



Long Term Athlete Development Plan



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Foreword

Welcome to Racquetball Canada's new Long Term Athlete Development booklet!

Racquetball is a relatively new sport and due to its short history has a limited base of accumulated scientific knowledge and theory to guide the training and development of the sport and its athletes. This document brings together information and research that many countries have been using for years in a multitude of sports and disciplines, designing a system to develop good athletes, good racquetball players and well rounded human beings.

Interviews were done with 70 of the top racquetball players in the world to look at some of the theories and practices that have led to their success and to identify the strengths and weaknesses of the present system of athlete identification, development and support (Top 70 Study, Powell & Peddle, 2006). In spite of the weaknesses identified, it was noted that Canada has had some good success at the local, national, and international level, which can be attributed to the enthusiastic involvement of the national and provincial administrative bodies, coaches, players, fans and parents. The LTAD model, which draws on the experience of many different sports all over the world, will build on this success and provide Racquetball Canada with a blueprint for better and broader athlete development, ongoing improvement and greater achievement on the medal podiums nationally and internationally.

Racquetball Canada's LTAD booklet

- Outlines some of the factors to be aware of when building a great athlete, a superior Racquetball player, and a well-rounded human being.
- Provides a blueprint to help identify issues and potential gaps in the current structure.
- Recognizes that there are specific "windows of trainability" which are important in the development of athletes, and which are central to the long-term improvement of Racquetball performance.
- Emphasizes that training the right components at the right stage of development is crucial for the success of all athletes from beginning community athletes to National Team Program players.
- Recognizes that many stakeholders are central to the long-term development and success of players.
- Provides a solid foundation for all players at all ages and levels, allowing for long-term participation, enjoyment and achievement.
- Recognizes that this a broad model for all players and that only a few players will ever achieve the top echelon of their sport.

Racquetball players will:

- Learn where they fit into the model and how they can use it to achieve their potential and goals.

Racquetball coaches will:

- Have a guide in the design of annual plans and programs.

Racquetball Canada will:

- Have an outline of what steps need to be taken to achieve their goals.
- Have the necessary tools and information to make informed decisions.

Weaving the LTAD into Racquetball Canada’s everyday systems and programs will be similar to how a coach teaches a new skill to an athlete – a step by step approach that is broken down into manageable chunks. The first phase of LTAD was to research, write and publish this general Racquetball document. The goal of this document is get the word out and get people interested and wanting more information. This current LTAD document is phase one of the LTAD process.

Phase two of the LTAD process is the “implementation” phase, where we put together the “specifics”. After people understand the theories and basic structure presented in the phase one LTAD document, they will be ready to implement those theories into practice. Implementation will be offered via a new coaching website and through cross-Canada clinics and courses that will teach the new principles and strategies. These will be Racquetball Canada’s “competition advantage” in the future, which is why only general information is included in the phase one LTAD booklet – in phase two, we will take advantage of being the only country in the WORLD to have an LTAD model completed for the sport of Racquetball!

This is an opportunity for Racquetball in Canada. The LTAD blueprint will provide the tools and momentum for the achievement of success at all levels!

Lori-Jane Powell (Technical Director Racquetball Canada) May 2009

Acknowledgements

Racquetball Canada would like to acknowledge the help and direction given by Dr. Colin Higgs to Racquetball Canada’s Long-Term Athlete Development Model. His leadership and enthusiasm combined with his positive and fun nature were an inspiration in helping us put this resource paper together. This book also could have not been completed without the help of some key volunteers. One volunteer stands out and I would like to give her special mention: Cheryl McKeeman. She is the one volunteer who stayed on board right from the very first committee through until the last word written. She helped keep this project on track through some difficult times and has proved invaluable throughout – thanks so much Cheryl! I would also really like to thank the final working committee: Kris Odegard, Dr. Colin Higgs, and Cheryl McKeeman who provided one of the best working groups I have ever been part of. They were the “finishers” on this project and for that I feel a lot of gratitude.

In addition, many thanks to David Behm, Shawn Davison and Carolyn Peddle for their help with the Exercise Physiology portion of this plan, which will be so critical in the implementation phase of Racquetball’s LTAD model. Also, special thanks to the following members of Racquetball sport community who contributed on this project and worked on many of the beginning planning committees: Ron Brown, Elisa Lane, Evan Pritchard, Loren Prentice, Carolyn Peddle, Cheryl McKeeman, Geri Powell, Kris Odegard and all provincial Board of Director Members.

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Introduction

*“It takes 10 years of extensive practice to excel in anything.”
(Herbert Simon, psychologist and Nobel Laureate)*

Research on skill acquisition has concluded that it takes eight to 12 years of training for talented athletes to achieve sporting excellence. This is also called the “10 year – 10,000 hour” rule, which averages three hours per day. This time may increase from one hour a day for younger athletes and up to five to six hours a day for high performance athletes, and includes all physical activity and sport.

Racquetball Canada’s Long-Term Athlete Development (LTAD) model explains how best to use the 10,000 hours depending on the athlete’s age and stage. It provides guidance on what and when to train. It recommends the ratio of time spent competing vs. training. The aim of Racquetball Canada’s LTAD model is to outline an appropriate long-term approach to training and preparation to coaches, parents, clubs, and administrators in Canada. The plan gives detailed training and competition guidance that will be of assistance to Racquetball stakeholders (clubs, schools) in planning their programs.

Activities for athletes with a disability are a growing part of Canadian sport. Racquetball Canada has been a leader in the adaptive field and already offers many programs to meet the needs of these athletes. The LTAD model lends itself well to meeting the needs of athletes with disabilities. The LTAD is a great starting point for all athletes and for this reason the Racquetball Canada LTAD model includes a section for athletes with a disability.

The LTAD model will assist Racquetball Canada to:

- Establish a clear, streamlined, efficient player development pathway for Racquetball players
- Identify gaps in the multiple Racquetball development pathways that are currently being used throughout the country and develop one cohesive system
- Provide recommendations to parents, coaches and athletes on how to properly train to become the best athletes and Racquetball players they can be
- Foster positive change and information sharing in the areas of planning, training, competition and recovery programs for the development of Canadian Racquetball players
- Provide a planning tool, based on scientific research, for coaches and administrators
- Provide awareness, education and action planning for parents, coaches and clubs
- Improve communication between athlete, parent, coach, club, administrative bodies and Racquetball Canada.
- Help athletes win in both their athletic and personal lives
- Facilitate lifelong enjoyment in Racquetball

The LTAD model will be used to review existing Racquetball programs led by Racquetball Canada and provide the basis for future initiatives. All Racquetball stakeholders can use LTAD in a similar way. This will enable the Racquetball community to work collaboratively to achieve the goals and targets of the sport.

This document is divided into four sections:

- Snapshot of Racquetball in Canada today
- 10 Key Factors influencing LTAD
- Racquetball’s 8 Stages of LTAD
- Racquetball Canada’s Operational Game Plan

Snapshot of Racquetball in Canada Today

This section of the plan provides the broad context that currently exists within Racquetball in Canada. It is not intended to cover all the strengths and weaknesses of our system, but merely to provide an overview. By identifying these factors, Racquetball Canada can be aware of the ones that work towards its goals (facilitating factors) and those that might be obstacles (hindering factors).

Athletes

Strengths	Weaknesses
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Talented & enthusiastic National team athletes - High percentage of male players - Lifelong sport 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Small numbers of National Team players - Low percentage of female players at all levels - No logical athlete development pathway - Developmental players are often over-competing and under-training - High drop-out rate after high school - No integrated talent identification system based on LTAD principles - Injured National Team players not easily replaced - No collegiate program - Underuse of athlete testing resources at universities

Coaching

Strengths	Weaknesses
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Dedicated coaches work hard to help athletes reach their potential - Pockets of good coaches throughout the country - Coaching database up-to-date 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Limited resources available to coaches - No mentoring program for developing coaches - Coaches working in isolation - Training methods and competition programs designed for adult athletes are superimposed on junior athletes - Training methods and competition programs designed for male athletes are superimposed on female athletes. - Few female coaches - Coaches have not incorporated LTAD principles - Preparation is geared to the short-term outcome (winning) rather than to the process - Too much focus on winning and immediate success instead of the process of developing the overall child

Competitions

Strengths	Weaknesses
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Many high-level professional and amateur competitions hosted every year, providing excellent training and competitive opportunities - Many competitive opportunities for recreational athletes 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Lack of facilities causes problems hosting tournaments - Focus on winning at tournaments, rather than on athlete development - Lack of organization inter-provincially - Lack of meaningful and competitive divisions when divisions are merged

Parents

Strengths	Weaknesses
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Many parents are passionate about the sport, and willing to learn about LTAD - Opportunity to start to teach fundamental movement skills and sports skills properly 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Parents not educated about LTAD - Over-involvement in a tournament or competition atmosphere when proper coaching and training methods have not been taught. - Too much focus on winning and immediate success instead of the process of developing the overall child - Over-involvement leads to burnout

