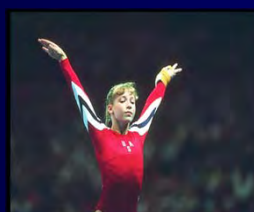


# Myths Surrounding the Role of Youth Sports in Developing Talented Athletes

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Presentation made at  
the University of Porto



## Where Is My University Located in the United States?

MICHIGAN STATE  
UNIVERSITY



## State of Michigan



## MSU: America's First Land Grant University



## Michigan State University



# The Institute for the Study of Youth Sports (ISYS)

MICHIGAN STATE UNIVERSITY



College of Education Kinesiology Department

## ISYS MISSION

- 1. To study the beneficial and detrimental physical, psychological and social effects of sport participation for children and youth.**
- 2. Disseminate knowledge that maximizes the beneficial effects of sport for children and youth.**

**Our Guiding Core Theme**  
*Advancing Knowledge*  
*Transforming Young Lives!*

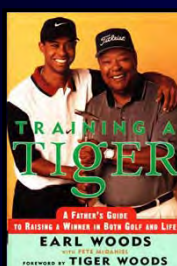


**The Professionalization of  
American Youth Sports**

- Over the last 30 years American youth sports have become increasingly professionalized.
- This professionalization is characterized by:
  - a focus on participation as a means to an end (e.g., college scholarship)
  - single sport specialization
  - intense year round training
  - private coaching
  - increased importance placed on winning



## The “Tiger Woods”/ “Williams Sisters” Effect



## The Professionalization of American Youth Sports

- Youth sports professionals have argued against such practices on philosophical grounds, but their opinions often go unheard.



## The Professionalization of American Youth Sports

- What drives many parents and coaches is the hope of their child obtaining a college scholarship or the pursuit of a professional sports career.



## Concerns Associated With Professionalized Youth Sports Today

- Child Abuse
- Eating Disorders
- Excessive Stress
- Burnout
- Identity/Self-Esteem Issues
- Injury
- Parent Problems



## Sport Organization Concerns With Elite Youth Sports

- US Olympic Committee

- *How is the pipeline influenced?*
- *Are we losing potentially talented athletes?*

- USA Tennis: USTA Junior Ranking Example



## Purposes

- Examine what is known about talent development in young athletes.
- **Identify myths surrounding the role of youth sports in the development of champions.**
- **Outline implications for professional practice.**





## What Is Know About Talent Development in Young Athletes



## Athletes Move Through Phases of Talent Development

(Bloom (1985))

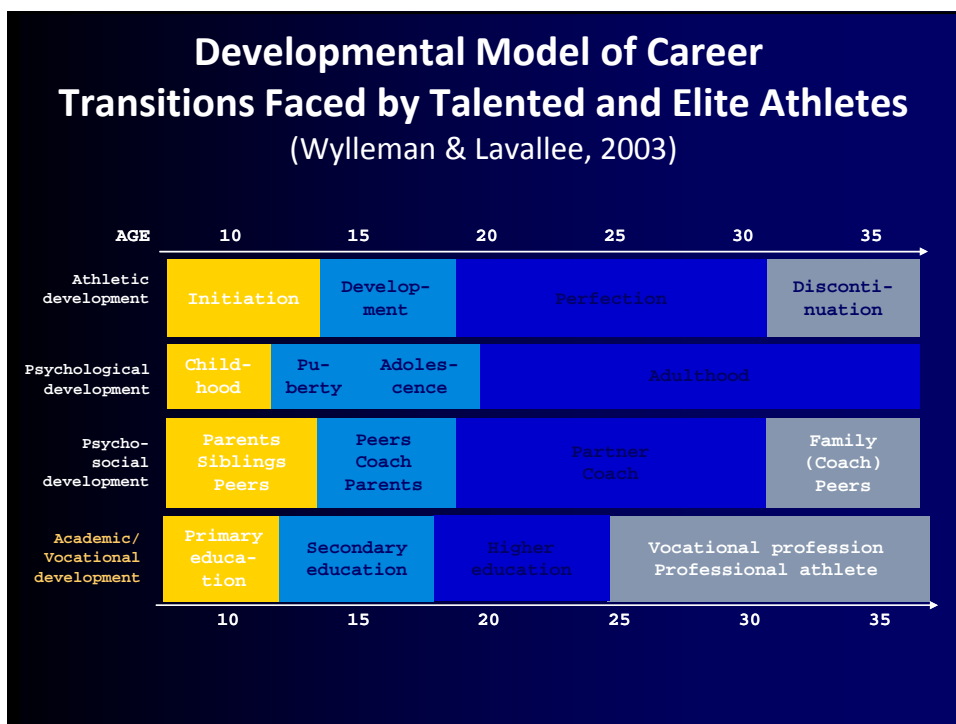
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- **Phase 1:** fun and participation focus
- **Phase 2:** showed talent, became more committed and involved and received more specialized coaching
- **Phase 3:** worked many hours striving for excellence/perfecting skills

