A supplement to
"Canadian Sport for Life"

No Accidental Champions

Long-Term Athlete Development for Athletes with a Disability

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No Accidental Champions

Long-Term Athlete Development For Athletes with a Disability

Planning for the sport excellence and well-being of Canadians with a disability

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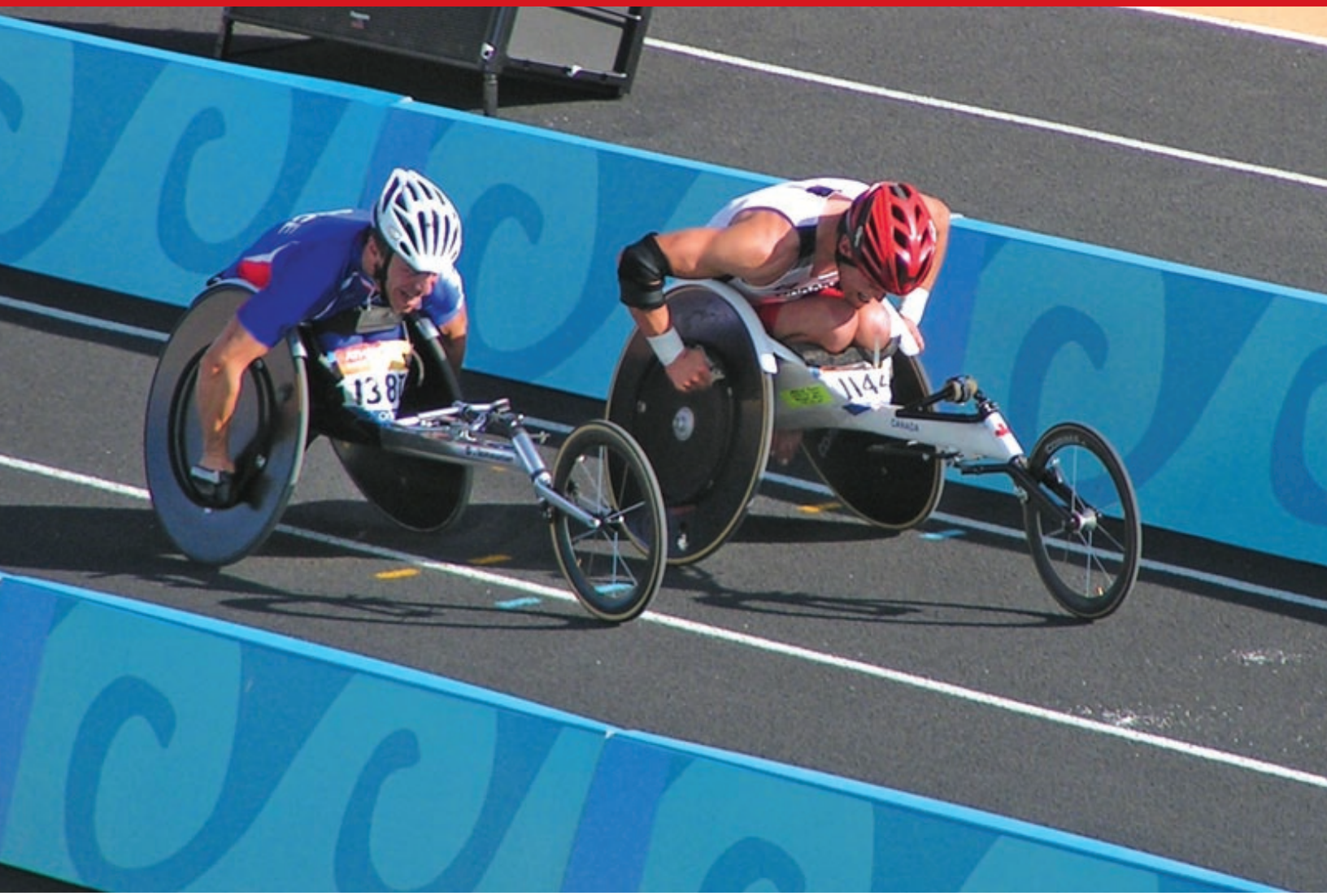


Not Different, But in Addition

Athletes with a disability (AWADs) are first and foremost athletes, and for this reason, virtually everything in the able-bodied Long-Term Athlete Development (LTAD) model is applicable. The able-bodied LTAD model and its resource paper, *Canadian Sport for Life*, should be the starting point for all athletes. *No Accidental Champions* is, therefore, only concerned with additional factors that need to be considered when working with AWADs.