Administration/Leadership

Strengths	Weaknesses
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Dedicated volunteers committed to bettering the sport - Strong Provincial associations - Strong athlete representation on Boards and Committees - Objective Team Selection method - Good use of technology (FTP site, R2 system, web-site) 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Tradition-based competition system interferes with athlete development. "This is how it has always been done" - Selection criteria and talent identification built around performance results. - No integration between physical education in schools, community programs, and elite competitive programs. - Too few outside stakeholders

Facilities/Clubs

Strengths	Weaknesses
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - There are still a few exceptional facilities throughout the country that are able to run multi-level programs and host big national and international events - Major stakeholders, with strong interest in promoting the sport - Provide a physical centre for programming, training, development - Portable courts 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Lack of facilities - No bridge between school programs and clubs - Lack of programming - Schools and community centers not aware of opportunities to access Racquetball facilities and programs - Facility closures because of financial reasons

Consequences of Current System

Strengths	Weaknesses
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Well-rounded individuals - Many life-long players - Many dedicated volunteers - Opportunity to develop a continually improving action plan - Opportunity to develop a Racquetball Canada strategic plan, built around LTAD core principles - Opportunity to develop a facilitative strategy to accommodate all levels of players - Opportunity to develop links between NSO and Club owners for training and competition 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - No systematic plan to develop athletes for the podium - Children training and drilling too young, rather than working on fundamental skills - Adult athletes need remedial coaching because of missed windows of opportunity - Bad habits developed from over-competing and a focus on winning - Undeveloped and unrefined skills due to under-training and over-competing - Fluctuating performance due to lack of talent identification and developmental pathway - Athletes leave the sport and want nothing to do with it later - No systematic development of the next generation of international athletes. - Athletes fail to reach their genetic potential and optimal performance level.



Goals

The goal of Racquetball Canada is to develop a clear and efficient player development pathway, and to communicate that pathway to clubs, coaches, parents and athletes, so that racquetball athletes can reach their full potential as athletes and as members of society.

The mission of Racquetball Canada is to promote racquetball as a sport and physical activity, and to provide leadership by developing and coordinating services and programs designed to meet the needs of the Racquetball community. Racquetball Canada is committed to high performance excellence in National and International Competitions (including World Championships, Pan Am Games, Pan Am Championships). Racquetball Canada is focused on club development, provincial association interaction, and coach education - the three main vehicles for delivering LTAD.

10 Key Factors influencing LTAD



Factor #1 The Ten-Year Rule

*“There is no shortcut to success in athletic performance”
Istvan Balyi, LTAD Expert*

Research has concluded that it takes eight to 12 years of training for talented athletes to achieve sporting excellence. This is also called the “10 year – 10,000 hour” rule, which averages three hours per day. This time may increase from one hour a day for younger athletes and up to five to six hours a day for high performance athletes, and includes all physical activity and sport.

As part of racquetball-specific research, over 70 elite Racquetball players from around the world were surveyed. In this LTAD plan, we refer to this as the Top 70 Study (Powell & Peddle, 2006).

The Top 70 Study showed that five out of six (83%) of the top male players (under age 35, who at some point in their career were in the top 4) did in fact play and practise racquetball and cross-train for more than 20 hours per week, on average, from age 8 onwards. Those top men became serious about racquetball when they were less than 10 years old.

The top female players also started playing young, but report that they tended to cross-train more than play racquetball. They became serious about racquetball when less than 12 years old; however most other female elite players did not get serious about racquetball until their mid teens. Once serious, those top female players trained on average more than 22 hours per week.

Recommendation: It takes a long time to develop a champion; therefore it is important to track developing players’ progress and not rush their development.

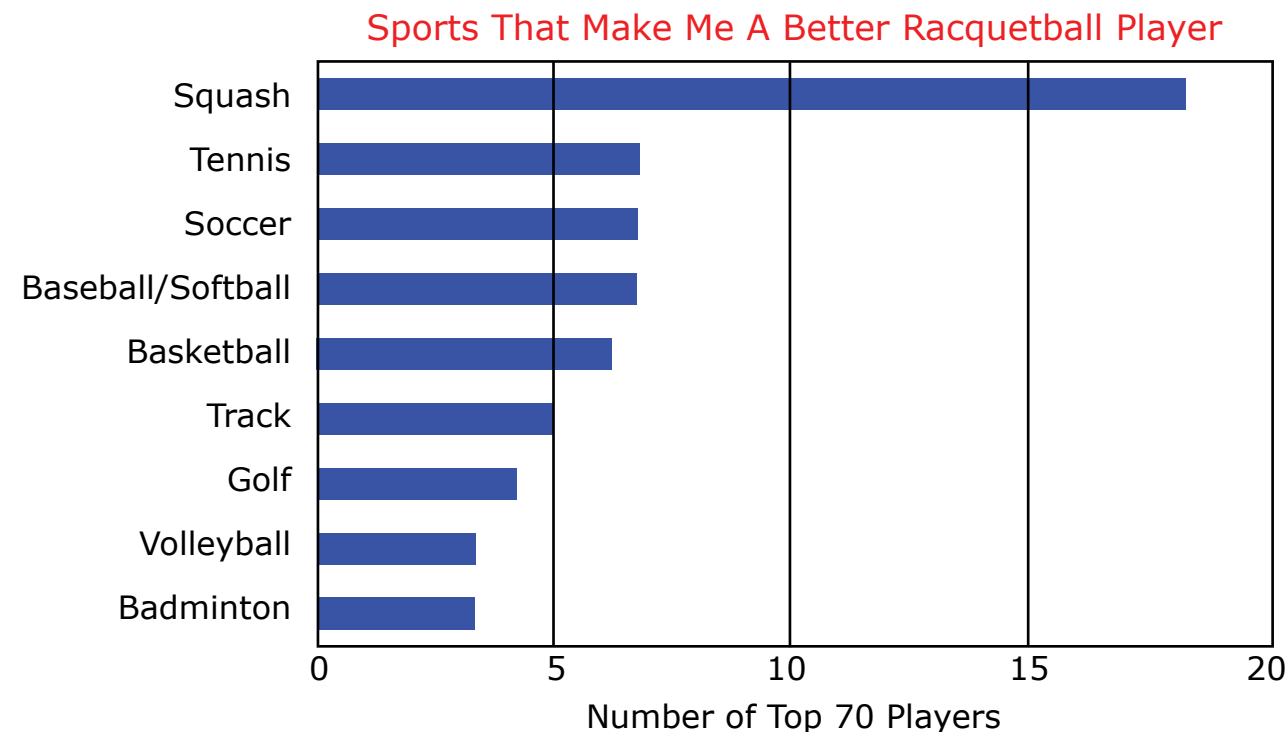
Factor #2 FUNdamentals

FUNdamental movement skills should be introduced through fun and games. FUNdamental sports skills should follow and include basic overall sports skills, such as Agility, Jumping, Balance, Coordination, Speed, Climbing, Walking, Hopping, Cycling, Kicking, Throwing, Hitting, and Diving.

Physical literacy:

- Is the mastery of fundamental movement skills and fundamental sport skills
- Should be developed before the onset of the adolescent growth spurt
- Is essential to the development of any athlete or Racquetball player

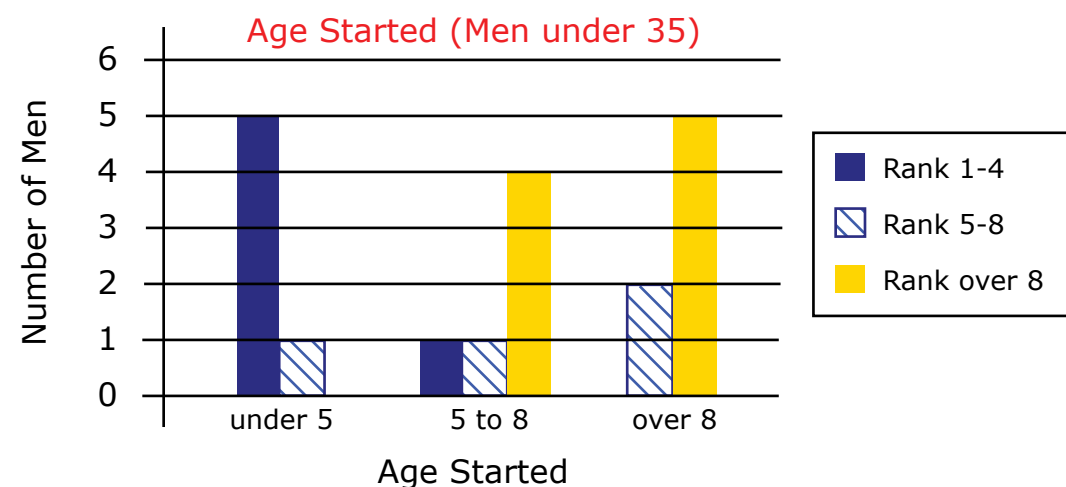
In the Top 70 Study, the top players recommended several sports that they believed had made them a better racquetball player. The chart below summarizes their responses.



