamina, strength, speed, suppleness, and skills are always trainable.</p>
Physical Development	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Introduce general physical conditioning. Introduce general strength and power training. Develop general speed, agility, and quickness. Develop flexibility with special attention during the growth spurt. Monitor PHV. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Develop general physical conditioning. Develop general strength and power. Develop general speed, agility, and quickness. Develop flexibility with special attention during the growth spurt. Introduce injury prevention. Monitor PHV

Psychological Development

- Develop visualization skills.
- Develop autonomous decision making during games.
- Develop goal setting.
- Develop team cohesion.
- Develop emotional control.
- Introduce game plans, pre-game, and game routines.
- Introduce stress management and coping strategies.
- Introduce attentional control.

- Consolidate visualization skills.
- Consolidate autonomous decision-making skills.
- Consolidate goal setting.
- Develop team cohesion.
- Develop emotional control.
- Develop game plans, pre-game, and game routines.
- Develop stress management and coping strategies.
- Develop attentional control.

Periodization

Single or Double Periodization

Pre-season:

Minimum: 8 to 12 practices

Ideal: 10 to 15 practices

Competitive Season:

Minimum: 9 to 11 weeks

Ideal: 12 to 15 weeks

Practice to Competition Ratio:

Minimum: 60% Practices: 40% Games (training ratio includes pre-season practices)

Ideal: 70% Practices: 30% Games (training ratio includes pre-season practices)

Number of Games:

Acceptable: 24 to 30 games plus structured skill development prior to games

Ideal: 18 to 22 games plus structured skill development prior to games

Number of Practices (including pre-season practices):

Minimum: 36 to 45 practices

Ideal: 42 to 52 practices

Frequency:

Softball-specific activities: 2 to 3 times per week for 90 minutes each session

Participation in complementary physical activities/sports 3 times per week.

Single or Double Periodization

Pre-season:

Minimum: 8 to 12 practices

Ideal: 10 to 15 practices

Competitive Season:

Minimum: 10 to 12 weeks

Ideal: 12 to 15 weeks

Practice to Competition Ratio:

Minimum: 50% Practices: 50% Games (training ratio includes pre-season practices)

Ideal: 60% Practices: 40% Games (training ratio includes pre-season practices)

Number of Games:

Acceptable : 30 to 35 games plus structured skill development prior to games

Ideal: 24 to 30 games plus structured skill development prior to games

Number of Practices (including pre-season practices):

Minimum: 30 to 35 practices

Ideal: 36 to 45 practices

Frequency:

Softball-specific activities: 2 to 4 times per week for 90 minutes each session

Participation in complementary physical activities/sports 3 times per week.

Game Modifications

- Begin to use the 12" ball.
- Use modified pitching and baseline distances.
- Make minor rule modifications to prevent injury and avoid dominance by individuals or team.
- Limit the number of innings pitched.

- Use modified pitching and baseline distances.
- Limit the number of innings pitched.

Competition Formats

- Record league standings but not individual statistics.
- At tournament and provincial championships, maximize the number of games for each team based on circumstances such as time and facilities.

- Record league standings but not individual statistics.
- At tournament and provincial championships, maximize the number of games for each team based on circumstances such as time and facilities.

Specialization

- Play 1 to 2 complementary sports.
- Play 2 to 3 positions in softball.
- Ensure fair and reasonable playing time.
- Develop at least 4 pitchers per team.
- Encourage daily participation in numerous sport or recreation activities.

- Play 1 to 2 complementary sports.
- Play 2 to 3 positions in softball.
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**Character Development
(ethics, values, life skills)**

- Encourage personal growth and development through teachable moments, acknowledge players doing something well, and formalize teaching with examples or discussions.
- Establish a Code of Ethics.
- Continue to develop fair play attitudes and behaviours:
 - respect for self, teammates, coaches, opponents, officials, rules, and the sport
 - non-violence
- Continue to develop positive individual values:
 - respect for the truth
 - moral reasoning, including recognition of right and wrong
 - considerate behaviour
 - responsibility/accountability – no excuses or laying blame
 - mental toughness and determination
 - integrity
- Continue to develop positive team concept, taking pride in
 - teamwork.
 - work ethic, including dedication, effort, and commitment to hard, productive work.
 - humility, dealing graciously with defeat and victory.
 - playing safely.
 - tolerance.
 - inclusiveness.
 - expressing gratitude, thanking coaches, officials, and volunteers.
 - accepting and fulfilling role on team.

**NCCP Context**

Community Sport - Ongoing Participation

Community Sport - Ongoing Participation

Training to Train Benchmarks - *Competitive Softball*

Softball Age Categories	Squirt, Pee Wee	Bantam
Optimal Windows of Trainability	<p><i>Speed:</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Window 2: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Females: Ages 11 to 13 Males: Ages 13 to 16 <p><i>Suppleness (Flexibility):</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Special attention during PHV <p><i>Sport-Specific Skills:</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Females: Ages 8 to 11 Males: Ages 9 to 12 <p><i>Strength:</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Window 1: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Females: immediately after PHV Males: 12 to 18 months after PHV Window 2: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Females only: onset of menarche <p><i>Stamina (Endurance):</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Begins with the onset of PHV Females: Ages 10 to 14 Males: Ages 10 to 15 <p>Stamina, strength, speed, suppleness, and skills are always trainable.</p>	<p><i>Speed:</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Window 2: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Males: Ages 13 to 16 <p><i>Suppleness (Flexibility):</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Special attention during PHV <p><i>Strength:</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Window 1: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Females: immediately after PHV Males: 12 to 18 months after PHV Window 2: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Females only: onset of menarche <p><i>Stamina (Endurance):</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Begins with the onset of PHV Males: Ages 10 to 15 <p>Stamina, strength, speed, suppleness, and skills are always trainable.</p>
Physical Development	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Introduce general physical conditioning. Introduce strength and power training. Develop general speed, agility, and quickness. Develop flexibility. Introduce formal weight training using light weights and emphasizing proper lifting technique that is supervised by a trained fitness professional. Monitor PHV. <p>Note: This is the major fitness development stage for stamina and strength. The onset of PHV and the actual point of PHV are the reference points.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Introduce general physical conditioning. Develop general strength and power. Develop general speed, agility, and quickness. Develop flexibility. Introduce injury prevention. Continue with formal weight training using light weights and emphasizing proper lifting technique under the supervision of a trained fitness professional. Monitor PHV. <p>Note: This is the major fitness development stage for stamina and strength. The onset of PHV and the actual point of PHV are the reference points.</p>

Psychological Development

- Develop visualization skills.
- Develop autonomous decision making during games.
- Develop goal setting.
- Develop team cohesion.
- Develop emotional control.
- Introduce game plans, pre-game, and game routines.
- Introduce stress management and coping strategies.
- Introduce attentional control

- Consolidate visualization skills.
- Consolidate autonomous decision-making skills.
- Consolidate goal setting.
- Develop team cohesion.
- Develop emotional control.
- Develop game plans, pre-game, and game routines.
- Develop stress management and coping strategies.
- Develop attentional control.

Periodization

Single or Double Periodization

Pre-season:

Minimum: 10 to 12 practices

Ideal: 14 to 18 practices

Competitive Season: 12 to 15 weeks

Practice to Competition Ratio:

Minimum: 50% Practices: 50% Games (training ratio includes pre-season practices)

Ideal: 60% Practices: 40% Games (Training ratio includes pre-season practices)

Number of Games:

Acceptable: 36 to 40 games plus structured skill development prior to games

Ideal: 24 to 30 games plus structured skill development prior to games

Number of Practices (including pre-season practices):

Minimum: 36 to 40 practices

Ideal: 36 to 45 practices

Frequency:

Softball-specific activities: 2 to 3 times per week for 90 minutes each session

Participation in complementary physical activities/sports 3 times per week.

Single or Double Periodization

Pre-season:

Minimum: 10 to 15 practices

Ideal: 15 to 20 practices

Competitive Season: 12 to 16 weeks

Practice to Competition Ratio:

Minimum: 50% Practices: 50% Games (training ratio includes pre-season practices)

Ideal: 60% Practices: 40% Games (Training ratio includes pre-season practices)

Number of Games:

Acceptable: 36 to 48 games plus structured skill development prior to games

Ideal: 30 to 36 games plus structured skill development prior to games

Number of Practices (including pre-season practices):

Minimum: 36 to 48 practices

Ideal: 54 to 72 practices

Frequency:

Softball-specific activities: 3 to 4 times per week for 90 minutes each session

Participation in complementary physical activities/sports 2 to 3 times per week.

Game Modifications

- Begin to use the 12" ball.
- Use modified pitching and baseline distances.
- Make minor rule modifications to prevent injury and avoid dominance by individuals or team.
- Limit the number of innings pitched.

- Use modified pitching and baseline distances.
- Limit the number of innings pitched.

Competition Formats

- Record league standings and individual statistics.
- Maximize the number of games for each team based on circumstances such as time and facilities at tournaments and regional, provincial, inter-provincial, and national championships.

- Record league standings and individual statistics.
- Maximize the number of games for each team based on circumstances such as time and facilities at tournaments and regional, provincial, inter-provincial, and national championships.

Specialization

- Play 1 to 2 complementary sports.
- Play 2 to 3 positions in softball.
- Ensure fair and reasonable playing time
- Develop at least 4 pitchers per team.
- Encourage daily participation in numerous sport or recreation activities.

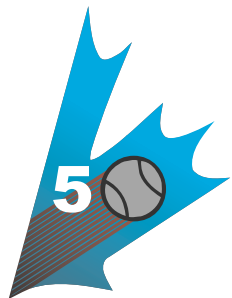
- Play 1 to 2 complementary sports.
- Play 2 to 3 positions in softball.
- Ensure fair and reasonable playing time.
- Develop at least 3 pitchers per team.
- Encourage daily participation in numerous sport or recreation activities.



**Character Development
(ethics, values, life skills)**

- Encourage personal growth and development through teachable moments, acknowledge players doing something well, and formalize teaching with examples or discussions.
- Establish a Code of Ethics.
- Continue to develop fair play attitudes and behaviours:
 - respect for self, teammates, coaches, opponents, officials, rules, and sport
 - non-violence
- Continue to develop positive individual values:
 - respect for the truth
 - moral reasoning – recognition of right and wrong
 - considerate behaviour
 - responsibility/accountability – no excuses or laying blame
 - mental toughness/determination
 - integrity
- Continue to develop positive team concept, taking pride in
 - teamwork.
 - work ethic, including dedication, effort, and commitment to hard, productive work.
 - humility, dealing graciously with defeat and victory.
 - playing safely.
 - tolerance.
 - inclusiveness.
 - expressing gratitude, thanking coaches, officials, and volunteers.
 - accepting and fulfilling role on team.





