



Support from the Experts

- Must Read Books



SUPPORT FROM THE EXPERTS

Must read books for anyone administering, coaching or parenting Children in Sport.

Straight Talk About Children and Sport. (1996) Janet Leblanc; Louise Dickson – available for purchase from Coaches Association of Saskatchewan www.members.home.com/saskcoach or (306) 975-0898

Available to borrow from Resource Centre of Sport Culture and Recreation at www.spra.sk.ca or 1-800-563-2555 or (306) 780-9424

Total Training For Young Champions. (2000) Tudor Bompa

Young Athletes. (1988) Robert Molina

Give Your Kids a Sporting Chance. (1988) Kevin Spink

Sport for Children and Youth. (1984) Maureen Weiss; Daniel Gould

How to Play with Kids. (1992) Jim Therrell

Available to purchase from the Canadian Centre for Ethics in Sport at www.cces.ca or (613) 521-3340, Toll Free: 1-800-672-7775

Fair Play – It's Your Call. A Resource Guide for Coaches

Fair Play for Kids. A Handbook of Activities for Teaching Fair Play

On Competition for Children

“Childhood used to be a preparation – now it’s a performance. What kind of childhood is that?
Hyper-Parenting: Are You Hurting Your Child By Trying Too Hard. (1999) Dr. Alvin Rosenfield

“Ideally, children between the ages of 6 and 12 years should attend 3-4 practices for each game they play.”
(Straight Talk About Children and Sport. 1996)

“The Coaching Association of Canada recommends that children can begin to participate in suitably designed competitive sport after the age of about 11. However, children learn better in a non-stressful environment. Young children under the age of 11 are still trying to develop their capabilities. Excessive stress could lead to low self-image and will severely hinder this learning process.”
(Straight Talk About Children and Sport. 1996)

“Competition is inherently neither good or bad. It is simply a process, and the quality of leadership largely determines whether it is a positive or negative experience for the participant.”
(Foundations of Sport and Exercise Psychology, p. 124)

“Johnson and Johnson (1985) thoroughly analyzed 122 studies conducted from 1924 to 1981 for the effects of competitive and cooperative attitudes on performance. Sixty-five studies showed that cooperation promoted higher achievement and performance than competition, with only 8 studies showing the opposite.”
“It’s not competition itself produces negative consequences – it is the overemphasis on winning that is counterproductive.” *(Foundations of Sport and Exercise Psychology,* p. 126)

“A child placed into a swimming race without good technique is like asking a child to do algebra without first doing arithmetic.” (extracted from the article “A Curriculum For Three Levels of Age-Group Swimming: Section II” authored by Brent S. Rushall, and published as an issue of the *Swimming Science Bulletin.*

“For children between the ages of 8-12, an emphasis on individual skill development should be **gradually** balanced with an emphasis on rules, structured relationships, and both offensive and defensive strategies. However, until children reach 12 years, it is unrealistic to have competitive reward structures and competitive relationships as the primary focus of a program. Such focus presumes the existence of social skills not acquired at least until early adolescence. Second, it means that performance expectations held by adults should be modified so that parents and coaches do not strive to have their children and teams act like miniature versions of adults. They must realize that only a few children under 10 will be able to conceptually grasp the idea of a team being composed of an interrelated set of positions that shift in response to one another, in response to the placement of opponents and in response to placement of the ball. In fact, most 10-12 year olds still have problems grasping this idea.” (Coakley -1988)

“Maureen Weiss (Weiss & Chaumeton 1992) concluded that youth sport participants differ from non participants and those who drop out in their level of perceived competence. Children with low perceptions of their abilities to learn and perform sport skills do not participate (drop out), whereas children who persist have higher levels of perceived competence. From this information you can infer that one very important task of youth sport leaders and coaches is to discover ways to enhance children’s self-perceived ability. One way to do this is to teach children to evaluate their performances by their own standards of improvement rather than on competitive outcomes (winning or losing).”
(Weinberg, Robert; Gould, Daniel, 1995)



The following quotes are from *Total Training For Young Champions (2000)* by Tudor Bompa, a York University professor, recognized world-wide as an expert in long term training for athletes.

“Participation in competitions during the early years should have just one scope – enjoyment and fun!”

“The higher the number of competitions, the lower the number of practices, which means skill proficiency decreases and weaker performances. It is essential that children practice more and compete less.”

“During competition children are *applying*, not *developing* their skills. If children have not properly developed their skills before application, they will be reinforcing poor techniques and unquestionably developing bad habits.”

“Children must have the opportunity to develop skills properly before they apply them in a competitive environment. Otherwise, they will likely develop skills that may be suitable for success at their particular stage of development, but not suitable for higher levels of competition.”

Bompa recommends the following guidelines for competition:

- Enter children in competition only when they are ready. This includes motivational readiness (they want to compete); demonstration of an appropriate skill level; and an appropriate level of physiological capacity (motor abilities needed to be competitive).
- Ensure primary goals are to have fun, learn skills, and reach certain skill, tactical, or physical objectives, such as, “If you have five good passes during the game, I’ll be happy.”
- Organize skill competitions for individual sports. “Whoever has the nicest skill will win”. Skill emphasis will be beneficial later, and it takes away the physiological stress of competition and the need to train hard.
- Discourage children younger than 7-8 from participating in organized competitions. They can test their skills in a non-competitive environment.
- Only at 12-13 years do children understand the role of competition and what it takes, from the point of view of skills and abilities, to experience success or failure. Therefore, participation in organized competition should begin in the late elementary school years of 11 or 12 years and later.
- Recommended number of informal competitions per year in 8-11 age group, with stress being on skill form, rather than on winning:
 - Team sports – 5-10
 - Individual sports – 2-3
- Recommended number of organized competitions per year in 12-13 age group, with objective being physical, technical, or tactical goals, rather than winning:
 - Team sports – 10-15
 - Individual sports – 5-8
- It is essential that children practice more and compete less.