Recommendation: To help develop FUNdamental movement skills, Racquetball Canada recommends young Racquetball players also take part in a wide variety of other sports. It is important to take part in ambidextrous and asymmetrical sports for full development.

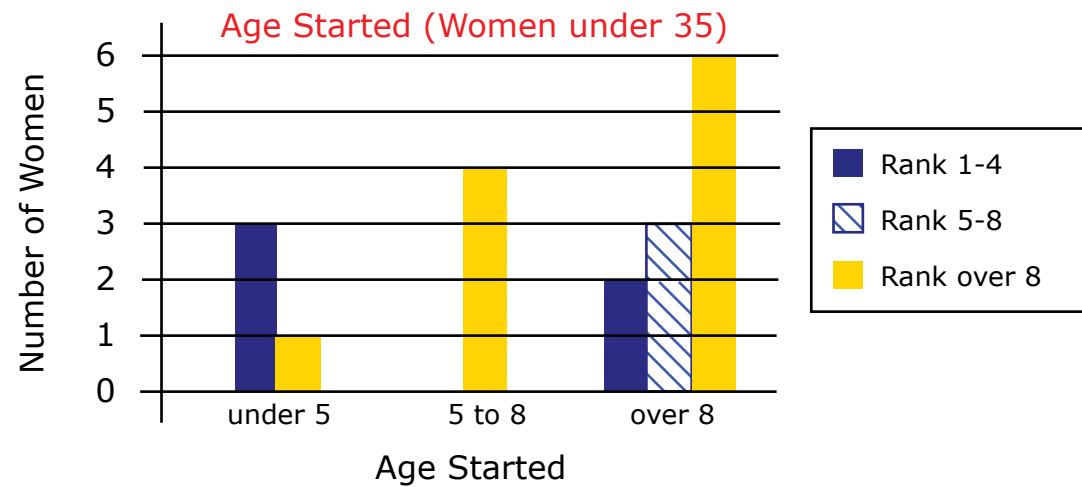
Factor #3 Early and Late Specialization

Sports can be classified as either early or late specialization. Early specialization sports include artistic and acrobatic sports such as gymnastics, diving and figure skating. These differ from late specialization sports in that very complex skills are learned before maturation, because they cannot be fully mastered if taught after maturation.



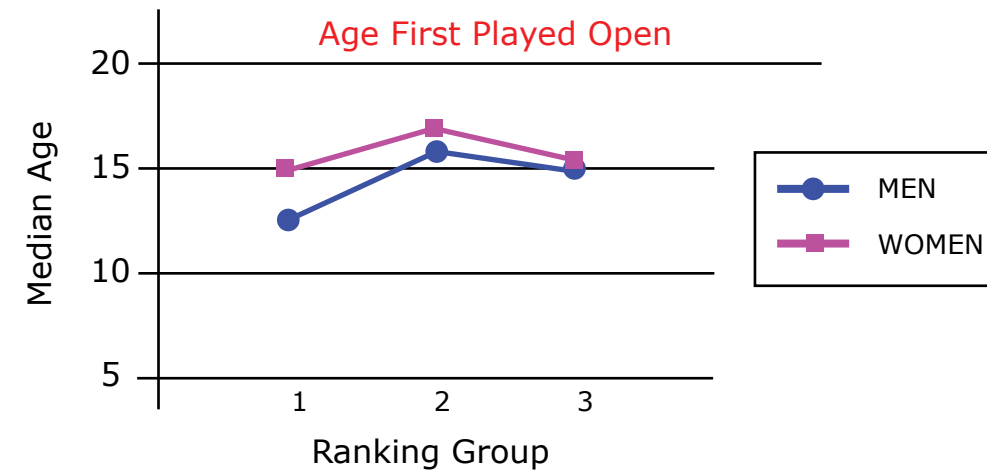
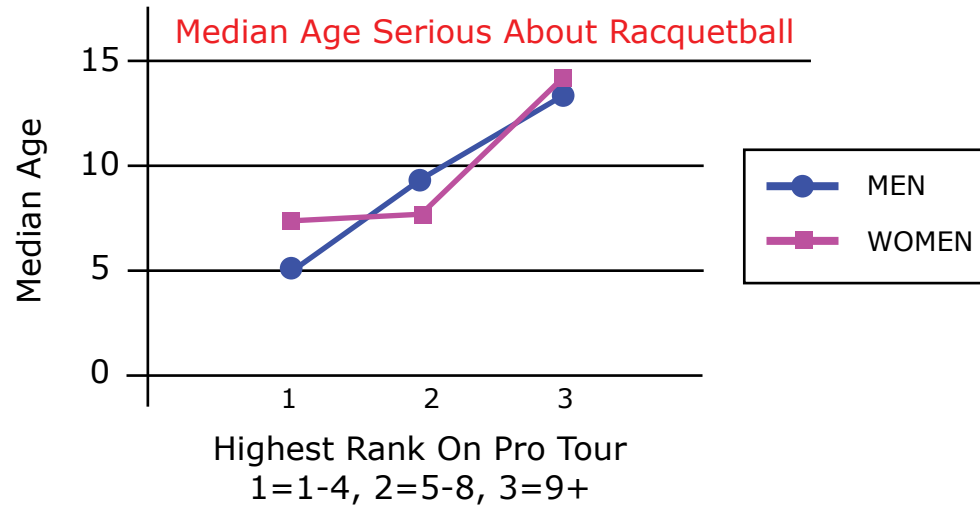
Based upon the Top 70 Study, we found that much debate exists over where Racquetball fits into the early or late specialization paradigm that is suggested by the generic LTAD. The data collected shows a wide variety of start ages and patterns.

This graph shows that men who have been in the top 4 on the professional tour tended to start playing when they were under 5 years old; no “top 4” players started after age 7. Players who have not yet achieved a ranking higher than 8, started playing a little later.



If we consider the top women in the sport today, those who have achieved the highest rankings either started very young, or started in their teens. Women who have not yet cracked the “top 8” tended to have started playing racquetball at age 6 or older, with the majority not starting until they were 10 or older.

The preceding graph shows that the top-ranked men say they were serious about racquetball at a median age of 5 years old; men whose best ranking has been between 5 and 8 got serious at a median age of 10; and those who have not cracked the top 8 did not get serious until age 13. For the women ranked 8 or better, the median age that they say they became serious about the sport is age 6, as opposed to women ranked 9 or higher, who got serious at a median age of 14. (Note – the median age is the middle age – half the players are the median or older, and half are the median or younger.)



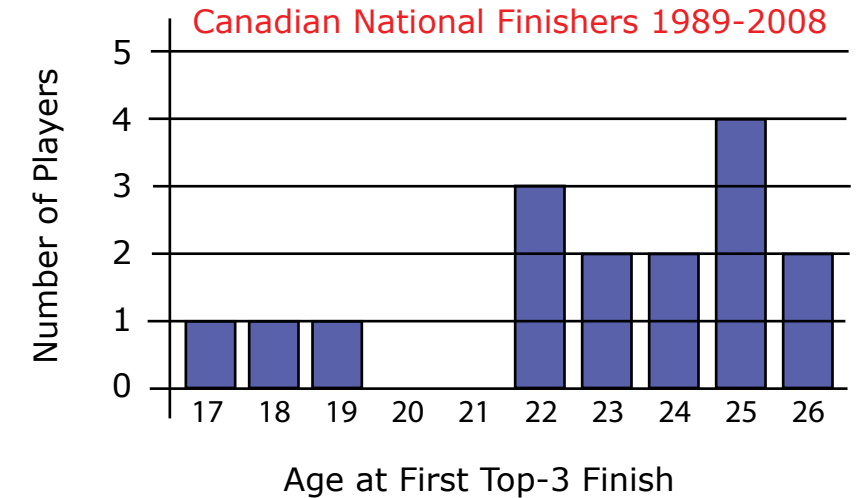
The Top 70 Study shows that, regardless of their ability, the best players in the world – namely, the players on the Pro Tour – first started to play in Open divisions at a median age of about 15 years old. Clearly they would have become very serious about Racquetball at least two or three years before this.

Therefore, Racquetball appears to be an “early start, late specialization” sport, with players starting FUNDamentals and Learning to Train by the ages of 5 to 8 and only specializing or “focusing” on Racquetball as their “speciality” sport in their early- or mid-teens.

A review of the top finishers at the Canadian National Championships from 1989 to 2008 shows that the median age at which players make their first Top 3 finish in singles is 23.5. The graph below summarizes these ages.

It is important to note that two of the three players who were under 20 when they first earned a medal are today still among the top players in the world.

Why is there such a wide range of ages? Racquetball is so new that there is little history to draw upon in terms of training methods, trends, etc. With its brief history, many top players were already adults when the Pro Tour and International Events started. As the sport grows, and especially as more countries enter the playing field, the age of players on the Pro Tour, and players at International Events, is dropping.



Specialization before the age of 13 is not recommended for late specialization sports as this has been shown to contribute to one dimensional preparation, injuries, physical and mental burnout and early retirement (Harsanyi, 1985).