Training to Compete (T2C)

Males: Ages 16 to 23 +/- years

Females: 15 to 21 years

Programming dependent upon change in height cue (PHV)

Objectives

- Refine fundamental softball skills and further develop advanced softball skills and tactics/strategies.
- Further develop general physical fitness and introduce softball-specific physical fitness.
- Refine general mental skills and develop softball-specific mental skills.
- Focus on the preparation for optimal performance in competition.

Guiding Principles – Community Softball

- Fun (socially motivated); Balance between participation and competition
- Player autonomy is developed.
- Players play softball and 1 to 2 other sports and play 2 to 3 positions in softball.
- Fundamental skills are reinforced in practice using game simulations but emphasis shifts to performing skills well during games.

Everything that has been learned in the earlier stages comes to fruition in the Training to Compete stage where the emphasis is learning to execute when it counts. To increase the likelihood of future success, players must first test their technical, tactical, physical and mental competencies in different circumstances and conditions.

Players will start to specialize in softball and 1 position in this stage but still play 2 to 3 different positions. Training becomes year-round with an increase in intensity and volume and becomes

highly individualized but within the team setting. Players continue to develop and refine their softball-specific technical skills and physical conditioning, testing themselves in a variety of competitive situations and learning to taper and peak for important competitions. Players and coaches are introduced to working with an Integrated Sport Team (IST) consisting of a sport psychologist, nutritionist, exercise physiologist, strength and conditioning coach, and a medical team (physician, athletic therapist, physiotherapist, massage therapist, chiropractor) to enhance player and team performances.

Guiding Principles – Competitive Softball

- Skill development is reinforced under competitive conditions.
- Player autonomy is developed.
- Players specialize in softball and 1 position but play 1 to 2 other positions.
- The focus on softball-specific and position-specific training and testing is increased.
- The importance of modelling high performance players is emphasized.
- Individualized instruction and preparation addresses each player's individual needs, strengths, and weaknesses.

During this stage, players begin to learn how to self-coach by becoming more independent, responsible, and accountable in making decisions that affect their training and playing performances. Players, in collaboration with coaches, will also start to reflect post-training and post-competition to find ways to enhance future performances. Players begin to identify the factors that contribute to their Ideal Performance State (ISP) and work towards achieving this state for every competition.

Moving through this stage, players start to make choices and decide what they want to do in terms of their future participation in softball. Players may continue on the competitive pathway or choose to play community softball with the possibility of returning to the competitive stream at a later date.

All players are learning to achieve balance between their sport participation and other aspects of their lives such as school, jobs, family, and relationships. They must be highly organized to meet these life demands and the increased demands of their training and competition schedules.

“In the Training to Compete stage, players determine the amount of time and energy they are able to devote to the game of softball. Players choosing to pursue the competitive stream will focus more on softball-specific technical and physical fitness training. The importance of mental training will increase as players are required to perform advanced skills, tactics, and strategies in a highly competitive environment “ – Don Bates, Softball Canada National Team Pitching Coach

Training to Compete To-Do List

- Provide a year-round, high-intensity training program that includes softball-specific training and testing.
- Teach players, who are now proficient at performing fundamental and advanced softball-specific skills, to perform those skills under a variety of conditions during training and competitions.
- Place special emphasis on optimum preparation by modelling high-level competitions in training.
- Individually tailor to a greater degree fitness programs, recovery programs, psychological preparation, and technical development to meet the player's individual needs and address each player's strengths and weaknesses.
- Utilize multiple periodization as the optimal framework of preparation for learning to taper and peak for important competitions.
- Change the training to competition ratio to 50% training to develop technical and tactical skills and improving fitness and to 50% competition and competition-specific training.
- Conduct critical evaluation of the program at regular intervals throughout the season with coach and player(s) thoroughly examining competition results, achievement of team and individual goals and how the player and team prepared. Together, the coach and player(s) will make modifications for the next cycle.

Training to Compete Benchmarks

	COMMUNITY SOFTBALL	COMPETITIVE SOFTBALL
Softball Age Categories	Bantam, Midget, Junior	Bantam, Midget, Junior
Optimal Windows of Trainability	<p><i>Speed:</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Window 2: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Males: Ages 13 to 16 <p><i>Suppleness (Flexibility):</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Special attention during PHV <p><i>Strength:</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Window 1: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Females: immediately after PHV - Males: 12 to 18 months after PHV • Window 2: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Females only: onset of menarche 	<p><i>Speed:</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Window 2: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Males: Ages 13 to 16 <p><i>Suppleness (Flexibility):</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Special attention during PHV <p><i>Strength:</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Window 1: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Females: immediately after PHV - Males: 12 to 18 months after PHV • Window 2: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Females only: onset of menarche

	<p><i>Stamina (Endurance):</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Begins with the onset of PHV <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Males: Ages 10 to 15 <p>Stamina, strength, speed, suppleness, and skills are always trainable.</p>	<p><i>Stamina (Endurance):</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Begins with the onset of PHV <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Males: Ages 10 to 15 <p>Stamina, strength, speed, suppleness, and skills are always trainable.</p>
Physical Development	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Develop general physical conditioning. Introduce softball-specific strength and power training. Maintain flexibility. Practice injury prevention. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Introduce softball-specific physical conditioning. Introduce softball-specific strength and power. Introduce softball-specific speed, agility, and quickness. Maintain flexibility. Practice injury prevention.
Psychological Development	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Refine autonomous decision-making skills. Develop team cohesion. Consolidate emotional control. Consolidate game plans, pre-game and game routines. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Refine visualization skills. Refine autonomous decision-making skills. Refine goal setting. Develop team cohesion. Consolidate emotional control. Consolidate game plans, pre-game and game routines. Consolidate stress management and coping strategies. Consolidate attentional control.
Periodization	<p>Double Periodization</p> <p>Pre-season: 10 to 16 practices</p> <p>Competitive Season 9 to 11 weeks</p> <p>Practice to Competition Ratio: 40% Practices: 60% Games (training ratio includes pre-season practices)</p> <p>Number of Games: 26 to 30 games plus structured skill development prior to games</p> <p>Number of Practices (including pre-season practices): 18 to 20 practices</p> <p>Frequency:</p> <p>Softball-specific activities: 2 to 3 times per week</p> <p>Participation in complementary physical activities/sports 3 times per week.</p>	<p>Multiple Periodization</p> <p>Pre-season: 15 to 20 practices</p> <p>Competitive Season: 12 to 16 weeks</p> <p>Practice to Competition Ratio: 50% Practices: 50% Games (training ratio includes pre-season practices)</p> <p>Number of Games: 44 to 52 games plus structured skill development prior to games</p> <p>Number of Practices (including pre-season practices): 44 to 52 practices</p> <p>Frequency:</p> <p>Softball-specific activities: 4 to 8 times per week including fitness and mental training</p> <p>Daily participation in complementary physical activities/sports in the off-season.</p>

Game Modifications

- No modifications required. Follow rules as per Softball Canada official rulebook.

- No modifications required. Follow rules as per Softball Canada official rulebook.

Competition Formats

- League standings are recorded and individual statistics may be recorded.
- Tournament and provincial championship formats maximize the number of games for each team based on circumstances such as time and facilities.

- League standings and individual statistics are recorded.
- Tournament formats maximize the number of games for each team based on circumstances such as time and facilities.
- The regional, provincial, inter-provincial, and national championship formats should identify the best team.

Specialization

- Play softball and 1 to 2 other sports.
- Play 2 to 3 positions in softball.
- Ensure fair and reasonable playing time.
- Develop at least 3 pitchers per team.
- Encourage daily participation in numerous sport or recreation activities.

- Specialize in softball.
- Specialize in 1 position but play 1 to 2 other positions.
- Ensure fair and reasonable playing time.
- Develop at least 3 pitchers per team.
- Encourage daily participation in numerous sport or recreation activities.



**Character Development
(ethics, values, life skills)**

- Encourage personal growth and development through teachable moments, acknowledge players doing something well, and formalize teaching with examples or discussions.
- Establish a Code of Ethics.
- Adhere to fair play attitudes and behaviours:
 - respect for self, teammates, coaches, opponents, officials, rules, and the sport
 - non-violence
 - non-harassment
- Apply positive individual values:
 - respect for the truth
 - integrity
 - moral decision making in the heat of competition
 - healthy living
 - considerate behaviour
 - seeking new information and opportunities to learn
 - responsibility/accountability – no excuses or laying of blame
 - committing to continuous improvement
 - mental toughness/determination
 - committing to a particular course of action
 - time management of academic, sport, and social aspects of life
- Apply positive team concept, taking pride in
 - teamwork.
 - playing safely.
 - work ethic, dedication, effort, and commitment to hard work.
 - expressing gratitude, thanking coaches, officials, and volunteers.
 - accepting and fulfilling role on team.
 - humility, dealing graciously with defeat and victory.
 - tolerance.
 - inclusiveness.
 - accepting and embracing discipline for the benefit of the team.
- Respect and adhere to Drug-Free Sport


NCCP Context

Community Sport - Ongoing Participation

 Competition - Introduction or
 Competition - Development



Learning and Training to Win (LT2W)

Males and Females: Ages 19+
DOMESTIC EXCELLENCE



Objectives

- Refine advanced softball skills and tactics/strategies.
- Develop softball-specific and position-specific physical fitness.
- Further develop softball-specific mental skills.
- Focus on maximizing performance in competition.

Guiding Principles – Community Softball

- Fun (socially motivated); balance between participation and competition
- Player autonomy is developed.
- Players play softball and 1 other sport and play 2 to 3 positions in softball.

The focus in the Learning and Training to Win stage is on preparing the player and team to regularly give the best possible performance on the international stage. During this stage, players are exposed to national multi-sport games and begin the transition from high-level national competitions to international competitions. Players learn to deal with the unique demands of competing on the international stage, which include travel, food considerations, and culture.

Year-round, highly individualized, and softball- and position-specific training is required both within

the team setting and by players on their own. Close to 40% of training is devoted to the refinement of technical and tactical skills and fitness improvement and 60% is devoted to competition and competition-specific training. Training should continue to develop core body strength, softball-specific strength and power and to prevent injuries. Players are introduced to multiple periodization with multiple taper and peaks. Special attention should be paid to injury prevention, recovery, and regeneration as players will be especially vulnerable to over-training.

Guiding Principles – Competitive Softball

- Cooperation between players, synchronization, and increased speed of execution of plays is emphasized.
- Player autonomy is refined.
- Players specialize in softball and 1 position, but have the ability to play a second position well.
- The focus on softball-specific and position-specific training and testing is increased.
- Instruction and preparation are individualized in order to address each player's individual needs, strengths, and weaknesses.