## A Scientific Approach to Understanding The Athletic Talent Development Process



## Developmental Model of Career Transitions Faced by Talented and Elite Athletes (Wylleman & Lavallee, 2003)



## **Individuals Influence Athlete Talent Development (van Rossum, 1995)**

- **Coaches**
- **Parents**
- **Teammates/Peers**



## **Coach Characteristics in Each of the Three Phases of Athlete Talent Development (van Rossum, 1995)**

- **Phase 1: Kind, Cheerful, Process-Centered**
- **Phase 2: Strong, Respecting, Skilled, Demanding**
- **Phase 3: Successful, Respected, Emotionally Bonded**

## **Athletic Talent Development Takes Time & Abilities**

- **Ericsson's (2001) 10-Year (10,000 Hours) Quality Practice Postulate**
- **Natural Talent Plays A Key Role in Athletic Talent Development (Lidor & Lavyan (2002))**

## **Talent Development: The Importance of Deliberate Practice (Ericsson et al., 1993)**

- The engagement in “deliberate practice” is necessary for the attainment of expertise.
- Deliberate practice: forms of training that are not intrinsically motivating, require high levels of effort, and attention and do not lead to immediate social and financial rewards.

## **Talent Development: The Power of Practice (Baker et al., 1993)**

- The Rate of Learning Decreases As the Amount of Practice Increases.
- Experts Accumulate More Deliberate Practice Than Nonexperts.

## **Expert-Novice Information Processing Difference**

**(Singer & Janelle (1999))**

- Experts have greater task specific knowledge
- Experts interpret greater meaning from available information
- Experts store and access information more effectively

## Expert-Novice Information Processing Difference

(Singer & Janelle (1999))

- Experts can better detect and recognize structured patterns of play
- Experts use situational probability data better
- Experts make decisions that are more rapid and more appropriate

## Mental Skills Are Critical To Being A Champion?

- Technical Skills
- Tactics
- Fitness
- **Mental Skills**





## The Development of Psychological Talent In Olympic Champions

- **Gould, Dieffenbach & Moffett (2002)**
- **USOC Sport Science & Technology Grant**



## The Development of Psychological Talent In Olympic Champions: Sample

- **10 Current and Former Olympic Champions**
- **33 Olympic Medals Won (28 Gold)**
- **Six Males/Four Females**
- **Represented 9 Different Olympic Sports (3 Winter, 6 Summer)**



## The Development of Psychological Talent In Olympic Champions: Triangulation Samples

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- **10 Significant Others Identified by The Athletes**
  - Parent
  - Sibling
  - Spouse
  
- **10 Coaches Identified by the Athletes**



## Psychological Characteristics of Olympic Champions (Gould, Dieffenbach, & Moffet, 2002)

- |   |   |
|---|---|
| • <b>Mental Toughness</b>                 | • <b>Confidence</b>                         |
| • <b>Ability to Focus</b>                 | • <b>Positive or Adaptive Perfectionism</b> |
| • <b>Ability to Set and Achieve Goals</b> | • <b>Coachability</b>                       |
| • <b>High Motivation</b>                  | • <b>High Optimism</b>                      |

**Development of Psychological Talent In Olympic Champions:  
How Psychological Skills and Characteristics  
Were Developed?**

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- **Families Clearly Supported and Encouraged Participation, But Exerted Little Pressure to Win**
- **Parents Treated The Child Like Other Siblings**
- **Families Emphasized A Belief In The Child's Ability to Succeed or "Can Do" Attitude/Optimistic Environment Created**
- **Parents Emphasized "If Going To Do It, Do It Right" Attitude**

**Development of Psychological Talent In Olympic Champions:  
Results - How Developed?**

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- **Early Exposure and Contact with High-Level Competitors That Inspired Them and Provided Various Forms of Vicarious Learning**
- **Most Had Early Success and Showed Signs of Talent**
- **Families Critical (Transport, Support)**

**Development of Psychological Talent In Olympic Champions:  
How Psychological Skills and Characteristics Were Developed?**

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- Families Emphasized and Modeled Hard Work Ethic and Discipline
- Families Did Not View Sport As Child's Entire Life: They Typically Kept Things In Perspective
- Siblings Often Played A Major Role in Athlete's Psychological Development (Model/Training Partner)

**Development of Psychological Talent In Olympic Champions:  
Parent "Emphasize Follow-Through" Quote**

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*If the children made a commitment, I expected them to follow-through. I would tell them "you don't have to do it. You don't have to sign up for it. That is your choice. You are free to make a choice. Once you do make that choice, then they must commit to it. So I did expect them to follow through.*