Recommendation: To offset the asymmetrical nature of Racquetball's effect on bone and muscle growth, Racquetball Canada recommends young children learn many other sports that use both arms and legs before learning to play Racquetball at around 7 years of age.

Recommendation: A vital period for the development of coordination (skill window) in children is between the ages of eight and twelve (Balyi and Hamilton, 1995; Rushall, 1998; Viru et al., 1998). Racquetball sessions should emphasize the development of general, fundamental movement and technical skills and work towards building a general Racquetball player first and Racquetball specialist second.

Factor #4 Developmental Age

Development refers to "the interrelationship between growth and maturation in relation to the passage of time. The concept of development also includes the social, emotional, intellectual, and motor realms of the child." (Canadian Sport for Life)

There are 2 important types of ages:

1. Developmental or biological age: The degree of physical, mental, cognitive, and emotional maturity.
2. Chronological age: The number of years and days elapsed since birth.

Development (Biological) vs. Chronological Ages

Development and Chronological ages differ most during adolescence. Training and competition are currently based on chronological age, which means that although athletes can be in different stages of their growth spurts, we continue to train them the same way. For example, we often see two 14 year olds – one that looks like a 16 year old (early developer) and one that looks like a 12 year old (late developer), yet they both compete and train in the same age category. Youth who mature early have a significant biological advantage over their competitors, and have traditionally been selected over late maturers at an early age.

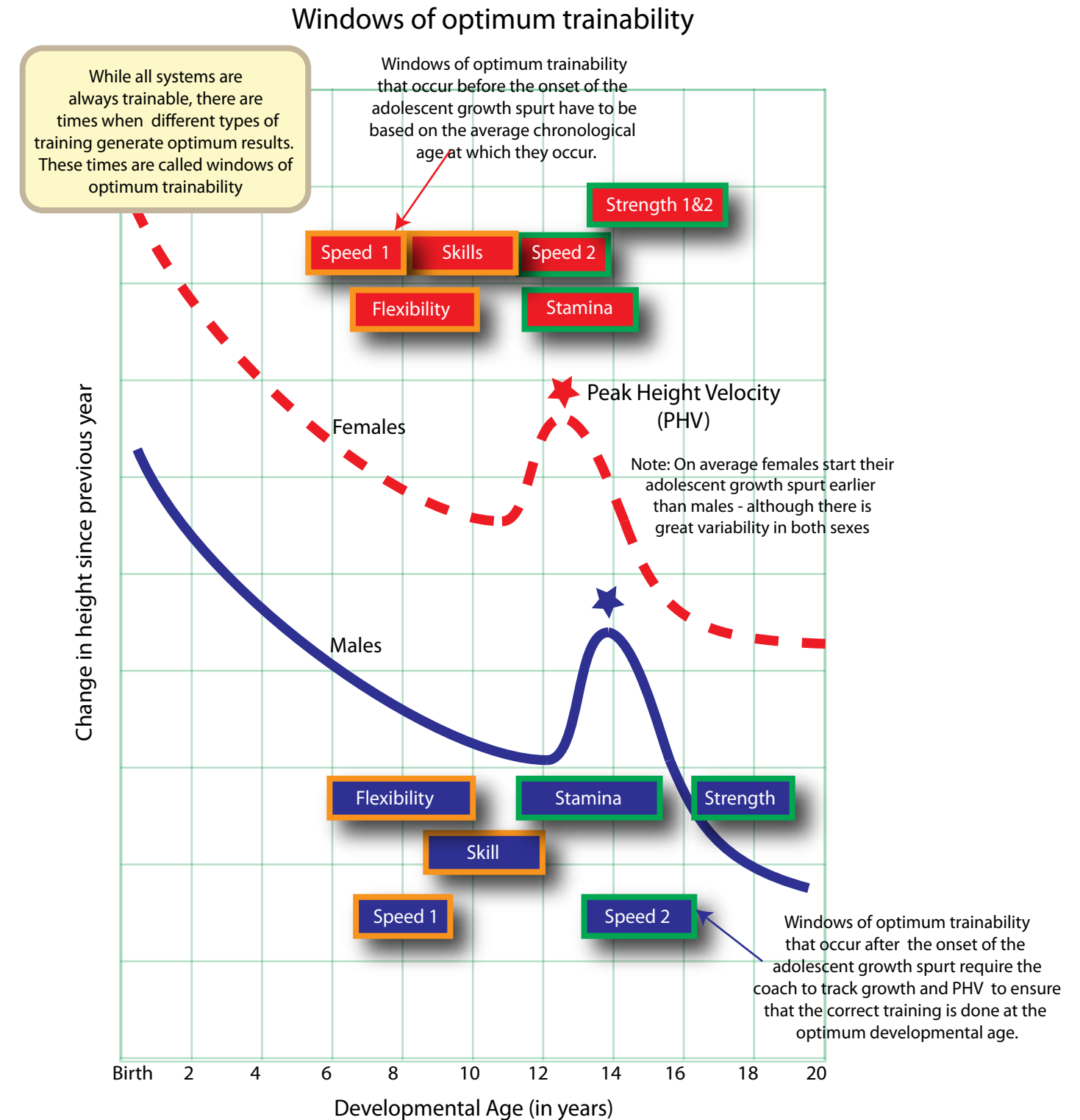
Recommendation: Racquetball programs must find ways to keep late developers in the sport until they catch up to the early developers.

Factor #5 Windows of Optimal Trainability

"Long-Term Athlete Development is about achieving optimal training, competition and recovery throughout an athlete's career, particularly in relation to the important maturation years of young people."
Balyi (2002)

Research shows that certain periods in the life of a young person are particularly sensitive to trainability. If these periods (called **windows of optimal trainability**) are ignored, the racquetball player may never reach his/her full genetic potential. It is vital that coaches, parents and club administrators be aware of these critical periods of "accelerated adaptation" so that those periods can be fully exploited.

These windows relate to the 5 S's of training and performance: **S**tamina (Endurance), **S**trength, **S**peed, **S**kills, and **S**uppleness (Flexibility) (Dick, 1985).



Optimal windows of trainability for physical development (Adapted from Balyi and Way, 2006)

Peak Height Velocity (PHV) is the maximum rate of growth in stature during growth spurt. The age of the maximum velocity of growth is called the age at PHV. Typically, the most intense period of growth for girls occurs between 11 to 14 years, while for boys it is between 12 to 16 years.

Trainability is the responsiveness of an individual to a training stimulus. There is a high degree of variation in the trainability of athletes, depending on genetic and environmental factors, and on the athlete's stages of growth and maturation.

Recommendation: Racquetball Canada will ensure that its Competition-Introduction coach education includes the systematic tracking and recording of the growth and development of athletes and the use of windows of optimum trainability.

Factor #6 Physical, Psychological, and Technical Development

Different aspects of an athlete's development may evolve at different rates, so training, competitive and recovery programs should adapt to the stage of physical, psychological and technical development.

Consider, for example, a 24 year old athlete who is trying to make the National Team. He has been unsuccessful despite his long time consistent efforts. National Team athletes are typically at stage 6 of the LTAD model. Physically and technically this athlete is in stage 6. Psychologically he is not. His training program needs to treat him in the appropriate psychological stage while continuing his physical and technical training in stage 6.

Recommendation: An athlete may be at different stages in Physical, Psychological and Technical development. Coaches need to take this into account when preparing training programs for the athlete.

Note – Specific details about how coaches will do this will be provided by Racquetball Canada during the LTAD implementation phase.

Factor #7 Periodization

Periodization is where the science of training meets the art of coaching. It's about sequencing the right activities at the right time to achieve success in an annual or long-term plan. Athletes in earlier stages will be on single-periodized annual plans, while athletes in later stages will have single, double or multiple periodization, depending on their goals and objectives.

Stage	Competition Objective	Competition Objective
Learning to Train (L2T) Stage 3	For some athletes Junior Nationals	Single if going to Junior Nationals
Training to Train (T2T) Stage 4	Junior Provincials and for some athletes, Junior Nationals and Junior Worlds	Single and for some athletes double
Training to Compete (T2C) Stage 5	Junior Nationals and Junior Worlds, National Selection Event, Nationals	Double
Learning to Win (L2W) Stage 6	Nationals and Amateur International Event	Double within multi-year plan
Training to Win (T2W) Stage 7	Nationals, Amateur International and Professional Event	Multiple within quadrennial plan

Recommendation: Racquetball Canada will ensure that its Competition-Development coach education teaches the stage-appropriate Periodization.

Factor #8 Calendar Planning for Competition

There are three aspects to Calendar Planning for Competition:

1. Scheduling of Major Events

The current schedule of competitions is based on tradition rather than on LTAD principles.



Recommendation: National and Provincial Racquetball Associations need to review existing competitive schedules to take into account periodization, physical, psychological, and technical development.

2. Ratio of Training to Competition

Younger athletes typically over compete and under train.

Recommendation: The chart below is Racquetball Canada’s recommended on-court times.