Learning and Training to Win To-Do List

- Provide year-round, high-intensity, position- and softball-specific training and testing.
- Teach players, who are now proficient at performing advanced softball and position-specific skills, to perform these skills under a variety of conditions during training and competitions.
- Place special emphasis on optimum preparation by modelling high performance competition.
- Individually tailor, to a greater degree, fitness programs, recovery programs, psychological

preparation, and technical development. Emphasize individual preparation that addresses each player's strengths and weaknesses.

- Allow players to make decisions about their training regimen.
- Utilize multiple periodization as the optimal framework of preparation.
- Change the training-to-competition ratio to 40:60. Devote 40% of available time to developing technical and tactical skills in training and 60% to competition and competition-specific training.
- Maximize strength training to bring about overall improvement.

- Ensure that physical training programs employ the most advanced techniques and sport science information in order to minimize injuries.
- Update, review, and understand the importance of performance and personal goal setting.
- Recognize and plan for the appropriate level of competition.
- Conduct critical evaluation of the program so that coach and player(s) thoroughly examine competition results and how the player/team prepared. The cycle should occur after each major event.

"To compete at the international level today, you must first have a passion for softball, but that needs to be combined with the commitment, dedication, and desire to improve both your physical and mental skills year round. The premier international softball players in today's game are physically fit, mentally prepared, and have a firm understanding of strategy and skill execution in addition to possessing the necessary sport-specific skills. Raw talent will only present someone with the opportunity and from there it is up to the individual to develop their game in the aforementioned areas if they want to be successful at the highest level."
Ryan Wolfe, Senior Men's National Team Player

Learning and Training to Win Benchmarks

	COMMUNITY SOFTBALL	COMPETITIVE SOFTBALL
Softball Age Categories	Midget, Junior, Senior	Midget, Junior, Senior
Optimal Windows of Trainability	<p><i>Suppleness (Flexibility):</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Special attention during PHV <p><i>Strength:</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Window 1: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Males: 12 to 18 months after PHV <p>Stamina, strength, speed, suppleness, and skills are always trainable.</p>	<p><i>Suppleness (Flexibility):</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Special attention during PHV <p><i>Strength:</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Window 1: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Males: 12 to 18 months after PHV <p>Stamina, strength, speed, suppleness, and skills are always trainable.</p>
Physical Development	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Develop general physical conditioning. • Develop general or softball-specific strength and power. • Maintain flexibility. • Practice injury prevention. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Develop softball-specific physical conditioning and introduce position-specific physical conditioning. • Develop softball-specific strength and power and introduce position-specific strength and power. • Develop softball-specific speed, agility, and quickness. • Maintain flexibility. • Practice injury prevention.

Psychological Development

- Refine autonomous decision-making skills.
- Develop team cohesion.
- Refine emotional control.
- Refine game plans, pre-game, and game routines.

- Refine visualization skills.
- Refine autonomous decision-making skills.
- Refine goal setting.
- Develop team cohesion.
- Refine emotional control.
- Refine game plans, pre-game, and game routines.
- Refine stress management and coping strategies.
- Refine attentional control.

Periodization

Double or Multiple Periodization

Pre-season: 4 to 6 practices

Competitive Season: 9 to 11 weeks

Practice to Competition Ratio: 40% Practices: 60% Games
(training ratio includes pre-season practices)

Number of Games: 26 to 30 games plus structured skill development prior to games

Number of Practices (including pre-season practices):
18 to 20 practices

Frequency:

Softball-specific activities: 2 to 3 times per week

Daily participation in a variety of sport or recreational activities.

Double or Multiple Periodization

Pre-season: 10 to 20 practices

Competitive Season: 14 to 16 weeks

Practice to Competition Ratio: 40% Practices: 60% Games
(training ratio includes pre-season practices)

Number of Games: 44 to 48 games plus structured skill development prior to games

Number of Practices (including pre-season practices):
30 to 32 practices

Frequency:

Softball-specific activities: 6 to 9 times per week including fitness and mental training

Daily participation in complementary physical activities/sports in the off-season.

Game Modifications

No modifications required. Follow rules as per Softball Canada official rulebook.

No modifications required. Follow rules as per Softball Canada official rulebook for domestic competitions and International Softball Federation rulebook for international competitions.



Competition Format

- League standings are recorded and individual statistics may be recorded.
 - Modify tournament and provincial championship formats to round robin or a format that maximizes the number of games for each team.
- League standings and individual statistics are recorded.
 - Tournament formats maximize the number of games for each team based on circumstances such as time and facilities.
 - The regional, provincial, inter-provincial, and national championship formats should identify the best team.

Specialization

- Play softball and 1 other sport.
 - Play 2 to 3 positions in softball.
 - Ensure fair and reasonable playing time.
 - Develop at least 3 pitchers per team.
 - Encourage daily participation in a variety of sports or recreation activities.
- Specialize in softball and 1 position but play 1 other position well.
 - Playing time dictated by performance.
 - Develop at least 3 pitchers per team.

**Character Development
(ethics, values, life skills)**

- Encourage personal growth and development through teachable moments, acknowledge players doing something well, and formalize teaching with examples or discussions.
- Establish a Code of Ethics.
- Adhere to fair play attitudes and behaviours:
 - respect for self, teammates, coaches, opponents, officials, rules, and the sport
 - non-violence
 - non-harassment
- Apply positive individual values:
 - respect for the truth
 - integrity
 - moral decision making in the heat of competition
 - healthy living
 - considerate behaviour
 - seeking new information and opportunities to learn
 - responsibility/accountability – no excuses or laying blame
 - committing to continuous improvement
 - mental toughness/determination
 - committing to a particular course of action
 - time management of school, work, sport, social aspects of life



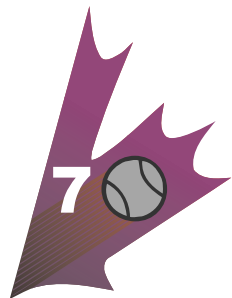
- Apply positive team concept – taking pride in
 - teamwork.
 - playing safely.
 - work ethic, dedication, effort, and commitment to hard work.
 - expressing gratitude, thanking coaches, officials, and volunteers.
 - accepting and fulfilling role on team.
 - humility, dealing graciously with defeat and victory.
 - tolerance.
 - inclusiveness.
 - accepting and embracing discipline for the benefit of the team.
- Respect and adhere to Drug-Free Sport

NCCP Context

Community Sport - Ongoing Participation or
Competition - Introduction

Competition - Development or
Competition - High Performance





Living to Win (L2W)

Male: Ages 23+

Female: Ages 19+

INTERNATIONAL EXCELLENCE

Objectives

- Refine advanced softball skills and tactics/strategies.
- Refine softball- and position-specific physical fitness and monitor through regular testing.
- Refine softball- and position-specific mental skills.
- Focus on maximizing performance at international competitions.

Guiding Principles

- Cooperation between players, synchronization, and increased speed of execution of play is emphasized.
- Player autonomy is refined.
- Players specialize in one position, but develop the ability to play a second well.
- Focus is on softball- and position-specific training.
- Instruction and preparation are individualized in order to address each player's needs, strengths, and weaknesses.

Living to Win is the final stage of preparation. This stage is identical to the Learning and Training to Win stage, except players have gained the experience of competing in pressure situations at the international level and are ready to perform to a high level over and over again on demand. Players should consider themselves full-time athletes and should manage and organize their lives accordingly.

All of the player's physical, technical, tactical, mental, and ancillary capacities are now firmly established. The focus of training is on refining all skills and abilities and continuing to zero in on the optimization of performance to peak for major competitions. Special attention should be given to

regular monitoring of recovery and regeneration to prevent over-training, injuries, burnout, and to maintain optimal physical conditioning.

Living to Win To-Do List

- Train players to peak for major competitions.
- Change the training-to-competition ratio to 25% training and 75% competition, which includes competition-specific training activities.
- Encourage coaches to be sensitive when goal-setting to ensure that common goals are established and met.
- Allow players to make decisions about their training regimen.
- Ensure that physical training programs employ

the most advanced techniques, sport science information, and testing protocols in order to maintain a high level of fitness so that softball can be played without the risk of fatigue or injury.

- Be aware of and be knowledgeable about how to deal with physical and mental fatigue.
- Conduct detailed physiological and biomechanical testing and monitoring, two to five times annually to optimize physical performance.
- Continue the critical evaluation program by which coach and players thoroughly examine preparation for competition and how the team and players performed. The cycle should occur after each event.
- Set very high objectives for competitions.



- Utilize multiple periodization as the optimal framework of preparation.
- Be aware of environmental factors such as time change, altitude, pollution, and food choices and develop strategies to compensate.
- Work with an IST that is led by the head coach to ensure players and team reach high levels of performance.

“Becoming a world class softball player takes commitment and sacrifice. Improving technical skills is very important but of equal importance is developing a high level of physical fitness, mental preparation and being a student of the game. Every day provides a new opportunity to learn and grow as a player. Success is a choice! Players in the Living to Win stage have made a choice to devote themselves fulltime to excelling on the international stage.” – Mark Smith, Senior Men’s National Team Head Coach

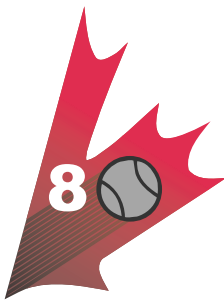
Living to Win Benchmarks

Softball Age Categories	Midget (Women only), Junior, and Senior
Optimal Windows of Trainability	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Stamina, strength, speed, suppleness, and skills are always trainable.
Physical Development	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Refine softball- and position-specific physical conditioning. • Refine softball- and position-specific strength and power. • Refine softball- and position-specific speed, agility, and quickness. • Maintain flexibility. • Practice injury prevention.
Psychological Development	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Refine visualization skills. • Refine autonomous decision-making skills. • Refine goal setting. • Develop team cohesion. • Refine emotional control. • Refine pre-game, game plans, and game routines. • Refine stress management and coping strategies. • Refine attentional control.
Periodization	<p>Multiple Periodization</p> <p>Pre-season: 18 to 22 weeks of daily training</p> <p>Competitive Season: 14 to 16 weeks (possibly longer if climate permits or if traveling to warm climate countries)</p> <p>Practice to Competition Ratio: 25% Practices: 75% Games including competition-specific training</p> <p>Number of Games: 40 to 50 games</p> <p>Number of Practices: Daily skill development, fitness training, and mental training with appropriately scheduled rest and recovery</p> <p>Frequency:</p> <p>Softball-specific activities: 9 to 12 times per week including fitness and mental training</p> <p>Daily participation in complementary physical activities/sports in the off-season.</p>



Game Modifications	No modifications required. Follow rules as per International Softball Federation official rulebook.
Competition Format	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Pooled or full round robin format
Specialization	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Specialize in softball • Specialize in 1 position but play 1 other position well • Playing time dictated by performance
Character Development (ethics, values, life skills)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Encourage personal growth and development through teachable moments, acknowledge players doing something well, and formalize teaching with examples or discussions. • Establish a Code of Ethics • Adhere to fair play attitudes and behaviours: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - respect for self, teammates, coaches, opponents, officials, rules, and the sport - non-violence - non-harassment • Apply positive individual values: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - respect for the truth - integrity - moral decision making in the heat of competition - healthy living - considerate behaviour - seeking new information and opportunities to learn - responsibility/accountability – no excuses or laying blame - committing to continuous improvement - mental toughness/determination - committing to a particular course of action - time management of school, work, sport, and social aspects of life • Apply positive team concept – taking pride in <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - teamwork. - playing safely. - work ethic, dedication, effort, and commitment to hard work. - expressing gratitude, thanking coaches, officials, and volunteers. - accepting and fulfilling role on team. - humility, dealing graciously with defeat and victory. - tolerance. - inclusiveness. - accepting and embracing discipline for the benefit of the team. • Respect and adhere to Drug-Free Sport





Active for Life (A4L)

Males and Females including players with an intellectual disability:
Entry may occur at any age or time

Objective

- Pursuit of lifelong participation in softball and physical activity.