An Introduction to LTAD

Between 10% and 14% of Canadians have a disability and, for optimum health, it is critical that all Canadians, with or without a disability, fully engage in physical activity. Canadians with a disability who aspire to the highest levels of sport performance also need a sport system to help them achieve their goals. Canada's outstanding international success in Paralympic sport, Special Olympics, and other sport for AWADs is well known, but there is concern that Canada's pool of talented AWADs is aging and being depleted. Canada therefore needs to develop the next generation of AWADs to their fullest potential.

For this reason, and to ensure the long-term health of its population, Canada is creating a LTAD model for AWADs.

Canada's LTAD

Canada's homegrown LTAD model is described in detail in the LTAD Resource Paper, *Canadian Sport for Life*. The purpose of this supplementary document is to provide greater detail on how the LTAD process can be enhanced to meet the specific needs and goals of AWADs.

Sport for individuals with a disability has grown tremendously over the last few decades. Nowadays, virtually any sport available to an able-bodied athlete can be pursued by a person with a disability at both the recreational and competitive levels.

High performance competitive sport for AWADs is organized by a number of different organizations. In many cases, national sport organizations (NSOs) are the governing body for both able-bodied and disability sport while other NSOs, such as the Canadian Wheelchair Basketball Association, are responsible for a specific sport for AWADs. Some organizations are specific to a particular disability; for example, Special Olympics Canada deals with athletes with intellectual disability and the Canadian Deaf Sports Association is responsible for athletes who are deaf or have hearing impairment.

At the world level, the International Paralympic Committee (IPC), an organization that parallels the International Olympic Committee, oversees the Paralympic Games, which are held in the same city as each Olympic Games, usually two to three weeks after their close. Special Olympics Incorporated is the international body that oversees the World Special Olympic Games, held on a four-year cycle, one year preceding the Olympic Games.

The major Paralympic summer sports are archery, athletics, boccia, cycling, equestrian, football 5- and 7-a-Side, goalball, judo, powerlifting, rowing, sailing, shooting, swimming, table tennis, volleyball, wheelchair basketball, wheelchair fencing, wheelchair rugby, and wheelchair tennis. The major Paralympic winter sports are alpine skiing, ice sledge hockey, Nordic skiing, and wheelchair curling. Other sports such as bowls and wheelchair dance are recognized by the IPC, but are contested outside the Paralympic Games.

The major Special Olympics summer sports are athletics, aquatics, 5 pin and tenpin bowling, football 5-a-Side, powerlifting, rhythmic gymnastics, softball. The major Special Olympics winter sports are alpine and Nordic skiing, curling, figure skating, floor hockey, snowshoeing, and speed skating.

The Canadian LTAD Model*

1. is based on the physical, mental, emotional, social, and cognitive development of children and adolescents. Each stage reflects a different point in athlete development.

2. ensures physical literacy[1] upon which excellence can be built, and builds that physical literacy in all children, from early childhood to late adolescence, by promoting quality daily physical activity in the schools and a common approach to developing physical abilities through community recreation and elite sport programs. It also recognizes the need to involve all Canadians in LTAD, including AWADs.

3. ensures that optimal training, competition, and recovery programs are provided throughout an athlete's career.

4. provides an optimal competition structure for the various stages of an athlete's development.

5. has an impact on the entire sport continuum, including participants, parents, coaches, schools, clubs, community recreation programs, provincial sport organizations, NSOs, multi-sport service organizations (MSOs), sport science specialists, municipalities, and several government ministries and departments (particularly but not exclusively in the portfolios of health and education) at the federal and provincial/territorial levels.

6. integrates elite sport, community sport and recreation, scholastic sport, and physical education in schools.

7. is 'Made in Canada', recognizing international best practices, research, and normative data.

8. supports the four goals of the Canadian Sport Policy — Enhanced Participation, Enhanced Excellence, Enhanced Capacity, and Enhanced Interaction — and reflects a commitment to contribute to the achievement of these goals.

9. promotes a healthy, physically literate nation whose citizens participate in lifelong physical activity.

* From *"Canadian Sport for Life"*

[1] *Physical literacy refers to competency in FUNdamental motor skills and FUNdamental sport skills.*

LTAD's 7 Main Stages

For optimum development of lifelong healthy physical activity and athletic performance, children and adults, including those with a disability, pass through a series of developmental stages.

- Active Start
- FUN damentals
- Learning to Train
- Training to Train
- Training to Compete
- Training to Win
- Active for Life

A brief overview of the stages is given below. For more details, refer to *Canadian Sport for Life*, pages 36-44. The ages given in the diagram below represent the normal range of ages at each stage for non-disabled individuals. Individuals with a disability, particularly those with an acquired disability, may pass through the stages at significantly different ages and at greater speed and time since acquiring a disability (rather than chronological age) becomes an important factor.