	Ratio (see note)	Weeks	Total Days on Court	Days of Court Training	Days in League/ Sim Comp	Days in Competition
Stage 3 - Learn to Train	70% 30%	30	45	30 1 hr/day	10	5
Stage 4 - Train to Train	60% 40%	30	100	60 1-2 hr/day	30	10
Stage 5 - Train to Compete	53% 47%	40	190	100 2 hrs/day	60	30
Stage 6 - Learn to Win	40% 60%	45	225	90 2-3 hrs/day	90	45
Stage 7 - Train to Win	40% 60%	48	225	90 2-3 hrs/day	60	75

note – the top value gives the percentage of time training: the lower value is the percentage of time competing

3. Events in which Athletes Compete

The athlete’s selection of events impacts their ability to achieve long-term development goals.

Recommendation: That athletes select the events in which to compete based on the value of that event in meeting their long-term development goals.

Factor #9

System Alignment and Integration

“System alignment and integration” refers to the process of ensuring that Racquetball Canada’s LTAD plan is athlete centered, coach driven and administration supported, and that all stakeholders work together for the benefit of the athlete and the sport.

Stakeholders include Racquetball Canada’s Vice President Development, Vice President High Performance, High Performance committee, some Development committees, Coach Committee, National Training Centre coaches, National Coaches, Development Centre coaches, and Tournament Committee.

Recommendation: The stakeholders will provide the best possible development pathway for all athletes.

Factor #10

Kaizen

The concept of continuous improvement.

Recommendation: All stakeholders need to take into account the latest developments in science, sport, and culture. Racquetball Canada’s LTAD model is dynamic and so new developments may change the recommendations and guidelines in this document.

Racquetball for Athletes with a Disability

Racquetball can be, and is, played by people with many different types of disability. However, regardless of the nature of their disability they play either Wheelchair Racquetball, or play the standard game. In general, those with physical disabilities play wheelchair racquetball and those with intellectual or psychological or other physical disabilities play the standard game.

To play wheelchair racquetball a player must have a minimum level of disability that makes it impossible for them to play the standard game. Beyond that, however, men and women of all degrees of disability play against each other as equals. The modifications to the game for wheelchair players are minor, with the main change being that the ball is out of play when it has bounced on the floor a third time – rather than a second time in standard play.

There are no separate competitions or competition categories for athletes with intellectual or psychological disabilities, so these athletes are most often introduced to the sport in the Learning to Train stage, and move directly from there to being Active for Life. For these participants the most important consideration is making them aware that the sport exists, and making them feel comfortable and welcome when they play.

There are competitions at the national and international level for wheelchair players, and for this reason, there are both “Active for Life” recreational wheelchair players and those pursuing excellence.

Wheelchair players with congenital disabilities pass through the same developmental stages as able-bodied athletes, and there is no evidence to suggest that their training should be significantly different. Participants who acquire a disability later in life need to pass through modified forms of each stage following their disability. They need to become active again (Active Start), learn the fundamentals of handling a wheelchair or prosthesis (FUNdamentals) and then need to be introduced to the sport at the Learning to Train stage. Wheelchair athletes – both with congenital or acquired disabilities – who pursue excellence will pass through the Training to Train, Training to Compete, Learning to Win and Train to Win stages.

For more information on working with wheelchair racquetball players see “Training Athletes with a Physical Disability” available from www.canadiansportforlife.ca.

See also Coaching Athletes with a Disability from the Coaching Association of Canada.



Some athletes with physical disabilities play the standard game.



Two additional stages for athletes with a disability

In addition to the 8 stages in Racquetball Canada’s Long-term Athlete Development Model, there are two additional stages for athletes with a disability, and those stages are Awareness and First Contact.

Persons with a disability are often unaware of the availability of racquetball as a competitive or recreational sport, and racquetball clubs need to develop plans to engage persons with disabilities where they can be contacted; for example in community living groups or rehabilitation centres. Once aware of racquetball as a sport option, clubs and coaches need to carefully plan the first contact between participant with a disability and the sport in order to ensure that their first experience is a positive one. Racquetball clubs and coaches should remember that their focus should be on the game of racquetball and not on the disability of the participant. Persons with a disability (or their parents/guardians) are usually knowledgeable about any special considerations that they need, and the best approach for coaches, is to ask the player how best they can be helped to fully engage in the sport.

Recommendation: Racquetball Canada will partner with organizations that provide programs for athletes with a disability.



Active Start

STAGE 1

Chronological Age: **Males and Females 0 to 6**

Objectives: **Learn fundamental movements and link together into play**

How To Achieve Objectives: **Ensure children have access to the facilities and equipment they need for things such as swimming, gymnastics, athletics and playing catch**

Competition: **Competition is not appropriate at this stage**

Coach: **Parents, guardians, pre-school educators**

General description of stage: **This stage is about fun, exploration and getting kids to develop habits of being physically active!**

With the goal of healthy child development, the key is to encourage and nurture fundamental movement skills and a general interest in being active. Crawling, walking, swimming, running, and activities to develop hand eye coordination are the basic staples for the children to learn at this stage. This is not simply a technical pursuit as the emphasis is primarily on fun and participation. Establishing a positive association to movement and activity will enhance the current and future endeavors of the children as they progress through future stages.

To Do (Action Plan):

Parents to pursue appropriate programs focused on early childhood activity

Physical Development:

Starting to learn fundamental movement skills.

Focus on movement skills using large muscle groups through unstructured activity. Emphasis is on exploration in a safe and stimulating environment, not instruction. Initiate basic human movement skills such as: running, jumping, kicking, throwing, catching, swimming, striking etc. For more information see Developing Physical Literacy: A Guide For Parents With Children Aged 0-12 (Higgs).



Provide opportunities for physical activity for at least 30 minutes each day for toddlers and at least 60 minutes each day for preschoolers. Several short periods of activity are better than one long period of activity.

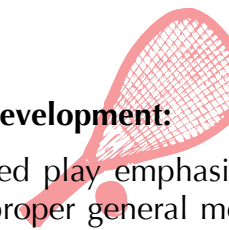


Psychological Development:

As children are getting their first exposure to physical activity it is vital that they feel supported and are challenged but in an enjoyable way. Some goals for the children from the activities would be:

- focus on having a positive perspective
- being able to deal with challenges in a constructive way
- development of brain functions, social skills, emotions, attitudes, and imagination

Ensure that games for young children are non-competitive and focus on participation.



Technical Development:

Unstructured play emphasizing fun and participation with proper general movement skills modeled by parents and early childhood educators.

Other Considerations:

Children should not be sedentary for more than 60 minutes except when sleeping

Foster non-competitive and co-operative activities

Encourage exploration of risk and limits in safe environments



FUNdamentals

STAGE 2

Chronological Age: **Males 6 to 9, Females 6 to 8**

Objectives: **Develop and build fundamental movement skills**

How To Achieve Objectives: **Entry level Racquetball and other sport programs**

Competition: **Club level; scrimmage in practice, potentially some league play, with modified rules and properly sized equipment**

Coach: **Community – Initiation**

General description of stage: **The FUNdamentals stage should be structured but fun!**

The emphasis is on developing fundamental sport skills in a fun and positive learning environment. In addition, children should be introduced to decision-making skills and simple rules and ethics of sport. There should be well-structured programs with proper progressions that are monitored regularly by parents, and trained coaches.

To Do (Action Plan):

Coaches or Clubs to link other racquet sports with Racquetball programs and clubs

Provincial Associations and Racquetball Canada to increase number of Community Racquetball coaches

Physical Development:

Further fundamental movement skills.

At this stage movement patterns become more refined and balance skills improve. No gender differences are apparent and physical activity should still be done through games and sports play. Provide opportunities for preferred and supportive physical activity at least 4 times a week.

Initiation to physical training through games and play with simple rules that focus on technique, form and fun: Medicine ball, Swiss ball, own body weight strength exercises, etc.

Patterning ambidextrous sports for refined movement skills:

Athletics, gymnastics and handball are for developing the ABC's: agility, balance, coordination, speed and suppleness.

Soccer, hockey, volleyball, basketball, baseball, etc. for developing catching, passing, dribbling, kicking, striking.

Initiation to asymmetric sports for further movement skills:

Racquetball, tennis, badminton, squash, table tennis, etc.

Psychological Development:

This stage should be the introduction for children to sport psychology/mental training. Sport psychology and mental training involves applying psychology principles to sport, to help train athletes to be mentally prepared and successful. In order for children to grasp these principles, the environment must be open, safe and supportive.

