

Will Savor
KIN 855
10/23/14
Project #1

Introduction

The sport I have chosen for my long-term athlete development plan is the sport I coach for: football. As a football coach I am always interested in looking for any ideas that could help me build my players into the best they can be. Even though I have chosen the sport of football for the main idea behind the project, my LTAD (Long Term Athlete Development) is from Hockey Canada (HC), the organization responsible for the all things hockey in Canada. On their website they have a PDF file with the LTPD plan they have within their system that shows the stages of player development they believe are effective in developing quality hockey players. Yes, I completely understand how crazy this may sound that I am basing my development ideas for football off of a ice hockey model, but even though I am a college football coach from Florida, I have been playing hockey since I was 6 and know the sport just as well as I know football. I believe my knowledge of both hockey and football is strong enough to help me make connections between the two sports to successfully create a plan to improve the development of football players I coach.

Important Features

Within the Canadian hockey LTAD plan there are many important features that I find quite interesting. I think the features they do a great job of breaking down each main feature into 9 stages of player development that they find beneficial to the development of hockey players. Personally, I think the player development staff at Hockey Canada may know what they are doing since they have ben apart of the development of some of the worlds greatest hockey players from the start of the organization to today. I plan to describe each important feature step by step to give a better understanding of how this plan is being put into effect.

Most player development plans I found online always began with the FUNdamental stage of the player, but the Hockey Canada group put together an even earlier stage of player development that they find crucial. The Discovery stage is the first step of this plan that they deem important for development. This feature is meant for the children to find an interest in the sport because HC believes that it is important for children to begin skating at an early age and this phase of development is to be between ages 0 to 4 years old. With the children getting acclimated to skating at a young age they begin to have their interest in the sport a lot earlier than most other children, and will be one step ahead at the next stage.

The next feature that HC has in play is the Fundamental phase for when the children are between the ages of 5 to 6. This phase is meant for the children to begin mastering their fundamental motor skills and really start getting used to what their bodies are capable of. They also expect the basic skills of the sport to begin to be taught of skating and passing, here the players' first opportunities to play the sport begin, along with other sports to contribute to the development of the fine motor skills

For HC phase 2 of the FUNdamental stage is when the children are between the ages of 7 to 8, also known as the novice phase. In this phase the children are expected to continue to work of fine-tuning their motor skills and coordination, but mostly this phase is where consistent practice starts to become a factor. The plan for practice becoming more consistent helps the players slowly acclimate to the idea of practicing on a more consistent basis to help their development and help contribute to physical literacy, fitness and basic skills.

The next phase of the HC LTAD is what they call the Atom Program, where players are placed on teams and put into the "learning to play" environment. This is the stage

where they expect the players to begin some competition against other players. In this stage the players being to sharpen their skills in team play that they will utilize later on down the road. It is in this stage they believe, “In most cases what is learned or not learned in this stage will have a very significant effect on their level of play that is achieved later on” (p.40). They believe this phase is crucial to the development of the players and how effective they can be as they grow beyond the ages of 9 to 10.

When the players reach the age of 11 to 12 they are placed in the Peewee phase, the equivalent to the “learning to train” phase of LTAD plans. This stage is important because it is where the players being to compete in games as much as they practice and they are expected to see have a more accelerated adaptation to motor skills and coordination. They are also stressed to be in more social and group orientated skills of teamwork and collaboration to achieve an overall goal. This phase is crucial in the sport because here is where the separation and specialization of athletes become a large factor and the gap between the more skilled and the least skilled begins to widen a bit more.

In the next stage of “train to train” the players are reaching the age of 12 to 16 and this is where the gap of skill widens even larger because the player specialization becomes more intricate and players become more focused on their skills and some have more passion than others. This phase is expected to improve the players’ specialization of speed, strength, agility and skill. It is where they believe the players will begin to do more solo training to hone their skills even more from their group work during practices with their teams. This phase is important because this is where some players begin to excel at a level in hockey where some are pulled out of high school to play for major junior teams and play at a higher level than most local area teams.

The “train to compete” phase is an important phase because the players are then expected to train at an even higher level to compete for spots on even more skilled teams. This phase is where the players take more time to specialize at specific [positions and areas to be singled out for their skill in that area to be considered for higher levels of play. This phase is generally when the players are 16 to 17 years old and are now being noticed by national and professional scouts for the higher levels to compete with the best.