AWADs pass through the same stages as able-bodied athletes, although the ages and rate of progress may differ.

Active Start	Males and Females 0-6	Learn FUNdamental movements and link them together into play
FUNdamentals	Males 6-9 Females 6-8	Learn all FUNdamental movement skills and build overall motor skills
Learning to Train	Males 9-12 Females 8-11	Learn overall sport skills
Training to Train	Males 12-16 Females 11-15	Build aerobic base, develop speed and strength, further develop and consolidate sport specific skills
Training to Compete	Males 16-23+/- Females 15-21+/-	Optimize fitness preparation and sport-, individual-, and position-specific skills as well as performance
Training to Win	Males 19+/- Females 18+/-	Podium performances
Active for Life	Enter at any age	Smooth transition from an athlete's competitive career to lifelong physical activity and participation in sport

Specific disabilities may advance or slow development for any given chronological age.

The 10 Key Factors Influencing LTAD for AWADs

This AWAD supplementary document is based on and supported by available coaching and exercise science literature. This science is less well developed than for able-bodied athletes and *No Accidental Champions* should be seen as an exciting first step, written for coaches and drawing from their practical experience. The factors influencing LTAD for able-bodied athletes can be found in *Canadian Sport for Life,* pages 19-34.

1. The 10-Year Rule

Exactly how long it takes to become an elite AWAD varies from sport to sport, with the nature of the disability, and considerably with the pre-injury sporting experience and expertise of trained athletes who acquire a disability. The highest level of performance in hotly contested sports appears to take the same time and level of commitment as it does for able-bodied athletes, which is approximately 10,000 hours of training over 10 years.

2. The FUNdamentals

Athletes, with and without a disability, need to acquire FUNdamental movement and sport skills, or physical literacy, through fun and games, and this needs to be achieved prior to puberty.

Children with a disability face difficulties in acquiring FUNdamental skills because

- overly protective parents, caregivers, rehabilitation facility staff, 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 and programs 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 person with a disability into a group activity where FUNdamental skills are practiced and physical literacy is developed.

The physical literacy skills needed by children with a disability vary greatly depending on the nature and extent of their disability and should include all such skills learned by able-bodied children (modified as required) as well as the 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 their wheelchair, 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.

3. Specialization

Disability sports are late specialization sports (*Canadian Sport for Life*, page 22) and it is critically important that children with congenital or early-acquired physical or intellectual disability be exposed to the full range of FUNdamentals before specializing in the sport of their choice. Similarly, adults with an acquired disability should master their new FUNdamental movement skills before specializing in a single sport.

4. Age Factors

Some congenital disabilities are known to influence childhood and adolescent development and the timing of puberty; however, much more research is needed before a full understanding is achieved. Although the timing of puberty may vary, the sequence of development that the adolescent goes through usually does not. For example, children with spina bifida are known to experience puberty earlier than their peers and individuals with intellectual disability tend to enter puberty early but complete the process later. Because of variations in the timing of puberty (and therefore peak height velocity), it is likely that there will also be variations in the ages at which optimum periods of trainability occur.

5. Trainability

Little or nothing is known about periods of optimum 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, as shown in *Canadian Sport for Life*, page 27, be adjusted based on the observed age of puberty. Whether there are optimum periods of trainability during post-injury rehabilitation needs to be investigated.

6. Physical, Mental, Cognitive, and Emotional Development

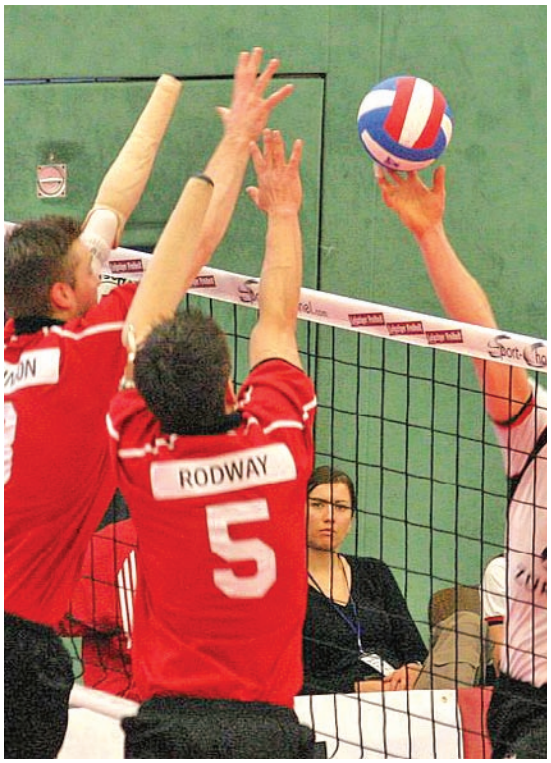
Sport can play an important role in helping individuals with a physical or intellectual disability to develop a new, positive self-image as well as enhance their self-concept. For this reason, sport programs should consider the mental, cognitive, and emotional development of AWADs in addition to their physical development.