Some mental components necessary for success are:

- 1) confidence
- 2) concentration
- 3) motivation
- 4) relaxation
- 5) thought awareness/positive self-talk

Technical Development:

Learn to Hit the Ball

Learn to play Racquetball with one of Racquetball Canada's Community-Initiation Coaches:

- Basic Grips
- Basic Strokes
- Basic Mobility/Footwork
- Basic Court Position
- Basic Serve
- Basic Serve return stance
- Basic Rules



For More Information, visit the Official Racquetball Canada Website at www.racquetball.ca

Other Considerations:

Promote on-court safety including wearing eye-guards whenever on the court

Start to teach healthy eating by starting the day with a breakfast and limiting fast-food consumption



Learning to Train

STAGE 3

Chronological Age: **Males 9 to 12, Females 8 to 11**

Objectives: **Learn overall sport skills**

How To Achieve Objectives: **To be involved with a range of sport activities, including Racquetball**

Competition: **Club leagues, Junior Provincial tournaments and for some athletes Junior Nationals**

Coach: **Community – Initiation or Competition - Introduction**

General description of stage: **This stage further develops Racquetball player's fundamental technical and training skills.**

This stage helps give athletes specific structure and planning to their general sport skill development. Training sessions are still geared around fun but are structured to produce long-term positive habits of successful training. Both singles and doubles are taught to ensure holistic skill development. Club and Provincial competitions are introduced for fun, but are not the main focus. By the end of this stage, children will learn physical literacy: the interrelation of movement skills and sport skills. Speed, power and endurance are developed using sports and games.

To Do (Action Plan):

Parents and coaches to keep track of growth spurt

Racquetball Canada to ensure consistency of programming across the country

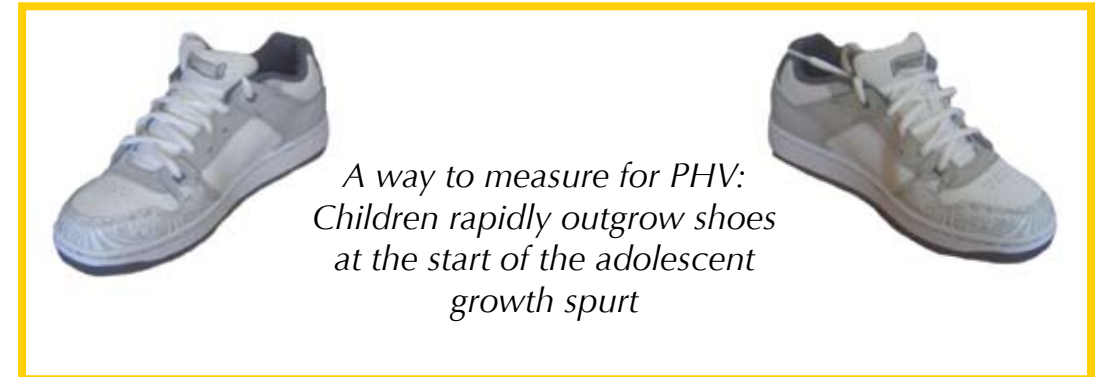
Provincial associations to align club and Provincial Racquetball Organization (PSO) competitions and programs

Physical Development:

Children should be involved in at least 3 sports throughout the year.

At this stage, children are developmentally ready to acquire the general sports and Racquetball skills that are the cornerstones of all athletic development. Playing other racquet sports that require similar movement patterns is also beneficial. Some other sports are tennis, squash, table tennis, badminton or handball.

It is important to be aware of the start of the adolescent growth spurt by regularly measuring the height of children and looking for a sudden height increases. Growth spurts of girls and boys last approximately 12-24 months.



A way to measure for PHV: Children rapidly outgrow shoes at the start of the adolescent growth spurt

Psychological Development

This stage is about:

1) Imagery/Visualization

- used to build confidence, increase motivation, help concentration and produce relaxation

2) Relaxation

- helps athletes cope with pressure and anxiety

3) Goal Setting

- having a specific goal allows the athlete to maximize their time and effort in accomplishing what they would like to do in racquetball

4) Thought Awareness/Self-Talk

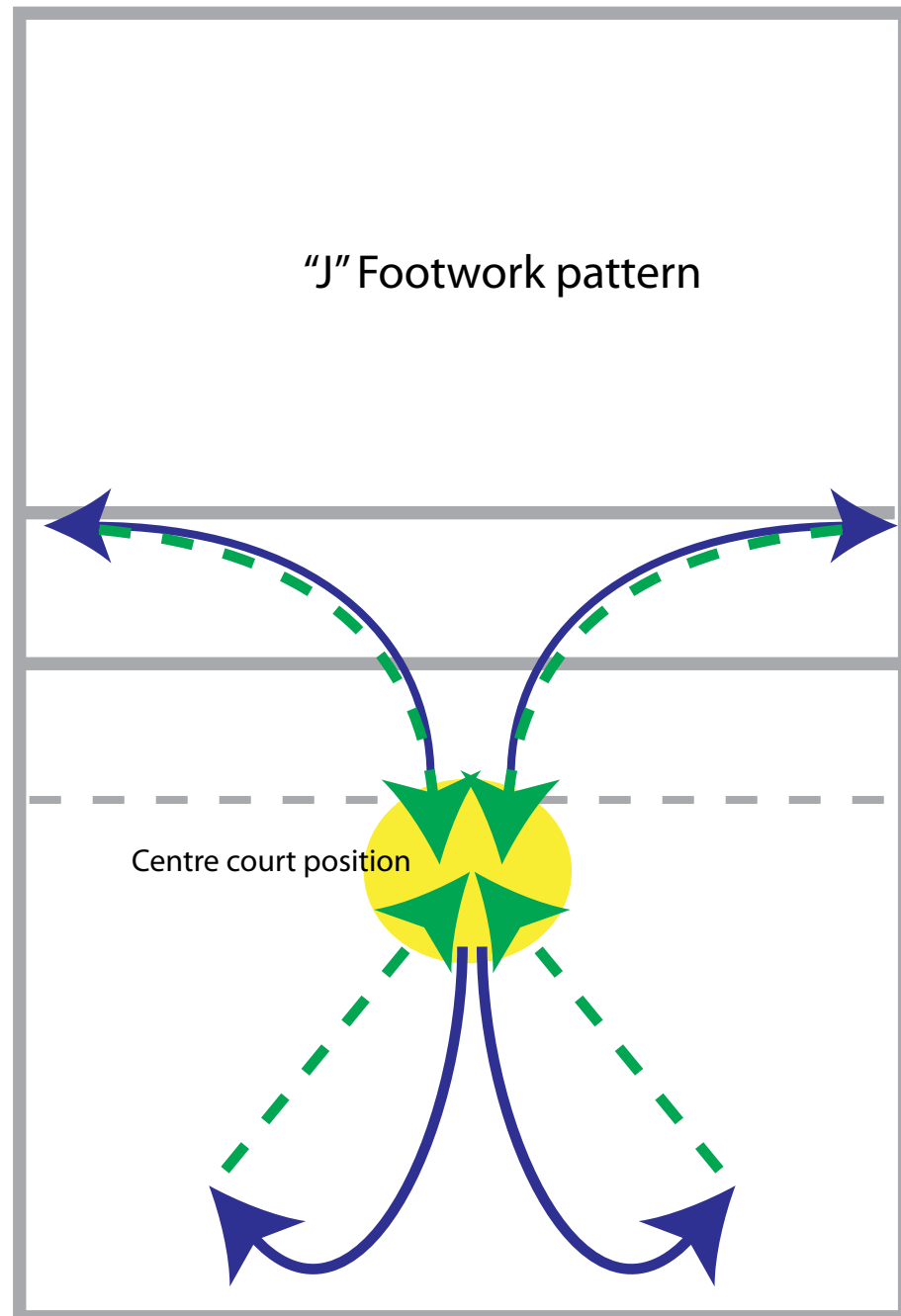
- if an athlete is worrying about all the negative things that have or could happen, their focus is not on the game
- these thoughts disrupt concentration, performance and confidence
- thought awareness is the technique to address this issue

Technical Development

1) Continue to refine and improve proper swing technique for the forehand and backhand using appropriate grip

2) Further develop basic serve and serve return

- 3) Learn multiple serves such as drive, lob and “z” serves to both sides of the court
- 4) Improve footwork by emphasizing the need to always go back to centre court
- 5) Stay in a low and athletic position, and move in a “J” pattern to set up to hit the ball rather than moving in a straight line, directly at the ball



Training and Competitive Environment:

- Approximately 45 days on court, (30 weeks): 10 days in simulation-league play and 5 days in competition (approximately 3 tournaments) (see Key Factor #8)
- Approximate Training/Simulation/Competition ratio: 70% training/20% in simulation-league/10% in competition ratio
- On court quantity and intensity: 1 to 3 sessions/week with varying intensity
- Average duration of sessions: 60 to 90 minutes
- Competition format: Skills-based divisions as well as age-based or gender-based
- Competition goals: Fun through a variety of challenges
- Complementary sports: 4 to 6 sessions/week

Other Considerations:

- Teach the importance of a warm-up and cool-down
- Promote the importance of staying hydrated, especially during physical activities
- Teach the general rules and ethics involved in Racquetball
- Check for the proper fit and use of sporting and protective gear
- Reinforce the importance of school and education
- Promote a healthy lifestyle including daily physical activity and sports
- Teach care and maintenance of equipment



Training to Train

STAGE 4

Chronological Age: **Males 12 to 16, Females 11 to 15 (During adolescent growth spurt)**

Objectives: **Build an aerobic base, develop speed and strength towards the end of the stage, and further develop and consolidate sport specific skills**

How To Achieve Objectives: **Racquetball at private clubs and community centers as well as other sport programs**

Competition: **Club, Junior Provincial, Junior Inter-Provincial and for some athletes Junior Nationals and Junior Worlds**

Coach: **Competition – Introduction/Development**

General description of stage: **This stage is about developing good training habits on and off the court.**

There is an emphasis on strength conditioning, linked to the beginning of peak height velocity (PHV) (See Key Factor #5). There is more individual training as opposed to a group activity for fitness and on court technical training. The focus is still on training rather than competing so it is important that activities consist predominantly of high volume, low intensity workloads. Training volume increases as athletes progress through this stage.