When the players are 18 to 20 they reach the “train to win” phase of the game where they are expected to have their physical, mental and lifestyle capacities fully established and in effect. Here the players are in a competitive phase where the elite are now competing with the best in the world and need to continue training at a high level to stay competitive. At this point the elite have separated themselves and are in a situation where their livelihood would begin depending on their ability to still compete at this level of play.

The final stage of HC’s LTAD for players in Canada is the “excel” phase where the players are expected to be playing at their peak performance levels in all aspects of mental, physical and social abilities. This level is where the players are most competitive with the elite around the world and have to continue to compete at the highest level possible.

These phases of player development are all important factors because each stage is specific for certain age group and it is setting a standard mark for where each player should be at while at a specific age of competition. These phases are crucial for the development of the players through life and can defiantly be used as guidelines for other sports to use in their LTAD plans.

Implementation LTAD Plan

Since I am a college coach I would have to say I would try and implement this style of LTAD for a high school football program because it is the closet level of play to where I am at now and could be used for wither level. I think if a high school team were to be put under a program of such intensity that it could be a huge factor to the teams' success.

I think the biggest change I would have to make for this program would obviously be to transfer the ideas of the program over to a more football specific plan, which would not be too difficult because a lot of the training sessions and idea within each phase can be easily transferred to the football equivalent. Where hockey has more speed specific and short burst areas of training, the football program would have more position specific training for position specific needs. The offensive line would not do as many plyometric workouts as the wide receivers and defensive backs. The receivers and defensive backs would also not be expected to do as much heavy explosion exercises as the lineman. Yes, the transfer between sports would be a challenge, but more of a tedious one than a major factor.

With high school sports becoming more and more competitive I think it would benefit my program to adopt this style of training for not only the varsity squad, but for all incoming freshman to take part in once they start playing in their first year. I feel confident that I would be able to develop a program made for high school athletes to follow so that each year they are continually getting better to not only help the varsity squad when they are seniors and make the program very strong. With a LTAD I think a high school program would be more than capable of benefiting from the overall training goals of developing players from the ages of 14 to 18 to make them strongly competitive at the high school and then the college level.

Detailed Implementation Program

The one change I would make to this plan would have to be how the players are trained during practices to keep them all at a high level. In high school there is a huge gap between the best players and the worst players, this should not come as a surprise to anyone because all high school football programs in the United States allow any student enrolled in the school to play for the team, there are not try-outs or cuts from the team. this style of play allows for all students to be involved, but it also allows any student to come out and play even if they have no prior experience. So the players coming out to play with no experience are already set years behind a majority of the athletes who have been playing for years. This can be a problem because of how large of a gap these two groups have between them. With players with such skill having to go against players with none at all there really is no benefit. The plan would be to devise practice schemes that are capable of allowing each to develop properly for their own benefit.

This may sound way too in depth for a high school program because there is only so much a coach can do with the players when they are in school a majority of the day. I think the best way to attack this plan would be to get a course opened in the school that would contribute to physical education and be an elective that select students could take that would allow for the lower level players to come out and develop their skills while still earning school credit. I think this course could fall under the parameters that most high school strength and conditioning programs fall into because those classes are mostly loaded with the varsity football players anyway. This course would allow the time during the day for the “teacher” to work on position specific drills to help that player specialize a

little more than they do during practice. It would grant them the opportunity to have a two-a-day style practice schedule that would help their skills.

This plan will not only benefit the individual who has a lot to catch up on, but will benefit other members of the team because if this player is getting better, than they are more capable of giving a better look on the field in practice to help the better players prepare for the upcoming game. This plan may seem extreme because it probably is. I will admit I am biased when it comes to doing whatever I can to get players better. I wish I could take my running backs out of class to watch film and work with each of them one-on-one, but that is not possible, so my idea for how to best implement a change to a LTAD plan for a high school football team may be extreme but it is a huge change that would be necessary to keep the competition level high during practice to benefit the whole team.

Trouble-Shooting

When it comes down to whether the program can be seen as effective, I truly believe that it could help to make a high school football team better. I think being able to train the players at a high intensity level from when they are freshman up until their senior year, there would be huge gains made for the program over the years as the style of play is changed and the LTAD becomes the way the football program is run. This program could be effective because it is based off a model used to train the best hockey players in the world and the sport specific tweaks being made could absolutely help to make it an effective plan for the future of a program.

Would this plan see any resistance while being out in place? Absolutely. The administration, parents and some of the players would resist it. Just because here is

resistance does not mean that it is not effective. It is easy to see why each level would find this program as an issue to be put in place for a high school sports team.