Consideration of mental, social, and emotional development is particularly important when working with athletes with intellectual disability and the developmental characteristics and implications for coaches (*Canadian Sport for Life*, page 54) need to be interpreted in light of each athlete's mental and developmental age, rather than chronological age.

With LTAD's holistic approach to athlete development, programs for AWADs need to place emphasis on ethical behaviour, fair play, and character building throughout the various stages. Particularly for athletes with an intellectual disability, consideration must be given to the athletes' ability to understand and apply these concepts.

7. Periodization

There is no evidence that periodization for AWADs is substantially different from that for able-bodied athletes. It is therefore suggested that the recommendations on periodization in *Canadian Sport for Life*, pages 28-30, be followed. Since disability may reduce functional muscle mass and aerobic capacity, fatigue in AWADs should be carefully monitored, and rest and recovery periods should be adjusted accordingly.



8. Calendar Planning for Competition

Within the able-bodied Canadian sport system, under-training and over-competition are common and the ratios for training to competition (*Canadian Sport for Life*, page 31) should be applied. There is no evidence to suggest different ratios for AWADs.

Effective competition for AWADs in all classifications needs to be matched to the athletes' stage of development. This can be a problem when there are few athletes in a particular sport or classification/division within that sport. Creative solutions to this problem need to be developed, particularly for athletes with greater levels of disability.

Currently, local and international levels of competition (suitable for the Learning to Train and Training to Win stages) are more readily available than competition suitable for athletes at the Training to Train and Training to Compete stages[2]. This gap in the competition calendar must be eliminated if optimum development is to occur.

9. System Alignment and Integration

Since *Canadian Sport for Life* focuses on athlete development through Canada's sport system, *No Accidental Champions* focuses on aligning the many components of that system for AWADs. This includes development of competition, coaching, funding, facilities and equipment, training partners, sport science, ancillary services, daily living support, and talent identification and development. Without sport system alignment and integration, optimum benefits for AWADs will not be achieved.

10. Continuous Improvement

Sport for AWADs is relatively young and, like many newer sports, is developing at an incredible rate. New research, new equipment, and new techniques appear rapidly worldwide, and to put Canadian athletes "out front", sport organizations must be on the alert to take advantage of all new information. Evaluating that information, selecting what information will be used, and then integrating it into programs and services must be an active, ongoing process, tied to the concept of continuous improvement, which permeates LTAD. This concept ensures that LTAD for AWADs

- responds and reacts in a timely manner to new scientific and sport specific data, observations, and research.
- is a continuously evolving vehicle for positive change in the sporting, recreation, and physical education lives of individuals with a disability.
- promotes ongoing education and sensitization of federal, provincial/territorial, and municipal governments, the mass media, and the Canadian sport system to the needs and expectations of AWADs.

[2] Report of the Minister of State's (Sport) Work Group on Sport for Persons with a Disability (July 2004)

What's in Addition?

While there are many similarities between AWADs and able-bodied athletes, there are some differences that change the LTAD process.

- Athletes may have been born with a disability (congenital disability) or may have acquired a disability later in life.
- Children with a congenital disability may not have the same opportunity to learn FUNdamental movement skills because they do not always have the same opportunities for vigorous, physical play during their early years (Active Start). This is sometimes due to long periods of hospitalization and the lack of suitable physical education programs, but may also be due to parents or caregivers being overly protective, a situation that can also occur with an acquired disability.
- AWADs may operate in a sport environment in which there are participants not found in able-bodied sport. For example, runners who are blind need sighted guides and most sports require officials who determine the classification or division of competition into which the athlete best fits to ensure fairness of competition. Failure of the sport system to develop these supporting roles will have a long-term negative impact on athlete development and the competition experience.
- Many AWADs require equipment or facilities adapted to take full advantage of their athletic ability and to minimize the sport-performance impact of their disability.
- Because there may be only a few other AWADs with the same type and/or level of disability, access to appropriate competitive experiences may be difficult.
- Some AWADs require personal care support, interpreters, and other personnel not found in able-bodied sport.

"I have gone through all the same stages of development as Canada's other elite athletes. From training hard as a teenager, through learning to compete on the international stage, to standing on the Paralympic podium, my development has taken time and perseverance."