To Do (Action Plan):

Coaches and Parents to implement individual athlete tracking system i.e. measure height monthly
Provincial Associations and Racquetball Canada to implement regional and inter-provincial challenges

Physical Development:

Body parts at this stage will grow at different speeds. Therefore, it is very important to make athletes aware of their constantly changing bodies since athletes may temporarily lose some of their kinesthetic awareness, and performance may deteriorate during periods of very rapid growth.

Continue measuring and monitoring monthly growth (PHV) especially for girls who have a smaller window (1-2 months) to develop strength after their maximum growth spurt occurs.

Average age for girls reaching PHV is 12 and for boys 14.

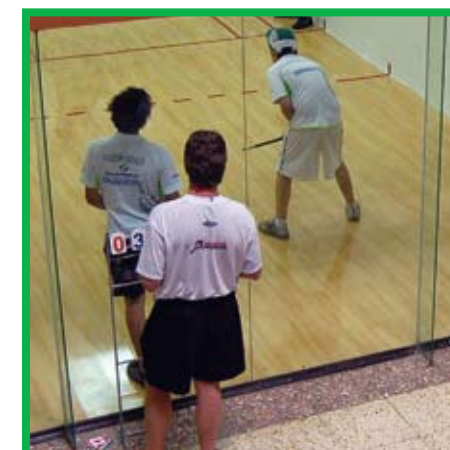
At the start of the stage it is important to build an aerobic base, followed by speed and strength.

Early in stage, off-court focus on the following:

1. Emphasize slow stretching exercises, because decreases in flexibility result directly from growth.
2. Vary off-court based activities to avoid over-use, because increases in growth and decreases in flexibility make adolescents prone to injury.
3. Introduce structured aerobic training during windows of optimum trainability.
4. Introduce free weights for basic strength development.
5. Develop core and stabilizer strength.
6. Improve explosive arm and leg power.
7. Maximize speed development.
8. Introduce physical testing (field test).
9. Introduce yoga for flexibility and strength.
10. Further develop nutritional knowledge.
11. Learn what overtraining is and how to track signs and symptoms of overtraining.

Later in stage:

1. Maximize strength development
2. Improve strength endurance
3. Improve power/speed endurance
4. Build a level of fitness that allows the athlete to maintain high volume, high quality training
5. Learn to monitor training sessions and make appropriate adjustments





Psychological Development

The aim of this stage is to introduce athletes to more advanced forms of sport psychology/mental training. The new skills are:

- 1) Profiling
 - the athlete generates a list of physical, technical and psychological skills and attributes that they possess, and compares that to the ideal
- 2) Goal Setting
 - refine longer-term goal setting
- 3) Imagery for Training and Competition
 - continue to build on previous imagery/visualization skills, by adding more concrete detail and complexity of imagery
- 4) Concentration Skills
 - concentration skills help reduce internal/external distraction by using triggers and thought awareness/positive self-talk to bring the athlete back to a better internal focus

5) Game Focus Plans/Pre Performance Routine

- athletes learn to develop focus plans and pre-performance routines to get into their performance zone

6) Match Preparation

- developing systematic routines with the things one can control such as being organized with food, sleep and equipment

Technical Development:

1. Increase speed of proper “J” shaped footwork patterns to the ball and centre court
2. Learn proper movement out of the service box to center court by watching the opponent rather than the ball
3. Learn proper movement for the return of drive, lob and “z” serves
4. Learn proper movement for the cut-offs for lob and “z” serves
5. Improve stroke mechanics and become aware of individual strengths and weaknesses
6. Develop a serving strategy based on individual strengths and weaknesses
7. Refine the fundamental shots of down-the-line, wide-angle, cross- court, pinches and ceiling balls

Training and Competitive Environment:

Single Periodization, and for some athletes Double Periodization:

- Approximately 100 days on court: 60 days in training and playing games, 30 days in league-simulation and 10 days in competition (35 weeks)
- Approximate Training/Simulation/Competition Ratio: 60% training/30% league-simulation/ 10% competition
- On court quantity and intensity: 3 to 5 sessions/week with varied intensity
- Average duration of sessions: 90 to 120 minutes
- Competition format: Skills-based divisions, age-based or gender-based division taking National ranking system into account for seeding etc
- Competition goals: enjoyment/building towards provincial team selection
- Complementary sports: 2 to 4 sessions/week

Other Considerations:

Encourage self-management, and taking responsibility for actions

Teach to have respect for others





Training to Compete

STAGE 5

Chronological Age: **Males 16 to 23, Females 15 to 21**

Objectives: **Optimize the engine and learn to compete**

How To Achieve Objectives: **Optimize fitness preparation and racquetball specific skills, singles and doubles performance. All the objectives of Training to Train must be achieved before the objectives of Training to Compete can begin.**

Competition: **Club, Junior Provincial, Junior National, Junior Worlds, Provincials, National Selection Events and Nationals**

Coach: **Competition - Development**

General description of stage: **This stage is about training and competing. Training volume remains high while intensity increases.**

The emphasis is on developing individual strengths and minimizing weaknesses in physical, technical and tactical skills based around specific event demands. Here you will find the top performers on the Junior National or Development Team.

To Do (Action Plan):

Racquetball Canada to hold an annual training camp to evaluate and train top Canadian developing level athletes

National Training Centre coaches, Local on-site coaches, and athletes to fully implement year-round training and recovery program

Coaches (as above) to direct athletes to individualized training with a sport psychologist, strength and conditioning coach, sport scientist, dietician, technical coach, physiotherapist, etc



Physical Development

Athlete and coach learn to work with a full time Performance Enhancement Team (PET) to optimize individual training. The goal is to have sufficient fitness to manage the rigors of competition and training without injuries or burnout.

Begin double periodized training program; Junior National Team: Junior National Championships and Junior World Championships; Development Team: Selection Event, Nationals.

Work with a strength and conditioning coach using individualized annual training plan.

Recognize and prevent overtraining.

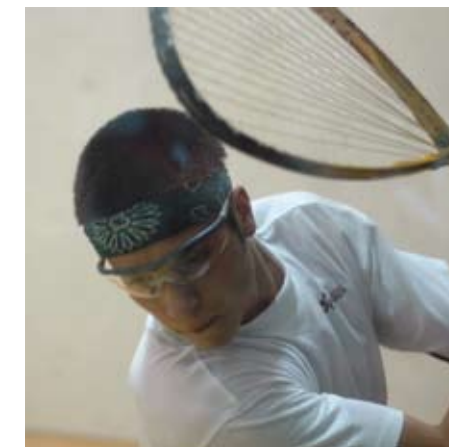
Identify and implement specific well planned methods of regeneration and recovery.

Maintain complementary sports.



Psychological Development

Athletes in this stage are learning to achieve balance with other important roles such as schooling, part-time jobs, family, etc. They must be highly disciplined in regards to their recovery activities to effectively meet the heavy demands of training and competitions.



The aim of this stage is to make sport psychological skills specific to the needs of each athlete.

1) Performance tracking and Match preparation

- as self-awareness heightens, the athlete learns to make the appropriate decisions or alterations to best influence a successful performance

2) Evaluation of Performance

- use training diaries and competition diaries to track and assess training and competition performance

Training to Compete

3) Consistency

- at this stage athletes need to consistently deliver high performance results in training and competition

4) Begin to teach life balance and financial skills

Technical Development

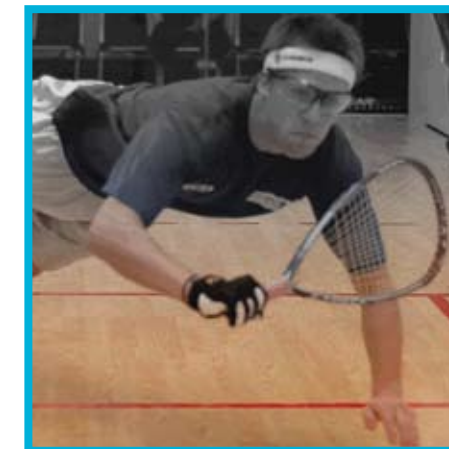
Athletes in this stage are developing a unique game style based on their particular strengths and weaknesses.