Guiding Principles

- Fun (socially motivated)
- Balance between participation and competition

Softball is not just for the elite. If it was, we wouldn't have over 200,000 registered members and hundreds of thousands of non-registered players enjoying the game on an annual basis. The community side of the game is huge. Softball enables everyone to enjoy the outdoors with family or friends, whether it's a young child playing catch with a parent in the backyard, a teenager playing at the community level during the summer, or a retiree who has never played before, but would like to participate at the Masters' level.

According to the *Canadian Sport for Life: Long-Term Athlete Development Resource Paper*, which describes the generic LTAD model, the objective at this stage is a smooth transition from the competitive playing career to lifelong physical activity and participation in sport. It should be noted that there is a better opportunity to be Active for Life if physical literacy is achieved before the Training to Train stage.

There is always an opportunity to stay involved in softball and be Active for Life. Not only can a player enjoy playing softball for a lifetime, but she or he can also become involved in the sport as a coach, official, administrator, or volunteer. In addition, players should be encouraged to try a different version of the game such as moving from Fast Pitch to Slo-Pitch or Orthodox or vice versa. Players can even move from one sport to another. For example, the gymnast becomes an aerial skier, the sprinter takes up bobsledding, and the 12-year-old hockey player discovers lacrosse.

Softball can contribute to the solution of social problems such as inactivity and obesity because it is a lifelong activity. Our game presents a unique opportunity because it allows players to challenge themselves mentally and physically, both in a team environment and as an individual. The game develops physical skills such as balance, coordination, flexibility, strength, and power as well as social skills such as cooperation with teammates working towards achieving a common goal.

"Through my experiences as a player, coach, volunteer, board member, and now sport administrator, I can truly see the tremendous positive impact that being involved in sports in general and softball in particular can have on individuals and society. Not only can softball encourage an active, healthy lifestyle, but it teaches so many important life skills that can be taken from the ball diamond and applied to everyday life." – Lise Jubinville, Manager of Long-Term Player Development and Coaching Services for Softball Canada



Active for Life Benchmarks

Softball Age Categories	All age categories
Optimal Windows of Trainability	Stamina, strength, speed, suppleness, and skills are always trainable.
Physical Development	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Develop general physical conditioning. • Develop general strength and power. • Develop general speed, agility, and quickness. • Maintain flexibility. • Practice injury prevention.
Psychological Development	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Transfer mental skills learned in softball to everyday life, work life, or volunteering. • Transition the mental approach for competitive softball to recreational softball or Master's. • Use softball as a stress reliever and for relaxation.
Periodization	<p>Single Periodization</p> <p>Pre-Season: 4 to 6 practices</p> <p>Competitive Season: 10 to 14 weeks (possibly longer if climate permits)</p> <p>Practice to Competition Ratio: As desired by player. Recommend 10% Practices: 90% Games</p> <p>Number of Games: 28 to 36 games</p> <p>Number of Practices: As desired by player</p> <p>Frequency: Softball-specific activities: As often as desired by player Daily participation in sport or unstructured moderate intensity physical activity. Minimum of 60 minutes of moderate activity 3 times a week.</p>
Game Modifications	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Use modified rules as required.
Competition Format	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Ensure that a maximum number of games are played by the team in a designated timeframe to select a winner.
Specialization	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Select the position according to the player's interest. • Play desired number of sports, including softball



Character Development (ethics, values, life skills)

- Encourage personal growth and development through teachable moments, acknowledge players doing something well, and formalize teaching with examples or discussions.
- Establish a Code of Ethics.
- Adhere to fair play attitudes and behaviours:
 - respect for self, teammates, coaches, opponents, officials, rules, and the sport
 - non-violence
 - non-harassment
- Apply positive individual values:
 - respect for the truth
 - integrity
 - moral decision making in the heat of competition
 - healthy living
 - considerate behaviour
 - seeking new information and opportunities to learn
 - responsibility/accountability – no excuses or laying blame
 - committing to continuous improvement
 - mental toughness/determination
 - committing to a particular course of action
 - time management of academic, sport, social aspects of life
- Apply positive team concept – taking pride in
 - teamwork.
 - playing safely.
 - work ethic, dedication, effort, and commitment to hard work.
 - expressing gratitude, thanking coaches, officials, and volunteers.
 - accepting and fulfilling role on team.
 - humility, dealing graciously with defeat and victory.
 - tolerance.
 - inclusiveness.
 - accepting and embracing discipline for the benefit of the team.
- Respect and adhere to Drug-Free Sport



NCCP Context

Community Sport - Ongoing Participation or
Competition - Introduction

LTPD AND THE NEW NCCP

Over the past few years, the National Coaching Certification Program (NCCP) has been undergoing a transition to a competency-based approach to the training and educating of coaches. In the development of the new NCCP, generic LTAD principles have been incorporated into the content of NCCP clinics and materials given to coaches. With the creation of our softball-specific LTPD guide, Softball Canada is ensuring that our NCCP is aligned with our LTPD model.

Softball Canada's Coach Development Model (CDM) is broken down into three distinct streams and these streams are further divided into contexts. This approach ensures that coaches working with players in a particular context are trained specifically in the areas in which these players require expertise.

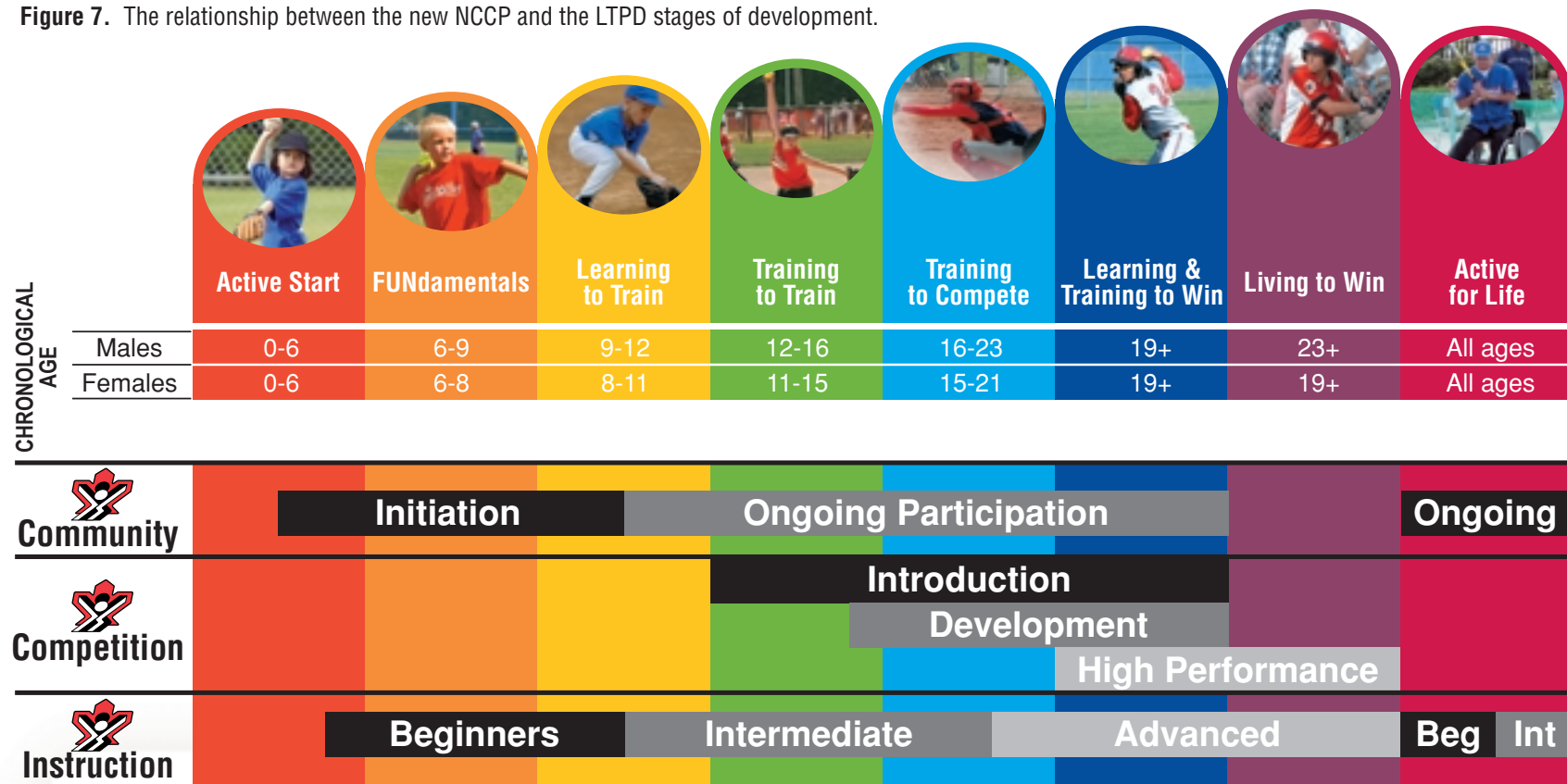
Figure 6. The new NCCP.