Chantal Petitclerc
Paralympic, Olympic,
and World Champion

Two More Stages

Figure 1

Development of AWADs requires two new stages in addition to the 7 stages in the able-bodied LTAD model (*Canadian Sport for Life*, pages 36-44). These stages are called Awareness and First Contact/Recruitment and are particularly important for individuals with an acquired disability who, prior to injury or illness, may have had no contact with, and no knowledge of, sport for AWADs. These additional stages are shown in Figure 1.

The period following acquisition of a disability is one of transition and great change for most individuals. Some activities in which they were previously engaged may no longer be open to them in the same form, and they may not be aware of the many sporting and recreation activities that are available. The purpose of the Awareness and First Contact/Recruitment stages is, therefore, to inform individuals of the range of activities in which they can participate and to provide ways for them to experience those activities. A positive first experience can go a long way to engaging persons with a disability in both competitive and recreational sporting activities.

Athletes who retire from disability competition need to be encouraged to remain involved in the sport as coaches, program volunteers, fundraisers, mentors, or officials.

Awareness Stage

Sport opportunities for people with a disability are not always well known and someone who acquires a disability may have no knowledge of what sports are available. Sports need to develop awareness plans to make their offerings known to prospective AWADs.

First Contact/Recruitment Stage

Sports only have one opportunity to create a positive environment for prospective AWADs. It may not be easy for them to make the first approach to a sport, and research shows that if they don't have a positive first experience, they may be lost to the sport and to a healthy lifestyle.

Since people become disabled at any age, no ages have been assigned to these additional stages. The lifelong importance of an Active Start for kids with a congenital disability cannot be over-emphasized.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Changes to the System

LTAD is NOT just about developing the athlete — it is about developing the system in which the athlete learns and performs the sport so that optimal long-term development is supported. For AWADs, this means making sure that each sport plans for and delivers what the athlete needs at each stage of development. The Report of the Minister of State's (Sport) Work Group on Sport for Persons with a Disability identified 10 pillars of support that are needed for optimum athlete development — coaching, appropriate competition, funding, equipment, facilities, competition, training partners, sport science, and officials' and athletes' support.

Coaching

NSOs need to develop coaching materials within the National Coaching Certification Program in appropriate streams and all contexts for coaches who work with AWADs.

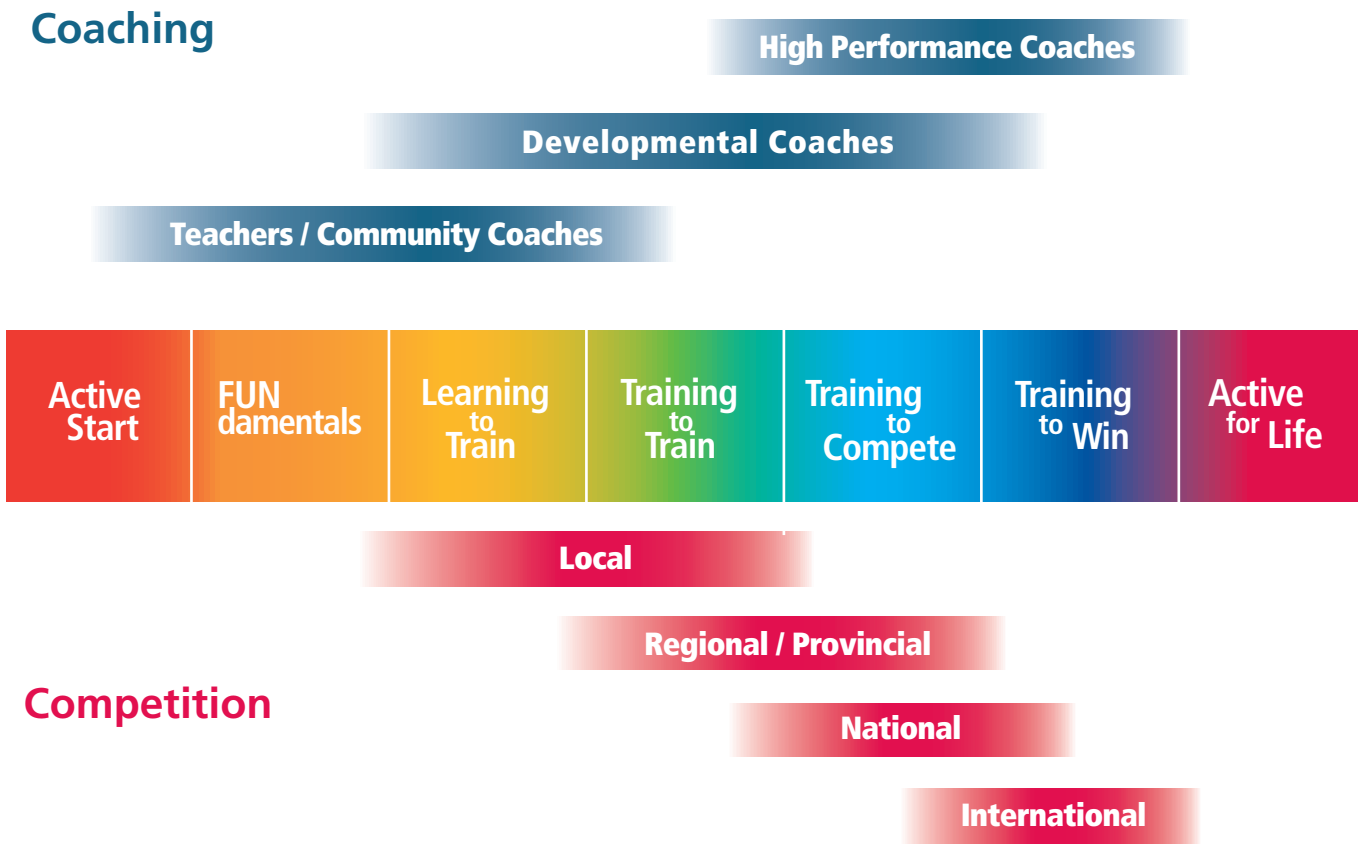
Participants with a disability need lifelong access to knowledgeable coaches and teachers when they engage in activity for health and enjoyment, particularly if they want to learn a new sport.