First off the administration would be against the plan because it would involve the inclusion of a football specific class for the football players to take so they could train during the school day and receive credit for the course. Most administrations would not allow this to happen because they want to focus on the education of the students and a class for football is not something that would be seen as a major necessity. The administration would resist the plan mainly because of that factor of having to go through the bureaucratic mess of getting the course approved for accreditation so that it can be held within the school day as an elective. They may also be against the plan because it is so heavily set on one sports team, that it would be unfair for the other sports of the school to not have the same opportunity.

Now the parents would be the most resistant to this type of plan. Why would they be? Because parents are the absolute worst things that could ever happen to sports because they are biased and overly opinionated. I am glad I do not get paid enough to deal with parents yet because it seems like a huge headache. The parents would put up a fight for this because if they were told their child was being placed on a plan that would track his overall development in sports over his four years in high schools, that would make a parent second guess allowing their child to play for the team. The parents would have issues with the high intensity training necessary within the LTAD because it would take more effort and energy than anything else their child may have ever done before. The parents will also think their child is better than what the coaches see and would put up a fight about the level in the system their child would be at because their child is a superstar.

The final resistance that would happen for the LTAD plan would be the players themselves. This portion is the easiest to deal with because the only players that would complain or resist the system are clearly the ones who do not have what it takes to get better and are not at the level of mental preparedness for this high of training (which happens to be a major phase of the LTAD). Once a player begins to disagree with something they are outing themselves as someone who clearly does not have what it takes and can be seen and treated like a cancer to the rest of the team and will no longer have a place on the team.

I took the HC LTAD plan to my current head coach Bobby James and then talked to hi about my changes to the training to make it more sport specific and explained how I would begin the program during the players freshman year so that they are at their peak by the time they are seniors and how also gave him my insights on how a sports class would benefit the program as a whole to get extra work in. Albeit, we are both college coaches and very biased towards extra training Coach James was a fan of my ideas about how this program can not only be effective at the high school level, but a t a college level. He did remind me though that the mentality I have is directed more towards the college level of thinking because all the players we have on our team were recruited to play for us and made the decision to put this much effort into football, whereas most high school players are on the team to wear the jersey on Friday. It was a great conversation about how the training could be effective for a program especially a few years down the road where it becomes the lifestyle of the program and all the players are on board after seeing results. He was very informative about how the ideas can be seen as extreme, but if they are toned

down for the high school level they could be effective to help a program become great after a few years.

Discussion

The LTAD is a very interesting idea itself because it is not something I have ever seen before because I have never been apart of a player development program that guided me to where I am. I was one of those high school freshmen who never played football until the summer before my first year in high school. I think if I was put on a LTAD system I would have gone to play college football at a higher level than Division-III. I think the ideas of LTAD have really been effective in helping me understand some of the intricacies that go into coaching, especially when it comes to the development of the players and their motivation.

I think there are a lot of pros for the LTAD plans because it allows players the opportunity to be able to push them to a level of play that puts them among the elites in the world. It is also great that it is organized in such a way that most athletes and coaches are able to track the progress and be able to determine what needs to be worked on specifically for them to reach their full potential. I think the largest con that I have seen is how we are expecting kids to try and specialize at such a young age, that it seems like such a small window that it is easily missed. The specialization process in the sports begin at such a young age now, that most of the kids still wake up early on Sunday mornings to watch cartoons. I just do not think that any child under the age of 10 should be expected to make a decision that big at such a young age.

I do not believe that LTAD plans are bad for sports because of how effective they can be if used properly. I think the specialization period may need to be moved back some

because I cannot expect a 10 year old to decide what sport they want to play for the rest of their life, while I am 24 and still have no idea what I want to be when I grow up. I think that these plans can be extremely effective in the later years of training because the high intensity training becomes a factor for most the players trying to compete at a high level. I have never implemented or been apart of an LTAD plan before, but I would seriously consider putting one in effect if I were to become a college head coach one day because it would be easier for me to track a college football team over four years, than it would a high school team because there is more freedom with the college players than there is with the high school level players. I overall think these plans are extremely beneficial if they are used within the right setting and are helping make the children better athletes, and not causing issues with their views on sports.

References

Hockey Canada Long Term Player Development Plan: Hockey For Like, Hockey For Excellence.

<http://cdn.agilitycms.com/hockey-canada/Hockey->

[Programs/Coaching/LTPD/Downloads/LTPD_manual_may_2013_e.pdf](http://cdn.agilitycms.com/hockey-canada/Hockey-Programs/Coaching/LTPD/Downloads/LTPD_manual_may_2013_e.pdf)