COMMUNITY SPORT STREAM	COMPETITION STREAM	INSTRUCTION STREAM
Community Sport - Initiation	Competition - Introduction	Instruction - Beginner
Community Sport - Ongoing Participation	Competition - Development	Instruction - Intermediate
	Competition - High Performance	Instruction - Advanced



Figure 7. The relationship between the new NCCP and the LTPD stages of development.



Coaches need to understand the LTPD Guide and the importance of developing well-rounded players. For example, players in the Fundamentals, Learn to Train, and Train to Train stages need to be encouraged to train and compete in a number of sports. While other sports' seasons may overlap with softball's season, players should not be cut due to conflicts with training and competing in another sport. For the long-term benefit of players, coaches should encourage multiple sport participation to foster the development of all athletic abilities. In order to educate coaches about these concepts, a coach-specific LTPD document will be created by Softball Canada. Coaches will be educated about LTPD through NCCP clinics.

Softball Canada's CDM and NCCP endeavour to accommodate players and coaches at all stages of development. Instructors and coaches will undergo

training that is specific to the type of player being coached. As a result, players will benefit from the best available instruction and coaching, which in turn enables players to achieve their goals.

Coaches are the key drivers of LTPD because they have the most direct impact on players on a day-to-day basis. Coaches who engage in the LTPD model and its practices are more likely to produce players who reach their full athletic potential. To do this properly, coaches need to be supported by parents, their local clubs or associations, their Provincial/Territorial Softball Association, and Softball Canada.

For more information on Softball Canada's NCCP, please visit the coaching section on Softball Canada's web site (www.softball.ca).

AN INTEGRATED SYSTEM

The primary benefit of an integrated system for softball is that stakeholders understand their roles and responsibilities and know the player development pathway and where they fit on that pathway. A secondary benefit is that the game will be healthier because Softball Canada's membership will increase as more children, youth, and adults are introduced to the game and current members retained, thanks to innovative programs and services that meet their needs. An integrated system requires the coordinated effort of all primary stakeholders – parents, players, softball instructors and coaches, officials, softball facility owners, practice facility owners, softball equipment manufacturers and softball retail outlets, and every organization affiliated with the game, including Softball Canada, Provincial/Territorial Softball Associations, and local clubs, leagues, and associations.

It is critical that everyone is aware of each other and provides input. This will allow the creation of an integrated softball development system, a first for Canada because it not only clearly identifies the different groups involved in the development process, but outlines the roles each should play. The contribution of each stakeholder forms the basis of the LTPD Guide, which is based on the LTPD philosophy that delivers a developmental pathway for softball players, regardless of their age, gender, or level of ability. Think of it as an integrated sporting family in which everyone has responsibilities and is aware of each other's role.

The Qualities of Each Stakeholder

Parents

Parents play a vital role in many aspects of their children's development in softball. Many get involved in coaching, fundraising, administration, and transporting children to and from practices, games, tournaments, and championships. It is essential that parents understand their role in assisting their children to achieve their full potential within sport. Parents need to be encouraged to be as involved as possible in the physical development of their children as well as educated in the concept of LTPD and physical literacy. The more parents understand the role of proper training and competition, nutrition, hydration, rest, and recovery, the better the sport experience their children will have.

Parents need to

- participate in sport with their children.
- encourage participation of their children in two to three complementary sports.
- provide support and guidance and make their child's involvement in softball fun.
- be educated about softball and how to progress through the sport's stages.
- be educated about proper nutrition and recovery.
- have a long-term commitment to their child's skill and performance progression.
- understand the ABC's of athleticism.
- understand that increased activity reverses the current trends in childhood and adult obesity and cardiovascular disease.
- understand that inactive adults tend to produce inactive children and that the reverse is true.
- understand that children lose motivation if they feel they cannot meet parental expectations.
- be flexible with their expectations; as children pass through different phases of development, parents should modify their expectations if necessary.
- strive for an accurate assessment of their child's ability.
- keep expectations in line with their child's skills, abilities, and aspirations.
- explore the child's expectations, goals, and aspirations.

Players should

- enjoy the sport.
- become adept at the key physiological proficiencies: balance, flexibility, posture, core stability, strength and power, cardio endurance, and performance skills.
- understand how pressure and stress affects performance.
- understand the strengths and weaknesses of their mental performance.
- know what mental management skills they need to integrate into their personal performance plan to be able to control their emotions, focus on the task, and cope with adversity under pressure.
- become self-reliant and demonstrate independent initiatives in learning and developing their skills and strategies.

Coaches and Administrators should

- be educated and continue to upgrade by attending coaching seminars and lectures relating to the game.
- have a thorough understanding of softball's LTPD.
- understand how and where they fit into the system.
- have a passion for the game and for excellence.
- have a solid understanding of the skills required to progress to the next level.
- have a general understanding of what is available for players of all levels.
- accept that effective mental skills are critical to consistent, quality performances at all levels.
- integrate the mental skills training process into training and competition.
- understand their role and what is required in order to best deliver the player to the different stages.
- provide proper access to training and competition facilities.
- ensure that membership fees reflect the quality of the experience.
- provide appropriate conditions of play for the level of the players.
- be a source of information, expertise, and support and provide the necessary information, contacts, personnel, and communications.
- facilitate discussion between the various stakeholders, clubs, players, administrators, and associations.
- make sure programming is in place to support their role.
- when it comes to their role in the system, strive to be the best.
- continue to emphasize youth development and adult recreational programs to ensure the long-term growth of the sport.

Other Stakeholders

Umpires perform a vital role in softball and its growth and popularity. The recruiting of new, young umpires and retaining those currently in the system needs to be emphasized. Recognition programs need to be improved to create better awareness of the vital service umpires provide within the softball community. Umpires also need to be educated about LTPD principles so that they can work with coaches to educate and develop players.

Effective administrators and volunteers play an essential and pivotal role in successful organizations, clubs, and events. We need to recognize that their efforts are critical to the long-term success of softball and work to retain good administrators and volunteers.

Schools, community organizations, and facilities provide broad opportunities for participation, create competitive opportunities, and encourage coaching development. However, these groups need to better understand the role of the LTPD process and ensure that, through their programs, young players are taught the FUNdamentals of physical activity in order to maximize on their development.

All these groups require structure and support if we are to properly engage them in LTPD.

“One of the greatest challenges of our day is finding unity amongst diversity. Unity implies oneness, but oneness does not necessarily imply sameness. We may all be different, unique individuals, but through unity of purpose, we can team together synergistically to accomplish great tasks – tasks where the whole is greater than the sum of its parts”. – Mahatma Ghandi

STAKEHOLDERS' ROLES

Stakeholders are essential to the success of softball's LTPD. Each must understand its role and have a clear understanding of its responsibilities within the system. The chart below outlines each stakeholder's role and responsibilities.

TABLE 4. Stakeholders' Roles

LTPD STAGES	SOFTBALL CANADA			PROVINCIAL/TERRITORIAL SOFTBALL ASSOCIATIONS (P/TSA's)			LOCAL ASSOCIATIONS/CLUBS		
	Leadership	Program Development	Program Delivery	Leadership	Program Development	Program Delivery	Leadership	Program Development	Program Delivery
Active Start									
FUNDamentals									
Learning to Train									
Training to Train									
Training to Compete									
Learning and Training to Win									
Living to Win									
Active for Life									

Softball Canada

- provides leadership and works collaboratively with P/TSA's to develop programs that enhance the sport nationally for all stages.
- is primarily responsible for the development and delivery of programs for Learning and Training to Win and Living to Win.
- works with Provincial/Territorial Softball Associations to develop and deliver programs for Training to Train and Training to Compete.

Provincial/Territorial Softball Associations

- provide leadership and work collaboratively with Softball Canada to develop programs that enhance the sport nationally for all stages.
- are primarily responsible for the development and delivery of programs, from Active Start to Training to Compete, including Active for Life, that meet regional needs.
- deliver national programs for these stages.

Local Associations/Clubs

- provide leadership and work collaboratively with Provincial/Territorial Softball Associations to develop programs that enhance the sport provincially or territorially from Active Start to Training to Compete, including Active for Life.
- are primarily responsible for the development and delivery of programs for these stages that meet local needs.
- deliver provincial/territorial and national programs for these stages.

LTPD IMPLEMENTATION

The LTPD Guide is a living document. In fact, by the time the Guide goes to print, there will likely be changes. This is a good thing and reflects the need to continually evolve and improve softball's player development system. The LTPD principles must be implemented to have the desired effect. However, there will be challenges. The first will be communicating the LTPD principles. The second will be getting the necessary buy-in for change. And the third will be effectively monitoring and evaluating the results of the changes made and making revisions as needed.

To that end, Softball Canada is forming an LTPD Implementation Committee that will develop an LTPD Implementation Plan. It is recognized that each Provincial/Territorial Softball Association and local softball organization and club must develop its own strategic plan that reflects regional and local differences. However, it is also recognized that all stakeholders need to be pulling in the same direction on key issues that affect the sport nationally. We recognize that some changes might not be in the best interests of certain individual stakeholders, but they must be made for the benefit of the sport as a whole. Feedback will be sought with the final plan being widely communicated to all stakeholders.

In creating the LTPD Guide, Softball Canada's LTPD Committee had the opportunity to reflect on the current status of softball. The sport has had many successes:

- the creation and adoption of the Learn To Play Program to introduce children to the game
- the creation of new revenue streams from the membership to create needed programs
- the successful and well-attended Canadian Championships
- the performances of our national teams, which are medal threats at most international events
- softball as one of the leading sports in the transition to the new NCCP
- Sport Canada's view of softball to be a well-managed and organized sport.

However, some challenges were identified as well. The LTPD Committee makes the recommendations listed on the following pages for future directions in the areas of player development, coaching, competition, leadership, and facilities and equipment. The LTPD Implementation Committee will use these recommendations as the starting point in developing the LTPD Implementation Plan, may add recommendations, and will provide a plan with detailed action plans and timelines.

Figure 8. LTPD Implementation.



PLAYER DEVELOPMENT

WHERE ARE WE NOW?

- Softball players are not being systematically introduced to softball across the country in the Enter stream.
 - The Learn to Play Program has been adopted as the national initiation program to introduce children to softball. While great progress has been made in its national adoption, a large percentage of minor softball associations are not using the program.
 - “Try” softball programs are not universally available across the country.
- Parents do not spend enough time participating in physical activities with their children.



WHERE DO WE WANT TO BE?

- All minor softball associations have adopted the Learn to Play Program for children ages 5 to 10.
- Softball is an exemplary sport in physical education curricula across the country. It is a student-focused activity that enables participants to master fundamental movement skills as outlined in provincial/territorial government curriculum guides.
- Programs and resources specifically targeting the school system (elementary, junior high, and high school) are available.
- Training programs for coaches and teachers working with children are available, reflect the needs of children, and ensure softball technical skills are properly taught.
- In each province/territory, programs provide an opportunity for children, youth, adults, and new Canadians to try softball.
- Parents are actively involved in their child's softball participation.