High performance coaches training AWADs to win at the highest levels need advanced knowledge of adaptations for skill and physiological development and strong knowledge of disability sport rules and classification/divisioning. Advanced sport specific technical knowledge and skills are required along with knowledge of disability characteristics related to sport and the interface with equipment if specialized equipment is required.

Coaches working with AWADs in the Learning to Train to Train to Compete stages need to be specialists in working with developing athletes and need strong knowledge of adaptations of activities for skill and physiological development and knowledge of disability sport rules and classifications/divisions. Talent identification skills and sport specific technical knowledge are critical as is knowledge of disability characteristics related to sport participation. Knowledge of fitting the AWAD to sport-specific equipment is important.

Coaches and teachers working with participants in the Active Start to Learning to Train stages should be versed in sensitization tips and techniques (see *Coaching Athletes with a Disability*, published by the Coaching Association of Canada, www.coach.ca) on introducing participants to sports for individuals with a disability. They must have positive attitudes towards individuals with a disability and have strong instructional and interaction skills. They must be able to create a positive learning environment, be aware of different learning styles, and be able to adapt equipment, skills, and rules to get individuals with a disability involved and keep them involved in sport.

Figure 2



Appropriate Competition

AWADs need access to competitions that are structured to prevent the cancellation of events or classes/divisions within events and at which there are high quality ancillary personnel such as officials, classifiers/divisioners, tappers, guides, and interpreters to make sure that competition is ethical, fair, appropriate, and well organized.

Local Competition

Strong local, regional, provincial, national, and international organizations capable of organizing competitions are necessary. The competition schedule should be based on the long-term needs of developing athletes rather than on traditional events and the needs of organizers. It is important to ensure that there are enough competitors within a classification/division to hold events. If this is not possible, sport organizations need to find creative ways to ensure that AWADs get ethical competition that is suitable for their age, skill, and fitness levels.

Enter fun, local competitions to introduce athletes to a variety of sports with little or no focus on results.

Regional/Provincial Competition

Ensure an appropriate ratio of training to competition and the use of competitions to support and reinforce training goals. Provide AWADs with the opportunity to try competition in various sports to enable them to find the sport (or sports) to which they are best suited.

National Competition

Ensure an appropriate ratio of training to competition and the selection of competitions that fit well with long-term training goals. Focus on performance rather than results. Use competitions as learning experiences.

International Competition

Ensure exposure to events that are progressively more competitive. Each competition should be a building block to the next.

Funding, Equipment, and Facilities

LTAD requires long-term, stable funding, and that funding needs to be distributed across all stages of the model. At different stages, the best "bang for the buck" comes from focusing on the most critical needs of athletes at that stage. Those needs are described below. Likewise, the equipment and facility needs of athletes vary across the stages, with access to facilities and equipment being most important at the Active Start and FUNdamentals stages. Access to cutting-edge equipment designed to give Canadian athletes an edge in international competition is the prime requirement when Training to Win.