On Specialization

In his book *Total Training for Young Athletes*, Tudor Bompa lists the guidelines for each sport when children should start to practice and specialize. Following are quotes from his book:

“It’s important for young children to develop a variety of fundamental skills to help them become good general athletes *before* they start training in a specific sport. This is called multilateral development, and it is one of the most important training principles for children and youth.”

“The purpose of multilateral development is to improve overall adaptation. Children and youth who develop a variety of skills and motor abilities are more likely to adapt to demanding training loads, without experiencing stresses associated with early specialization.”

“In early years no one knows whether a player’s best position is on offence or defence. This is why a young athlete should play several positions. Only in late teens, during the years of specialization, should players be placed in a position where they have the greatest game effectiveness.”

(Hellstedt, Rooks, Watson - 1988)

“A child should play a variety of sports, both team and individual, for as long as possible for three reasons. First, variety is the antidote for boredom. Second, different sports require different skills, and a blending of various psychomotor skills results in a better all round athlete. Third, participation in a variety of sports at an early age will help the child achieve a lifetime of sports participation.”

(Grupe – 1988)

“Our educational responsibility cannot be primarily to optimize athletic achievement, but to assure the future of children and assure them of a happy childhood.”

Baxter-Jones, A.D. (1995). Growth and development of young athletes. *Sports Medicine*, 20, 59-64

“In talent identification and development programs, there has been a “catch them young” philosophy, driven by the belief that to achieve performance success at the senior level, training and competition must begin early, and more often; the earlier the better. This belief is not corroborated by research. Physical educators and medical professionals have advised consistently against sport in the young. It has been proposed and shown that participation should be the aim in pre-pubertal children.

Two major concerns arise from age-related competitions: the possible decrease in sports participation, and the use of performance results to identify talent. Talent identification “success” is often defined in terms of success in chronological age (CA)-grouped competitions. The research that exists strongly supports size and physique as being very important determinants of CA competitive success.

“One has to always ponder whether age-group selections and talent identification reward maturational growth rather than skill development, a factor which differentiates most sports at the highest level.”



From *Straight Talk About Children and Sport*

“Children, from approximately 8 years of age until the onset of puberty, need to be placed in sports where they will receive competent instruction and work on developing sport skills. These are still the ‘skill-hungry years’, when a child’s ability to develop movement patterns is much higher than in adolescence. Specializing too early in sport means children will miss out on a broad base of activities. Early specialization limits a child’s potential in all sports, including the one in which he or she is currently specializing.”

“I don’t think being completely focused on any one area is ever good for a child. If you lose your ability to play that sport, you may think that you have lost everything.”(Lyle Sanderson – Associate Professor – College of Kinesiology, University of Saskatchewan)



On Children's Play

“Quality leadership produces C.O.O.L (co-operative, open, optimistic, loving) kids. Learn the language of kids – rather than frustrating everyone by demanding that they learn our adult language. Believe me, they’ll be adults soon enough. The focus of youth sport in order of priority should be on fun, participation, learning.”
From *How to Play with Kids*. (1992) - Jim Therrell

From Scott, J.P. (1962). Critical periods in behavioural development. *Science*, 138, 949-958.

Certain periods in the life of young children are marked by times of particular sensitivity. For example, in McGraw’s (1935) attempts to modify behaviours of identical twins by teaching them a number of physical activities, some credence to the “appropriate times for learning: postulation was presented.”

- (a) The onset of walking was not affected by pre-emptory practice or help. It is a phylogenetic behaviour that is largely “programmed” into the natural development or timing of the youngster. It cannot be “speeded-up.”
- (b) Roller skating, an unnatural activity but closely related to walking, developed almost in concert with walking itself.
- (c) A number of other activities were actually made worse by early practice because of bad skill habits developed or the negative occurrences associated with the learning experience.

Implication. Starting a sporting experience at a very young age is not necessarily advantageous. It would seem that if one was to design the development of sport, the following are appropriate:

- Provide a wide variety of activities so that generalized basic gross skills are developed.
- Pay little attention to skill intricacies; instead be satisfied with gross motor movement patterns.
- Provide much activity that leads to successful outcomes.
- Avoid at all costs, the implementation of adult rules and sport dynamics; instead provide activities appropriated for the social, intellectual, and developmental stages of the participants.
- There are critical periods for learning that vary from sport to sport. For each kind of co-ordinated muscular activity, there is an optimum for rapid and skillful learning.

(Jean Piaget, Renowned Child Psychologist Taken From *Straight Talk About Children and Sport* (1996). Leblanc/Dickson)

“The most important phase in the development of self esteem occurs between the ages of 6 and 11.”

“The key is to provide as many opportunities to succeed as possible. This will lead to better adjusted and more confident children who are better able to cope with stress and new challenges.”

“Children need free time just to play. It’s just as healthy to let kids kick a ball around or play hide-and seek.”
(Lyle Sanderson, Associate Professor, College of Kinesiology, University of Saskatchewan as quoted in *Straight Talk About Children and Sports*. (1996)