HOW WILL WE GET THERE?

- The Learn to Play Program continues to be promoted and adopted across Canada.
- Resources and programs for coaches, teachers, and minor softball associations are developed to assist in introducing softball to children, youth, adults, and new Canadians.
- A parent guide outlining fun softball activities a parent can use with their children is developed for home use.



PLAYER DEVELOPMENT

WHERE ARE WE NOW?

- The physical development of children and youth playing softball is often left up to the school system or other sports instead of being incorporated into their softball training.
- Children lack physical literacy, which limits their genetic potential and physical preparation because they are not systematically exposed to the following skills during the appropriate window of trainability:
 - The ABC's of athleticism – agility, balance, coordination, and speed
 - Fundamental movements skills: running, jumping, and throwing (RJT)
 - Kinesthetics: gliding, buoyancy, and striking with a body part (KGBs)
 - The 5 S's of training and performance: speed, stamina, strength, skill, and suppleness
- When training for these skills does occur, players lack adequate supervision and access to appropriate coaching expertise.
- Fundamental softball skills are not well developed nor are they introduced when children and youth are most receptive to learning sport-specific skills. The result is remedial work taking place at the higher levels of the game instead the refinement of advanced softball skills.
- Players who chose the Enjoy stream lack integrated and systematic programs that meet their specific needs and assist in their development should they chose to move to the Excel stream. Late maturing players lack the opportunities to advance in the sport.
- Players tend to under-train and over-compete, with the number of games during a typical season greatly outnumbering the number of practices. When training does occur, there is too much focus on competition preparation and not enough on skill development.

WHERE DO WE WANT TO BE?

- Players, parents, coaches, and minor softball associations understand what softball skills and tactics are appropriate to be developed for each age group. The result is a seamless transfer of players from one coach to the next and from one age category to the next.
- Parents, players, coaches, and minor softball associations understand the windows of trainability and have resources, programs, and fitness experts available to assist in developing the physical capabilities of children and youth playing softball.
- Player development programs reflect the guidelines of the LTPD framework and offer a standardized curriculum leading to consistency in programs across the country.
- Late-maturing players are retained in the sport and have opportunities to develop to their full potential.
- Practice-to-competition ratios reflect LTPD principles and objectives for each stage of development.
- Coaches are able to plan their season using the right activities with an adequate degree of difficulty (intensity and volume) and in the right sequence (periodization) to meet the LTPD objectives for training and competition in each stage of development.



HOW WILL WE GET THERE?

- A matrix identifies softball skills and tactics that should be attainable for each age category and is available to all stakeholders.
- Curriculum guides for each minor age category are created for coaches and contain a season's worth of practice plans to develop the appropriate softball skills and tactics in a logical and sequential order. The curriculum guides also provide a template of a seasonal plan that coaches can modify to suit their team's individual needs. Future editions of the curriculum guides could incorporate activities to develop physical fitness and mental skills appropriate for softball.
- Softball Canada develops Softball Canada Skills Academies in cooperation with the school system where students work on developing softball skills for part of the day and attend classes for the rest of the day. Softball Canada Skills Academies will be open to any student meeting the eligibility requirements, which are not based solely on skill level.
- Minor softball associations value coach education and training and adopt policies that require all of their coaches to be NCCP-trained and certified. They offer financial support to volunteer coaches to take NCCP training and certification. They offer continual professional development and support, including mentoring by qualified individuals, to ensure that coaches are competent and knowledgeable and can teach fundamental and advanced softball skills and tactics in addition to developing players physically, mentally, emotionally, and socially.

PLAYER DEVELOPMENT

WHERE ARE WE NOW?

- A formal national player identification program does not exist.
- Players who have chosen the Excel stream lack integrated and systematic programs to assist in their development and allow them to move up to the national team level. Players tend to reach this level in spite of rather than because of a formalized player development system.
- The talent pool is not deep enough for the national team. Not enough players who can consistently perform to an international standard are being developed.
- Developing players lack sufficient opportunities to train and compete with international opponents.
- Developing players and national team players lack year-round training opportunities as a group.
- There are few cross-training opportunities with international programs.
- Softball lacks year-round training opportunities.
- National team coaches lack the resources to spend enough time working directly with junior and senior players to teach all aspects of the game.
- A national database that tracks softball skill test results and softball-specific fitness testing does not exist, resulting in limited knowledge of norms for each age category.

WHERE DO WE WANT TO BE?

- Softball Canada's national player identification system is linked from the clubs to the provincial/territorial level and the national team level. This system assists in the identification of players for enrichment programs and allows late-maturing players the opportunity to advance in the sport.
- Regional Training Centres are established and identified players are instructed by regional coaches using a standardized curriculum that develops national team-level players capable of excelling on the international stage. Regional coaches mentor club coaches and work with local associations and clubs to develop better players and coaches throughout Canada.
- Softball Canada has partnerships with the school system to provide opportunities for student players to develop their abilities.
- Softball Canada constantly seeks the latest in sport science research and training techniques.
- A national database that tracks softball skill test results and softball-specific fitness testing is in place and norms are known for each age category.



HOW WILL WE GET THERE?

- In addition to researching the best practices from other sports in the area of player identification and monitoring, national team coaches, national team Integrate Sport Team experts, and other sport science experts are consulted to develop new programs. This includes developing standardized testing protocols for softball skills and softball-specific fitness. A method to monitor results from this testing is developed, including the establishment of norms for each age category and both genders.
- Softball Canada creates a National Skills Award Program that monitors a player's physical, emotional, cognitive, and social development.
- Softball Canada, in partnership with P/TSAs, will establish Regional Training Centres where identified players can further develop skills in order to reach the next level of performance and potentially the national team. The curriculum is standardized across the country and in line with the skills needed at the international level.
- Softball Canada, in partnership with P/TSAs, hires and trains regional coaches to work with identified players at Regional Training Centres. Regional coaches mentor local coaches in that province or territory. Softball Canada provides professional development for these regional coaches to ensure consistency across Canada. As well, the Regional Training Centres are linked to national team programs to ensure the use of up-to-date methodologies.
- Softball Canada, in partnership with P/TSAs, creates programs similar to Quebec's Sport-Études to offer competitive players the opportunity to train during part of the day and attend classes for the rest of the day. Sport School programs are restricted to students who meet strict eligibility requirements, including a high degree of skills.

PLAYER DEVELOPMENT

WHERE ARE WE NOW?

- Players are encouraged to specialize in a sport or position too early in their development, limiting their potential and leading to early burnout. There is too much emphasis on specialization at the expense of continued improvement and refinement of fundamental skills. The result is poor physical literacy.
- Programs designed for males are superimposed on programs for females.

- Best practices regarding player development are not well shared between stakeholders.

WHERE DO WE WANT TO BE?

- Parents and coaches encourage young players to participate in a number of sports and to play a number of positions within each sport to develop physical literacy.
- Competition rules ensure that specialization in a sport or position does not occur before it is developmentally appropriate.
- Programs reflect the specific needs of the female and male softball player.

- Best practices regarding player development are easily accessible and available to all stakeholders.



HOW WILL WE GET THERE?

- Softball Canada, P/TSAs, and local associations and clubs form agreements with other sports to ensure that players have the opportunity to participate in a number of different sports at the same time.
- Resource material for parents and coaches is developed regarding specialization.
- Competition rules are reviewed and aligned to LTPD principles.
- Softball Canada researches the specific needs of female and male players.
- Softball Canada and P/TSAs provide forums for associations, clubs, and coaches to share their best practices regarding player development.
- National team coaches are part of the discussion when player development programs are created, ensuring a transfer of their knowledge and expertise to the levels below.



COACHING

WHERE ARE WE NOW?

- The best coaches work primarily with the best players, who generally are older. The least experienced coaches often work with the least experienced players, who are the ones who most need the best instruction in order to develop physical literacy, which ensures a strong foundation of fundamental movement skills and fundamental softball skills. This often results in the need to re-train players in proper technique later in their development.
- Parental involvement is poorly defined.
- Male coaches greatly outnumber female coaches.
- Because winning is the focus, coaches emphasize strategy instead of skill development, play only the better players, and force players to specialize too early.

- Coaches lack a clear understanding of how to introduce the ABC's of athleticism and fundamental movement skills to children.
- Coaches introduce softball-specific skills before a good foundation of the ABC's of athleticism and fundamental movement skills is developed.
- Coaches are not well educated about the most effective methods of introducing fundamental softball skills to children.
- Appropriate physical training methodologies are not well understood or applied by coaches. Coaches do not adequately understand the growth and development needs of their players, especially in relation to optimal windows of trainability of the physical capacities and LTPD principles.

WHERE DO WE WANT TO BE?

- Programs for the FUNdamental and Learning to Train stages are taught by knowledgeable and experienced coaches who understand and can develop the ABC's of athleticism and the fundamental movement skills of all their players.
- Parents are educated and trained to play a supporting role in coaching.
- Female coaches are equal in number to male coaches in all age categories.
- The right coach is at the right place and available to the player at the right time in her or his development.

- LTPD principles and content are interwoven throughout Softball Canada's NCCP.
- The identification and training of optimal windows of trainability for accelerated periods of development are emphasized in Softball Canada's NCCP program and in all LTPD materials that are developed for parents and coaches.
- All softball coaches are NCCP-trained and certified.
- Softball Canada's NCCP and LTPD materials identify the appropriate softball skills and tactics to be developed for each age. Softball Canada's NCCP educates coaches on how to teach all softball technical skills and tactics and the art of coaching for each stage of development.

HOW WILL WE GET THERE?

- Coaches are appropriately recognized and compensated for the contribution they make to softball and to sport in general in Canada.
- Through Softball Canada's NCCP, coaches are given resources and taught how to utilize parents in their softball programs.
- Softball associations and clubs are educated about the barriers women face in becoming coaches and develop innovative ways to recruit and retain female coaches.



- Through greater emphasis on the LTPD principles within Softball Canada's NCCP, coaches become more knowledgeable and receive instruction on applying LTPD principles at all stages of development.
- New programs delivered by P/TSAs and minor softball associations for the Fundamentals and Learning to Train stages incorporate the training of the ABC's of athleticism and fundamental movement skills.
- P/TSAs deliver coaching workshops annually, providing Softball Canada-approved professional development opportunities for coaches as part of the maintenance of NCCP certification and the pursuit of lifelong learning.

COACHING

WHERE ARE WE NOW?