Why Funding?

- for local organizations, at the First Contact and FUNdamentals stages, to deliver the range of fun activities that will encourage young Canadians with a disability to try out different sports, develop physical literacy, and build physical activity into their daily lives.
- for equipment, training, and competition as well as affordable coaching and access to facilities. During the Training to Train and Training to Compete stages, many athletes withdraw from competition due to lack of funds.
- for podium success at the Training to Win stage, there is a need for adequate carding of top and development athletes to permit them to concentrate on training and competition, and to obtain the coaching, competition, and equipment they need to take on the world.
- for the Active for Life transition from high-level competitive sport to enable ex-athletes to engage in healthy, life-long activity and become involved in other aspects of their sport.

Why Equipment and Facilities?

- for all Canadian sport and recreation facilities to be accessible and affordable to individuals with a disability to promote being Active for Life.
- for Canadian sport scientists working with athletes Training to Win to develop partnerships to design innovative world-class equipment that gives AWADs the edge in international competition.
- for facilities to be available for training at times, and at costs, that encourage athletes to train at all stages.
- for access to adequate, accessible training facilities, and for some sports, fitting the athlete to equipment for optimum performance. This is critical at the Training to Train and Training to Compete stages.
- for being able to try different sports using suitable sport-specific equipment at the First Contact to FUNdamentals Stages, making the experience far more enjoyable and encouraging participation. Getting equipment that is sized for children and teens can be a challenge and "equipment libraries" and equipment swaps can help greatly.
- for First Contact, children need equipment designed for their age, size, strength, and skill, which is critical to making early experiences positive and pays off in life-long love of physical activity and sport, for performance and health.

Training and Competition Partners

To develop optimally, AWADs need training and competition partners. While many able-bodied athletes like to train with a partner who will spur them on, for some AWADs, having a partner is a necessary and integral part of the sport. Cyclists who are blind cannot train or race without a sighted pilot, while a boccia athlete with severe cerebral palsy cannot train without a partner to retrieve balls. Athletes with intellectual disability may also require training partners.

To continue to improve sport performance, AWADs' training and competition partners need to be equally committed to their sport, and they need to be recognized as athletes in their own right. As AWADs improve, there may be a need to replace existing, and sometimes long-term, partners with partners whose athletic performance can keep pace with that of the AWAD. AWADs cannot improve if they seriously out-perform the partner who is working with them.

Sports need to make the recruitment and training of able-bodied competition and training partners an integral part of their sport development strategy, while sport scientists need to pay more attention to optimizing the very close relationship that must occur between AWADs and their guides/pilots/tappers.

Above all, sports need to ensure that the performance of AWADs is never compromised by performance limitations of guides, pilots, and other able-bodied training and competition partners and that AWADs do not feel obligated to remain with an able-bodied training and competition partner when they feel the partner is holding them back.

More research is needed to understand optimum athlete development.

Sport Science

The contribution that sport science can make varies with the stage of athlete development.

At the Training to Win stage, AWADs need state-of-the-art physiological, biomechanical, and psychological testing and training prescriptions. Coaches need to understand existing sport science, and sport scientists need to undertake original research on sport performance techniques, training methods, and equipment designed to give AWADs a competitive advantage at the international level.

At the Learning to Train, Training to Train, and Training to Compete stages, sport science can best contribute through optimization of performance techniques and a better understanding of the individualization of the interface between the athlete and their adaptive and sporting equipment. In addition, refinement of training loads based on periodic evaluations of physiological status and development of sound sport psychology programs, both based on the developmental age of the athletes, is important.

Sport scientists can make major contributions to LTAD at the FUNdamentals and Learning to Train stages through research in the areas of optimum acquisition of skills, establishment of effective learning environments, and the identification of activities and teaching methods that enhance the learning of FUNdamental movement skills. Particular emphasis needs to be placed on finding out more about the early skill learning of children or adults with a disability about which little is currently known.

Officials' Support

At each stage of LTAD, appropriate support for athletes is necessary. This support includes the opportunity to work with a wide range of officials whose skill and knowledge is appropriate for the level of development of the AWAD and the level of competition in which they take part. Those officials include sport-specific officials such as referees, umpires, and technical officers, generic sport officials such as doping control officials, and officials unique to sport for AWADs such as interpreters, classifiers, and divisioners.

Canadian sport needs systematic plans to develop high-level officials within sports for AWADs. This will ensure that when Canadians compete at the highest levels, they will be familiar with the rules, and interpretation of rules, they will face. This is particularly true of classifiers/divisioners, since being re-classified or placed in a different division at an international competition is one of the most damaging experiences that can happen to an AWAD.