- 1) Learn to analyze game film of self and opponents' strengths and weaknesses
- 2) Refine a serving strategy

Training and Competitive Environment:

Double periodized yearly plan:

- Approximately 190 days on court (40 weeks): 100 days in training/60 days in league-simulation/30 days in competition (7-9 tournaments)
- Approximate Training/Simulation/Competition ratio: 60% training/30% league-simulation/10% competition
- On court quantity and intensity: 6 to 9 sessions per week with varied intensity
- Average duration of sessions: 60 to 120 minutes



- Competition format: Skills-based divisions, age-based or gender-based division taking National ranking system into account for seeding etc
- Competition goals: to be selected to the Junior National, Development or National Team
- Complementary sports: 1 to 2 sessions per week

Other Considerations:

- Implement recovery and regeneration plan
- Implement injury prevention training and behaviour
- Teach tapering and peaking strategies
- Learn to travel internationally
- Learn to adapt to other countries and cultures





Learning to Win

STAGE 6

Chronological Age: **Males 19+, Females 18+**

Objectives: **Podium performances at National and International Amateur Events**

How To Achieve Objectives: **Maximize fitness and psychological preparation and racquetball specific singles/doubles skills**

Competitions: **National Selection Events, Nationals, Amateur International Events, Professional Events**

Coach: **Competition – High Performance**

General description of stage: **This stage is about transition and commitment.**

The transition is partly the maturation from adolescent to adult, as well as the belief in the ability to go from top level National performances to top level International amateur results. The commitment is doing what it takes and having the discipline to follow through on one's plan.

To Do (Action Plan):

Racquetball Canada Marketing Committee to assist athletes and coaches to seek year round financial support for training and competition

Physical Development

Athlete and coach work with a full time Performance Enhancement Team (PET) to optimize individual training needs. Athlete is not playing fitness "catch-up", or battling ongoing nagging injuries:

- Monitor overtraining symptoms
- Maximum strength and power through free-weight and modified Olympic style lifting
- Speed and power through plyometric and free-weight training
- Maintain suppleness and flexibility

Goal is to have muscular balance and strength that allow the athlete to focus on detailed event/individual specific performance.

Psychological Development

To succeed at this level requires attributes such as:

- Being confident, motivated and highly competitive
- Having a high level of knowledge of self and sport
- Being able to deal with the pressure of success or failure
- Effective lifestyle management
- Having the constant desire to improve and refine their performance
- Being open to new ways of training, different coaches and coaching methods
- Being creative and innovative
- Being able to prepare and implement pre-competition and competition plans and other sport psychology skills

Technical Development

In this stage, athletes have mastery of fundamental footwork movement patterns, stroke mechanics, serving strategy and the overall ability to create and execute a successful game plan.

1. Further refine skills from Stage 5 Training to Compete (T2C)
2. Refine serve selection during competition based on opponent's serve return
3. Develop a balanced game style by improving one's non-natural game style
4. Develop strategies to maximize energy efficiency during individual games, matches and tournaments

Training and Competitive Environment

Double Periodized and multi-year plan:

- Approximately 225 days on court (45 weeks): 90 days in training/90 days in league-simulation/ 40-45 days in competition (8-12 tournaments)
- Approximate Training/Simulation/Competition ratio: 40% training/40% league-simulation/20% competition
- Quantity and intensity: 9 to 12 sessions per week with high intensity
- Average duration of sessions: 100 to 150 minutes
- Competition format: Skills-based divisions, age-based or gender-based division taking National, International and Professional ranking systems account for seeding etc
- Competition goals: Winning National and International Amateur events
- Complementary sports: As needed

Other Considerations:

Learn to budget for life and competition expenses

Develop skills for attracting and negotiating with sponsors

Make decisions about the balance between sport, education, professional development, family and relationships



Training to Win

STAGE 7

Chronological Age: **Male 19+, Female 18+**

Objectives: **Having podium results at all levels of competition in the world (Amateur and Professional)**

How To Achieve Objectives: **Continue to develop creative and innovative strengths in racquetball skills, psychology, strategy and training**

Competition: **National Selection Events, Nationals, International Amateur and Professional Events**

Coach: **Competition - High Performance**

General description of stage: **Athletes at this stage have perfected their skills and compete successful at the very highest level of the sport.**

Athletes at this stage have perfected their skills and compete successfully at the very highest level of the sport. There is a commitment to winning, and winning time and time again. Athletes now focus on the preservation of high quality consistent performances and injury prevention strategies to be "winning for a living". Preparation is the key to maintaining such high levels of accomplishment.

To Do (Action Plan):

Racquetball Canada High Performance Committee to develop a plan for Canadian athletes to better access the Pro Tour in the USA

Racquetball Canada Marketing Committee to develop a marketing plan to help fund travel and training expenses

Physical Development:

Continue to develop and build on Stage 5 and 6 recommendations, with increased focus on injury prevention, rest and recovery strategies and maintaining fitness.

Psychological Development:

Athletes at this stage deliver optimal performances on demand.

Top Pro Characteristics:

- Similar to Stage 6, but with the ability to handle the increased pressure to perform to earn a living
- Learn new ways of being creative and innovative
- Maintain strong work ethic and be mentally tough

Technical Development:

A continuation of Stage 6 skills to improve consistency in competition:

1. Refine the quality of execution in high pressure and unusual situations
2. Scout opponents and modify a game plan for success
3. Track your opponent's tendencies and performance during the game and make the appropriate adjustments to be successful
4. Create new techniques for success
5. Refine strategies to maximize energy efficiency during individual games, matches and tournaments

Training and Competitive Environment:

Multiple periodization within quadrennial plan

Training mimics competition environment:

- Approximately 200+ days on court (48 weeks): 90 days in training/60 days in league-simulation/75 days in competition (10-16 tournaments)
- Approximate Training/Simulation/Competition ratio: 40% training/25% league-simulation/35% competition
- Quantity and intensity: 10 to 12 sessions per week with high intensity
- Average duration of sessions: 90 to 180 minutes
- Competition format: Skills-based divisions, age-based or gender-based division taking National, International and Professional ranking systems account for seeding etc
- Competition goals: Multiple National, International & Pro wins
- Complementary sports: As needed as part of rest and recovery



Other Considerations:

Develop transition options for life after high level competition

Strive for financial stability



Active for Life

STAGE 8

Chronological Age: **Any age, immediately after leaving the competition arena or following stage 3**

Objectives: **A smooth transition from an Athlete's competitive career to lifelong physical activity and participation in sport. Maintain a healthy body weight through sport, physical activity and healthy eating, to decrease the risk of many chronic diseases.**

How To Achieve Objectives: **Find ways to be involved in racquetball such as playing, volunteering, coaching, officiating or administrative work, or simply playing other sports**

Competition: **Athlete's choice, Masters, age group play, recreational, transfer to another sport**

Coach: **Any**

General description of stage: **Athlete's at this Stage play racquetball for recreation, health benefits and fun.**

Athletes at this Stage play racquetball for recreation, health benefits and fun. Typically, Active for Life can start any time after the Learning to Train Stage is complete. For optimum health benefits, Active for Life athletes require a minimum of 60 minutes of moderate daily activity or 30 minutes of intense activity 3 times per week. Daily activity in sets of at least 10 minutes of moderate activity can be accumulated to meet the daily 60 minute requirement.

To Do (Action Plan):

Athletes to find or set up social league nights or Masters competitions

Athlete to transition smoothly from heavy training loads to active living

Physical Development:

Maintain flexibility, strength and aerobic capacity.

Technical Development:

Develop a game style that is in-tune with your physical ability.

Other Considerations:

Volunteer provincially or nationally

Work in racquetball administration

Become a provincial, national or international official

Become a NCCP Racquetball Master Learning Facilitator, Learning Facilitator, Master Evaluator, Evaluator or Racquetball coach

Work in event organization provincially or nationally



Racquetball Canada's Operational Game Plan.

Racquetball Canada is committed to the Long Term Athlete Development principles. To ensure that these principles are reflected in all Racquetball Canada programs, Racquetball Canada and its stakeholders have much work to do, as is reflected in the To Do items included with each LTAD Stage.

Racquetball Canada will incorporate LTAD principles into all coaching materials.

Racquetball Canada will initiate a Competition Review, to study factors such as the competition schedule, the competition processes (for example, junior divisions reflecting age vs skill; for example, Regional Nationals for young juniors) and competition selection rules (for example, should all events for young athletes be round robin), to ensure that LTAD principles are reflected.

Racquetball Canada will assist parents to educate themselves about the principles of Long Term Athlete Development, by making available copies of this booklet, by providing information to Racquetball Canada Board members, and by providing additional resources online.

In addition, Racquetball Canada will:

Partner with organizations that provide programs for athletes with a disability.

Initiate a Rules Review to determine if further game modifications are warranted.

Work with the Provincial Sport Organizations (PSOs) to increase number of trained or certified Racquetball coaches.

Develop a system for keeping track of children's growth spurt.

Work with the PSOs to ensure consistency of programming across the country.

Work with the PSOs to implement regional and inter-provincial challenges.

Hold an annual training camp to evaluate and train top Canadian developing-level athletes.

Assist athletes and coaches to seek year-round financial support for training and competition.

Develop a plan for Canadian athletes to better access the Pro Tour in the USA.

Develop a marketing plan to help fund travel and training expenses for athletes and coaches.

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