- The general knowledge base of coaches needs to improve.
- There are not enough NCCP-trained and certified coaches at each stage of development.
- Coaches do not understand how to create and use a seasonal plan (periodization).
- Coaches use various methods that may not be objective to evaluate and select players, creating problems in the identification of players for enrichment programs.
- Not all coaches working with the top players at the provincial/territorial level are making use of available sport science resources.

WHERE DO WE WANT TO BE?

- Coaches use testing protocols for player evaluation and selection that are reliable, valid, and endorsed by Softball Canada.
- Coaching resources are available in a wide variety of formats.
- The International Softball Coaches Symposium, co-hosted by Softball Canada and a P/TSA, is held annually and offers a professional development opportunity to community and competitive coaches.



HOW WILL WE GET THERE?

- An annual evaluation of Softball Canada's NCCP, coaching materials, development programs, and services includes a realignment with LTPD principles as the LTPD Guide changes to reflect the evolution of softball in Canada and internationally.
- Softball Canada produces LTPD resource material specifically for parents, coaches, and softball associations.
- Softball Canada develops standardized softball-specific fitness testing protocols and skill-testing protocols to track players' progress and for use in player evaluation/selection.
- The International Softball Coaches Symposium, co-hosted by Softball Canada and a P/TSA, in place since 2004, continues to be improved upon to provide coach education and professional development as it relates to LTPD.
- A formal enrichment program for identified players is developed and supported by regional coaches who are educated in a national standardized program and curriculum.

COACHING

WHERE ARE WE NOW?

- A coaching development program does not exist to educate and train coaches on how to develop players for higher levels of competition or educate coaches about the demands of international competition.
- There is only a small pool of Canadian coaches with the potential to coach at the Training to Compete, Learning and Training to Win, and Living to Win stages.

- Coaches have minimal accountability in preparing players for the next stage of LTPD. Many coaches have a 'win now' mentality and do not consider the long-term development of their players.

WHERE DO WE WANT TO BE?

- A strategy is in place to identify and develop coaches at the Training to Compete, Learning and Training to Win, and Living to Win stages.
- A greater number of professional development and mentoring opportunities are available, including opportunities with national team programs.
- The number of opportunities to expose coaches to international training and competition is increased.

- Coaches are recognized for developing players according to the framework outlined by the LTPD Guide.



HOW WILL WE GET THERE?

- Softball Canada develops and launches the Competition-Development and Competition-High Performance contexts of the new NCCP. Content from the current Level 3 and Level 4/5 clinics is updated and improved.
- A pool of high performance coaches working with the top players in each province/territory is identified for participation in a structured education program guided by the national team coaches. As a result, skill instruction is consistent and integrated from one level to the next.
- In coordination with the hosting of international competitions within Canada, Softball Canada hosts professional development opportunities for high performance coaches.
- Softball Canada creates a recognition and accountability framework for coaches who develop players based on LTPD principles.



COMPETITION

WHERE ARE WE NOW?

- Competition is a good servant but a poor master. Competition schedules dictate training schedules and how players are developed instead of the other way around. Because coaches focus on winning, they begin teaching tactics too early and neglect fundamental skills. Programs focus too much on winning and not enough on process.
- Existing competitions narrow the pool of players too early. Players are rewarded for competitive success instead of skill improvement too early in their development. With winning as the priority of competition, there is a bias against late birth-month players and late-maturing players, which excludes potential talent in the long run. The cost of attending competitions limits the attendance of talented players.
- Adult competition schedules are superimposed on young players, who are playing too many tournaments, leaving insufficient time to train technical, mental, and physical skills.
- While fun, participation-based competitions for children exist in some regions, in others, children play the adult version of the game. Most children are not developmentally ready for the adult version.
- Competition rules are not always in the best interest of player development. Across the country there are many sets of rules at the minor level. Equipment and playing dimensions are not always suitable for the size and physical ability of players. In some cases, competition rules lead to player specializing earlier than is desirable.

WHERE DO WE WANT TO BE?

- Competition structures, formats, and schedules reflect and reinforce LTPD principles and objectives for each stage of development.
- Competition formats provide the appropriate level of competition and effectively assist in the development of players. Competitions are but one tool to develop players.
- An integrated training and competition model from the community to provincial to national level is in place to optimize player development.
- A standard set of rules is used in all minor age categories. These rules uphold LTPD principles, reinforce aspects of the game to help enhance player understanding of the game, and focus on promoting long-term player development.



HOW WILL WE GET THERE?

- Softball Canada, in consultation with stakeholders, completes a comprehensive competition review that
 - provides recommendations regarding competition rules for each stage of development with special emphasis on minor age categories.
 - provides recommendations regarding competition formats for each stage, including the consideration of new ideas such as having different competitive levels within the same competition.
 - provides recommendations regarding a standardized national competition calendar.
 - ensures that competition schedules are balanced and consider the development of abilities required in the technical/tactical skills matrix developed by Softball Canada.
 - determines the training and competition environment required for the development of top international players.
 - identifies the optimal training to competition ratio for each stage.
 - ensures that the design of competition schedules includes optimal periodization for play development to occur.
- Through Softball Canada's NCCP, coaches are taught how to develop periodized annual plans and how to provide competition-specific training within practices, making practices more game-like and fun.

COMPETITION

WHERE ARE WE NOW?

- Existing competitions are inequitable. The disproportionate size and population of various provinces/territories result in a massive inequality at Canadian Championships where one province can draw on a population of 12.1 million and another of 30,000. Due to geography, travel costs to Canadian Championships are extremely high. The inability of all provinces and territories to participate makes true national representation impossible.

- There is a lack of high-level national and international competitive opportunities for emerging talent and limited accessibility due to costs.

- Competition schedules are based on tradition rather than on the developmental and sport science needs of players.
- Competitions dictate the training schedule rather than the reverse, resulting in an inadequate amount of time being devoted to training relative to the number of competitions played.
- Canada's vast climactic differences dictate competition schedules. Provinces with milder climates have longer seasons than those that cannot get on the diamonds until late June or July.

WHERE DO WE WANT TO BE?

- Emerging talent has the opportunity to attend national and international competitions to aid in their development to reach the national team level.

- A standardized competition calendar is used across Canada so that competitions are appropriately integrated from league play to provincial/territorial play to the national championships.

HOW WILL WE GET THERE?

- Parents are educated on the use of competition as one piece of the long-term development of their child's abilities within a well-structured training, competition, and recovery plan.

- Softball Canada provides support to develop and expand college and university programs for female players.
- Softball Canada investigates ways to integrate and use events such as the Canada Summer Games, the U-19 North American Fast Pitch Championships for men, and junior national team programs to increase opportunities for player development.

- Softball Canada develops templates of periodized annual training, competition, and recovery plans for each stage that coaches can modify to suit their teams' individual needs.
- New programs like indoor softball extend the competitive season especially for cold climate regions.

LEADERSHIP

WHERE ARE WE NOW?

- Financial sustainability for LTPD implementation and ongoing program development is necessary. Steps have been taken to increase membership fees (Sustainability Plan), but more needs to be done for implementation to be efficient and effective.
- There is a need for better leadership, communication, and coordination of resources from the local, provincial/territorial, and national levels.
- The needs of the overall softball community, especially recreational softball and Slo-Pitch, are not well understood by governing bodies.
- Little support is available to help volunteers and clubs function as valued assets.

- Accurate membership numbers are either not known or are hard to gather in a timely fashion. Data mining is necessary to further quantify decisions and recommendations with the integration of LTPD principles within softball.
- Technology is not well utilized by softball organizations at all levels.

WHERE DO WE WANT TO BE?

- A financial model is in place at the local, provincial/territorial, and national levels that funds the current and future needs of the sport.

- Reports of membership numbers are easily obtained and administered.
- On-line tools and services are available to members.

HOW WILL WE GET THERE?

- A review of sport organizations in Canada and around the world is conducted and best practices regarding financial sustainability are gathered.
- Softball Canada continually makes improvements in communication, information sharing, and data collection, which guarantee that LTPD continues to guide, direct, and improve programs and member services.
- Resources and workshops assist clubs to run more efficiently and effectively.
- Market research is conducted annually and targets current members, in particular the recreational softball and Slo-Pitch community, and the general population to ensure that programs and services are meeting the needs of the softball community and to enable softball organizations to attract new members.

- A national membership database allows appropriate access to information at all levels.
- A committee of experts advises Softball Canada and the P/TsAs on the purchase and use of technology.

LEADERSHIP

WHERE ARE WE NOW?

- While softball is considered a club-based sport, in reality it is not. “A” programs operate separately from “B” and “C” programs, which are also known as house leagues in some provinces/territories. Male programs are often run separately from female programs. Minor programs operate separately from adult programs and often do not fall under the jurisdiction of the same association. Therefore, a developmental pathway is unclear and the infrastructure to develop players is haphazard.
- From the local to the national level, there are different names for the various age categories, especially for players under 10 years of age, and team classifications, making dialogue difficult.

WHERE DO WE WANT TO BE?

- A true club system is in place. All ages, genders, and classifications within an area are under the same umbrella organization offering quality programs and services and a clear player pathway.
- Clubs are recognized for developing players and offering quality programming.
- Standardized names for age categories and classifications are established.
- Current and past members rank their involvement as enjoyable and are ambassadors for growing the game.

HOW WILL WE GET THERE?

- Softball Canada develops a “Clubmark” type of program that accredits softball associations and leagues and offers various levels of accreditation.
- Softball Canada promotes discussion of common terminologies for age categories and classifications at the Softball Canada AGM.

FACILITIES and EQUIPMENT

WHERE ARE WE NOW?

- Softball organizations lack an accurate picture of the number and type of softball facilities across Canada.
- Currently, softball is a facility-rich sport. However, more and more fields are being converted for use by other field sports such as soccer. While it is not a yet a crisis situation, it could be if something is not done now.
- There is a decrease in the number and availability of affordable indoor training facilities.
- Governments mandate policies that make it difficult to recruit members yet allow other organizations offering softball programs to use the facilities at the same cost.

WHERE DO WE WANT TO BE?

- There are an appropriate number of softball facilities to meet the demands of the sport.
- Facilities are available for year-round softball training.

HOW WILL WE GET THERE?

- Softball Canada conducts an audit to determine existing softball facilities and what needs to be developed or renovated.
- Hosting events are tied to a facilities legacy and an improved strategy to use events to leave legacies where they are most needed.
- Softball organizations form partnerships with other sports to make efficient use of indoor training facilities or with government and corporations to build and run softball facilities.
- Softball Canada lobbies governments to ensure that members receive preferential treatment in the cost and allocation of softball facilities.

- Innovative equipment that assists player development is not readily available.

- Appropriate equipment is available for each stage of development.