Well-meaning but unqualified officials working with younger athletes can permit those athletes to develop incorrect skills that once learned are difficult to change. Officials need to balance the learning needs of young athletes with the flexibility to have fun in a relaxed competitive environment.

Sports need to recruit officials appropriate for the level of play at each stage of development, and those officials should not make calls more leniently just because the athletes have a disability.

Athletes' Support

Many high performance sports for athletes with a physical disability rely heavily on equipment such as wheelchairs, adapted skis, and prosthetic limbs, all of which need skilled technicians working on them if the athlete is to perform at the highest levels. Sports need to have in place technician recruiting and succession plans to ensure that technicians provide Canadian AWADs with a competitive edge in international competition.

In addition, AWADs at all levels require access to professionals able to provide services in the area of injury prevention, sport nutrition, sport medicine, and rehabilitation.

Counselling services are also important to optimum athlete development, particularly in the areas of educational, personal, and career decisions.

For young people with a disability, early identification of functional abilities and adaptive techniques can lead to more enjoyable sport participation and perhaps guide AWADs into a range of sports for which they are best suited.

Daily living support

While some AWADs are able to manage all of the demands of daily living alone, some, particularly those with a severe disability, may need assistance. The extent and type of assistance will vary by individual and with the stage of development.

At the Training to Win and Training to Compete stages, the purpose of daily living support is to allow elite AWADs to focus on their sport performance rather than on the challenges associated with travel to and from training and competition. This is particularly important at international competitions. Sports need to consider ways to reduce the difficulties of having a single individual provide daily living support while also acting as the training and competition support partner.

At the Learning to Train to Training to Compete stages, the most critical daily living support for athlete development is assistance in getting to and from training sessions and competition on a regular basis. This process is sometimes further hampered by cost structures at sport venues that require admission to be paid both by the athlete (which is reasonable) and by the athlete's assistant. Sports need to work with training venues to develop policies on accommodating both daily living and training assistants.

At the Active Start and FUNdamentals stages, the most critical daily living support comes from parents and caregivers encouraging children and those recently injured to get out and try a wide variety of recreational and sporting activities and then helping them to get to and from the venues and deal with any barriers they encounter.

At the youngest ages, parents and caregivers have a responsibility not to be over-protective of children with a disability. Children must be given the opportunity to learn FUNdamental movement skills through vigorous play, even if that means a few bumps and bruises along the way.

Talent Development

The athlete pool for AWADs is relatively small, and Canada cannot afford to waste any of this potential. However, the purpose of talent identification is not to systematically test all individuals with a disability and direct them to the sports for which they appear best suited by virtue of body size and shape, skill potential, or physiological response. Rather, it is to ensure that each individual has the opportunity to learn about, and try, a wide variety of sports so that they find the ones they wish to pursue to the highest level possible.

Optimum talent development can only occur when developing AWADs master FUNdamental movement skills and have the opportunity to use them in a wide variety of recreational and sport settings. As in well organized able-bodied sport, the objective should be to re-direct athletes who are not progressing in one sport into another for which they might be better suited. Retaining all potential athletes in the talent pool, and finding the right fit between each athlete and their sports of choice, will benefit both the sport and the athlete.

The importance of developing physical literacy as the foundation upon which all future athletic success is built cannot be over emphasized. While important for all children, this is critical for children with a disability, both for the eventual contribution it makes to sport performance, but even more so for the contribution it makes to the individual's future ability to live as independently as possible.

Next steps

Systematic implementation of LTAD is critical if Canada is to retain its international leadership as a country that is successful in sport for AWADs. NSOs, both those that integrate athletes and those that govern sports only contested by AWADs, need to develop detailed plans to implement effective LTAD programs as do MSOs that serve a specific disability.

LTAD for high performance success and for the long-term health of Canadians with a disability will not happen by chance, but only through the concerted and coordinated efforts of all partners in the Canadian sport system. **There are no accidental champions.**

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References and Organizations

The following references provide basic information concerning AWADs and the LTAD process.

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Canadian Sport Centres also thank the following sport organizations and encourages you to learn more about them:

Canadian Paralympic Committee: www.paralympic.ca

Special Olympics Canada: www.specialolympics.ca

Canadian Blind Sports Association: www.canadianblindsports.org

Canadian Cerebral Palsy Sports Association: www.ccpsa.ca

Canadian Deaf Sports Association: www.assc-cdsa.com

Canadian Wheelchair Sports Association: www.cwsa.ca

Sport Canada: www.pch.gc.ca/sportcanada

International Paralympic Committee: www.paralympic.org

www.LTAD.ca

No Accidental Champions