

# Long-Term Athlete Development: Exploratory Survey About Its Awareness and Implementation Amongst Parents and Coaches



Vincent DiStefano, Marie-Michelle Boulanger, Emma Madigan, Allen A. Champagne & Steven Shaw

## ABSTRACT

Football coaches across Canada were surveyed regarding their knowledge and use of the Long-Term Athlete Development (LTAD). N = 50 (AB = 5; BC = 1; MB = 5; NS = 8; ON = 6; QC = 19; SK = 1). Their years of experience in coaching ranged from 1 to 15 or more years, with 30 coaches having 10 years or more of experience. The age group of athletes coached ranged from 6 to 20+ years of age. Results indicated that 38% of coaches had not heard of the LTAD model. Of the 62% of coaches who indicated having heard of the LTAD model, 74% reported being comfortable with their knowledge of the model, and 77% of those reporting being comfortable indicated following the principles and values of the LTAD model in their coaching plan and strategies. Although the majority of coaches reported being familiar with the LTAD model, 52% of the coaches could not name any of the core values or principles indicating a significant limitation in their ability to implement the model in their coaching practices. Moreover, it calls into question the claim that they know and feel comfortable with the model. The results also bring into question the current top-down method used to share knowledge about the LTAD model and to implement its principles in teams across different age levels. Similarly, 84 parents of young football players (AB = 15; MB = 4; NB = 13; NS = 10; ON = 9; QC = 21; SK = 12) were surveyed. Of the 84 parents surveyed, 75% reported that they had never heard about the LTAD model, with 71.5% of the parents who had heard of the model unable to name any core values or principles of the model. For proper implementation of the LTAD model, all relevant stakeholders should be informed and actively involved in promoting its core values and principles. Parents' survey response indicate that most parents do not know about the LTAD model. These findings suggest that many parents cannot be effective participants in LTAD without more active and intentional efforts by governing bodies to involve them in their child's athletic development. Combined, the results indicate a need to revise the current methods used to raise awareness about and to implement the LTAD model.

## RESEARCH QUESTIONS

- Q1: Are football coaches across Canada informed about the current LTAD model proposed by Football Canada?  
Q2: Are football parents across Canada informed about the current LTAD model proposed by Football Canada?

## METHOD

### Coaches Surveyed:

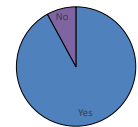
- Football coaches from across Canada were surveyed regarding their knowledge and use of the Long-Term Athlete Development model.
- 50 coaches surveyed (AB = 5; BC = 1; MB = 5; NB = 5; NS = 8; ON = 6; QC = 19; SK = 1)
  - Years of experience ranging from 1 to 15+ years
    - 30 coaches have 10+ years of experience
  - Age group of athletes coached ranged from 6 to 20+ years of age

### Parents/Athletes Surveyed:

- Parents of U16 and U18 level football players from across Canada were surveyed regarding their knowledge of the Long-Term Athlete Development model
- 84 parents surveyed (AB = 15; MB = 4; NB = 13; NS = 10; ON = 9; QC = 21; SK = 12)
  - Years of playing experience ranging from 0.5 to 12 years (Median = 7)
  - Age of athletes ranging from 13 to 17 years of age (Median = 16)

## RESULTS

Distribution of coaches surveyed who would like to be more informed about tackling and blocking safety techniques



Distribution of coaches surveyed who believe tackling and blocking safety training should be included in the long-term development of players



## INTRODUCTION

Figure 1: Long-Term Athlete Development Framework



Long-Term Athlete Development (LTAD) provides a general framework for athletes through a series of sequential stages that are designed based on level of maturation of the athlete, rather than chronological age (Canada.ca, 2017). By recognizing that people go through different stages of growth, learning, and training, it allows the competitive environment to be adapted to the different psychological, social, and physical needs of athlete, maximizing the pleasure of all athletes and ensuring that physical activity is maintained in the long run (Balyi, Way & Higgs, 2013).