- Softball Canada works with sponsors and softball equipment manufacturers to ensure that softball equipment supports LTPD principles.

THE NEXT STEPS

The *LTPD Guide for Softball in Canada* is a framework that will guide all stakeholders. The document was created after much research, discussion, and feedback. It expresses a shared vision and outlines a vehicle for change. Once the guide has been distributed to all members, we need to ensure that acceptance, support, and implementation occur. For the LTPD Guide to be a success, all members must work together for the benefit of all players and the sport as a whole.

The LTPD Guide is part of a federal government national initiative called *Canadian Sport for Life*. We look forward to your commitment to this plan to create the optimal environment for unlimited opportunities for our members to enjoy softball as a lifelong sport as well as providing pathways to develop as exceptional softball players.

“The greatest thing about tomorrow is, I will be better than I am today. And that’s how I look at life. I will be better as a golfer, I will be better as a person, I will be better as a father, I will be a better husband, I will be a better friend. That’s the beauty of tomorrow. There is no such thing as a setback. The lessons I learn today I will apply tomorrow, and I will be better.” – Tiger Woods



GLOSSARY OF TERMS

Adaptation refers to a stimulus or a series of stimuli which induces functional and/or morphological changes in the organism. Naturally, the level or degree of adaptation is dependent on the genetic endowment of an individual. However, the general trends or patterns of adaptation are identified by physiological research and the facts and guidelines of the different adaptation processes, such as adaptation to muscular endurance or maximum strength, are clearly delineated.

Adolescence is a difficult period to define in terms of time of its onset and termination. During this period, most bodily systems become adult both structurally and functionally. Structurally, adolescence begins with acceleration in the rate of growth in stature, which marks the onset of the adolescent growth spurt. The rate of statural growth reaches a peak, begins a slower or decelerative phase, and finally terminates with the attainment of adult stature. Functionally, adolescence is usually viewed in terms of sexual maturation, which begins with change in the neuroendocrine system prior to overt physical changes and terminates with the attainment of mature reproductive function.

Aerobic Capacity is the maximum amount of oxygen the body can use during a specified period, usually during intense exercise.

Aerobic Power is the rate at which energy can be produced aerobically.

Anaerobic Alactic Capacity is the total amount of energy that one can produce without the presence of oxygen.

Anaerobic Alactic Power is the rate at which energy can be produced by the ATP-CP System (Adenosine Triphosphate-Creatine Phosphate System): it is maximal effort.

Ancillary Capacities refer to the knowledge base and experience base of a player and include warm-up and cool-down procedures, stretching, nutrition, hydration, rest, recovery, restoration, regeneration, mental preparation, and taper and peak. This is the 'how, when, and what to do' to enhance training and performance. When players reach their genetic potential and physiologically cannot improve anymore, performance can be improved by using the ancillary capacities to full advantage.

Biological Age is the age determined by the physiological factors of maturation in conjunction with the training age (years of participating in sport).

Bounding is the simplest form of jumps training, consisting of low amplitude work, mostly using ankles with very little knee or hip involvement.

Childhood ordinarily spans the end of infancy — the first birthday — to the start of adolescence and is characterized by relatively steady progress in growth and maturation and rapid program in neuromuscular or motor development. It is often divided into early childhood, which includes pre-school children aged 1 to 5 years, and late childhood, which includes elementary school-aged children, aged 6 through to the onset of adolescence.

Chronological age refers to the number of years and days elapsed since birth. Growth, development, and maturation operate in a time framework; that is, the child's chronological age. Children of the same chronological age can differ by several years in their biological maturation.

Development is the interrelationship between growth and maturation in relation to the passage of time. The concept of development also includes the social, emotional, cognitive, and motor realms of a child. Although children mature and learn at different rates, almost all children learn in the same sequence and go through the same phases.

Flexibility is the ability to conduct movements at certain joints with an appropriate range of motion.

Fundamental Movement Skills refer to the set of motor skills that form the basis for all sports and physical activity. Fundamental movement skills can be further broken down and grouped as follows:

- **Body Management Skills** — agility, balance, coordination, speed, bending, rolling, stopping, landing, twisting, stretching, climbing, and turning —
 - involve balance either stationary or when moving.
 - involve body awareness or knowing where body parts are at all times and being able to control them with ease.
- **Locomotion Skills** — walking, running, dodging, jumping, hopping, leaping, skipping, galloping, and sliding —

- take the body in any direction, moving it from one point to another.
- are developed in the early stages of learning and must be taught and practiced.
- **Object Manipulation Skills** — throwing, catching, bouncing, dribbling, rolling of objects, and striking with an implement —
 - involve hand-eye or foot-eye coordination to manipulate objects.
 - involve sending, receiving, travelling with or receiving and sending objects like balls, hoops, jump ropes, racquets, bats, and hockey sticks.

Fundamental Sport Skills refers to the set of sport skills that form the basis for a sport. Some examples of fundamental softball skills are throwing a softball to a base to get an out, catching a thrown or hit ball with a glove, hitting a pitched ball with a bat, sliding into a base, and running the bases.

Growth and **maturation** are often used together, sometimes synonymously. However, each refers to specific biological activities.

- Growth refers to observable, step-by-step, measurable changes in body size such as height, weight, and percentage of body fat.
- Maturation refers to the progress towards the biologically mature state. Maturation differs from growth in that although the biological system matures at different rates, all individuals reach the same endpoint and become fully mature.

Ideal Performance State (IPS) refers to the self-created feeling or state of readiness in which a player is totally focused mentally and physically on the pending competition and is confident that he or she will perform to the best of their ability.

Integrated Sport Team (IST) refers to a group of professionals — sport psychologist, exercise physiologist, nutritionist, and medical team (physician, physiotherapist, massage therapist) — working in collaboration with the coaching staff to assist the player to achieve elite levels of performances.

Menarche is the onset of the first menstruation cycle.

National Coaching Certification Program (NCCP) is the recognized standard for coach training and certification in Canada and is offered by over 66 NSOs. The emphasis is on developing competent coaches so they are more effective and have a more meaningful impact on a player's sport experience.

National Sport Organization (NSO) refers to the organization which is recognized by the federal government as being responsible for the sport in Canada.

Onset of Peak Height Velocity (PHV) is the beginning of the growth spurt.

Periodization is a time management and planning technique that provides the framework for arranging the complex array of training processes into a logical and observationally and scientifically based schedule to bring about optimal improvements in performance. Periodization sequences the training components into weeks, days, and sessions. Periodization is situation-specific depending upon the priorities and the time available to bring about the required training and competition improvements. In the LTPD context, periodization connects the 'stage' the athlete is in to the suggested requirements of that 'stage'. Periodization includes

- Single Periodization: one preparatory and one competitive period within the year
- Double Periodization: two preparatory and two competitive periods within the year
- Triple Periodization: three preparatory and three competitive periods within the year
- Multiple Periodization: competing all year round while maintaining physical and technical skills
- Periods: preparation, competition, transition
- Phases: generally includes General preparation phase, Specific preparation phase, Pre-Competition phase, Competition phase, and Transition comprising of 4 to 6 mesocycles
- Mesocycles: usually comprised of 2 to 4 microcycles
- Microcycles: usually a week

Peak Height Velocity (PHV) is the maximum rate of growth (the growth spurt) in height which tends to last between 2.5 and 3 years in most adolescents. PHV usually happens between the ages of 12 to 15 for males and 11 to 14 for females. Early or late maturers might differ from the ages above.

Peak Strength Velocity (PSV) is the maximum rate of increase in strength during the growth spurt.

Physical Literacy is the mastery of fundamental movement skills and fundamental sport skills.

Posture is the static or dynamic positional states of the body maintained through the individual's neuromuscular skeletal system.

Power is the ability to generate the highest possible force in the shortest possible time.

Puberty refers to the point at which an individual is sexually mature and able to reproduce.

Range of Motion is the maximal movement amplitude at certain joints.

Readiness refers to a child's level of growth, maturity, and development which enables him or her to perform tasks and meet demands through training and competition. Readiness and windows of trainability during growth and development of young players are also referred to as the correct time for the programming of certain stimuli to achieve optimum adaptation with regard to motor skills, aerobic capacity, aerobic power, muscular endurance, and strength.

Skill Development refers to the ability to carry out a task with maximum certainty and minimum expenditure of energy and time. It is the action supported by a pattern of abilities that is learned and developed through practice and has the potential to endure.

Speed Development is the ability to react to a stimulus or signal in the shortest possible time (speed of reaction) and/or to perform a movement at the highest tempo (speed of movement). It is the action supported by a pattern of abilities to develop speed through practice and has the potential to endure.

Speed Endurance is the ability to maintain high levels of speed in relation to maximal speed or to maintain a high degree of muscle contraction speeds during repeated movements.

Strength is the ability to generate force through a single maximum voluntary contraction.

Strength Development refers to an action supported by a pattern of abilities to develop strength through practice with the potential to endure.

Technique is the integration of movement patterns while performing various skills. The better the technique, the more efficient the performance.

Testing and monitoring include regularly scheduled field testing, laboratory testing, medical testing, and psychological evaluation. It includes

- Anthropometric Measurements: regular, periodical measurement of standing height, sitting height, arm span, and weight to monitor growth. This helps predict the onset of PHV.
- Musculoskeletal Screening: the assessment of postural alignment, movement patterns, and neuromuscular balance. This helps to direct efficiency of movement along with the development of proactive injury prevention approaches.
- Screening: evaluation of the physical, technical, tactical, and mental potential of a player.

Trainability refers to the genetic endowment of players as they respond individually to specific stimuli and adapt to it accordingly. Malina and Bouchard (1991) defined trainability as “the responsiveness of developing individuals at different stages of growth and maturation to the training stimulus.”

Training refers to the systematic and integrated actions aimed at influencing performance in a goal-oriented way. It is the various processes and methods of periodically administering controlled stress on the organism using a series of principles organized into a coherent plan in order to induce general and specific adaptations to various systems, organs, and/or tissues to improve performance capacity.

VO₂ Max, or maximal oxygen consumption, is the maximum capacity of an individual's body to transport and utilize oxygen during incremental exercise, which reflects the physical fitness of the individual.

Window of Trainability refers to a point in the development of a specific behaviour when experience or training has an optimal effect on development. The same experience, introduced at an earlier or later time, has no effect on or retards later skill acquisition.

10 S's of Training and Performance:

- | | |
|----------------------------|---------------------|
| • Stamina (Endurance) | • Strength |
| • Speed | • Skill |
| • Suppleness (Flexibility) | • Structure/Stature |
| • (p)Sychology | • Sustenance |
| • Schooling | • Socio-Cultural |

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