In 2004, federal, provincial, and territorial ministers of sport endorsed the Canadian Sport for Life concept. Football Canada subsequently released its own version of the LTAD model adapted to specific demands of Canadian football (Football Canada, 2009). In so far, the blueprint created by the group of football leaders and experts did provide significant changes to rules and regulations, recovery programs, and competition structures and schedules. (Football Canada, 2009) In keeping with the concept of *Kaizen*, Football Canada underwent a "Competition Review" in 2018 meant to, in part, highlight the "...gaps between the current competition system and its ideal structure as described in the LTAD." (Football Canada, 2018).

The majority of gaps identified dealt with specificities within the LTAD models, such as time allocated to developing fundamental movement skills, lack of guide for practice calendar, and lack of standardized level of play across the country (Football Canada, 2018). However, it did not seem to look at gaps within its vertical channel of information distribution. Norris (2010) highlighted that the top-down approach is several degrees away from where major changes need to happen, namely the grassroots level. Unfortunately, this leads to an undesired situation where **minimally experienced coaches are in charge of a critical period of development that could potentially affect both the long-term progress and participation of young athletes.** (Norris, 2010)

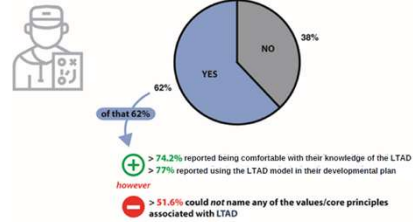
sportforlife.ca

### Current Problems:

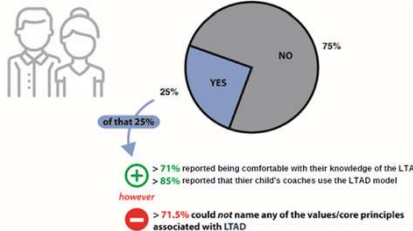
- The proper distribution of information through the top-down channel has not been evaluated
- The population that needs the information, at the grassroots level, most likely receives the least amount of knowledge

## RESULTS

Distribution of coaches surveyed who have heard of Long-Term Athlete Development (LTAD)



Distribution of parents surveyed who have heard of Long-Term Athlete Development (LTAD)



## DISCUSSION

### CLINICAL IMPLICATIONS

- Although the majority of coaches reported being familiar with the LTAD model, the fact that more than half of them could not name any of the core values or principles indicated a significant limitation in their ability to implement the model in their coaching practices. Moreover, it calls into question the claim that they know and feel comfortable with the model.
- For the proper implementation of the LTAD model, all relevant stakeholders should be informed and actively involved in promoting its core values and principles. Parents' survey responses indicate that the majority of parents do not know the LTAD model.
- Among parents who know the model, most cannot name any core values or principles. These findings suggest that many parents cannot be effective participants in LTAD without more active efforts to involve them in their child's athletic development

### FUTURE DIRECTIONS

- Need for new delivery system and implementation methods for LTAD.
- Currently piloting new approach to assessing and teaching tackling for youth players
  - Our aim is to shift the way we engage with coaches to encourage them to implement new teaching methods with the LTAD approach as a foundation.



## REFERENCES

Balyi, I., Way, R., & Higgs, C. (2013). Long-term athlete development. Champaign, IL: Human Kinetics. Football Canada (2018). Football's Canada competition review. Retrieved from <http://footballcanada.com/ltad-competition-review-update-2/>. Football Canada (2009). Football for life through long-term athletic development – the overview. Retrieved from <http://footballcanada.com/long-term-athlete-development-1/>. Long-term athlete development. (2017). Retrieved from <https://www.canada.ca/en/canadian-heritage/services/developing-athletes.html>. Norris, S.R. (2010). Long-term athlete development in Canada: Attempting system change and multi-agency cooperation. The American College of Sport Medicine, 9(6), 379-382. doi: 10.1249/JSR.0b013e3181fe3c44