**Development of Psychological Talent In  
Olympic Champions:  
Parent “Family Work Ethic ” Quote**

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*My people came over from Italy at the turn of the century and they set goals and I used to tell the kids this all the time. They had backbone and guts. They didn't sit down and cry and say poor me, everybody is discriminating against me. They got up and worked hard and excelled over the years. They were successful, but they worked*

**Development of Psychological Talent In  
Olympic Champions:  
Athlete “Perspective” Quote**

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*I never felt like if I won a competition they were overly-excited. They were like, that was good. You know, they said that even when I didn't perform well....I knew that they were proud of me but I think I knew they were proud of me whether I won or lost.*

**Development of Psychological Talent In  
Olympic Champions:  
Athlete “Perspective” Quote**

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*My mom was like, “I don ’t care if you won X gold medals, you still have to do your chores and clean your room.” In a way, they all kept me humble.*

**Development of Psychological Talent In  
Olympic Champions:  
Athlete “Parent Discipline” Quote**

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*I couldn ’t swear, I couldn ’t throw things at the volunteers. If I was upset and cried, that was okay, that was fine. You can cry but you can ’t treat people poorly.*

*Whether I lost my temper when I was eight years old at the finish of a race because I made a mistake, they immediately took my racing away for two weeks.*



## Development of Psychological Talent In Olympic Champions: Athlete “Optimal Parent Push” Quote

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*Pushing me just enough so it still came from my heart. The times I really needed the motivation, they were right there giving it to me.*



## Development of Psychological Talent In Olympic Champions: Conclusions

- Families played a critical role in the psychological talent development of champions.
- Most champions and their families initial goals were not focused on developing athletic prowess. Rather, the focus was on fun and personal development. They participated in multiple sports and pursued an active lifestyle.

## **Development of Psychological Talent In Olympic Champions: Conclusions**

- **The primary focus of parents and coaches was on long-term development emphasizing core values and disciplined involvement versus winning and short-term success.**
- **The early sport experience of these champions was similar to what experts propose for all children—fun, fundamentals (physical and psychological) and quality coaching.**

## **The Risk of Going Too Far: Burnout in Young Athletes**



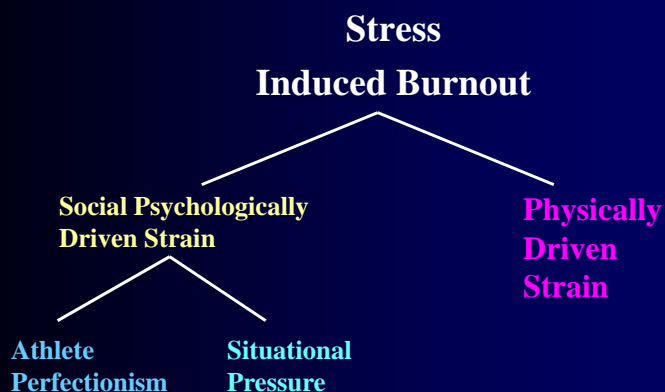
## Burnout in Junior Tennis

Gould, Udry, Tuffey & Loehr (1996)



## Burnout in Junior Tennis

Gould, Udry, Tuffey & Loehr (1996)



## **“Parent” Recommendations for Preventing Burnout**

- **Lessen Involvement in Child’s Tennis**
- **Reduce Importance on Outcome**
- **Show Empathy and Support**
- **Recognize Optimal Amount of “Psyching” Needed**

## **“Player” Recommendations for Preventing Burnout**

- **Play for your own reasons**
- **Balance tennis with other things**
- **No fun—no play**
- **Try to make the game fun**
- **Take time off**

## **“Coach” Recommendations for Preventing Burnout**

- **Utilize Player Input**
- **Two-Way Communication**
- **Facilitate Player Communication**
- **Be Personally Involved With Players**

## **“Coach” Recommendations for Preventing Burnout**

- **Remember More Is Not Always Better—  
Optimal Levels of Training and  
Competition Needed**
- **Monitor Overtraining**

## **Myths Surrounding the Development of Athletic Champions**



## **Myths Surrounding the Development of Athletic Champions**

- **Athletic Talent Can Be Accurately Predicted at a Young Age**
- **More Is Always Better!**
- **Stages of Talent Development Can Be Skipped**



## **Myths Surrounding the Development of Athletic Champions**

- **The Early We Start The Bigger Advantage We Have**
- **We Are Going To Get A Scholarship**
- **Early Single Sport Specialization Is Essential**

## **Myths Surrounding the Development of Athletic Champions**

- **You Cannot Have Fun If You Are Going To Be Good**
- **Talented Individuals Need Different Entry Programs and Coaching Approaches Than Their Less Talented Counterparts**

## Myths Surrounding the Development of Athletic Champions

- **There Are No Costs Associated With The Development of Talent**



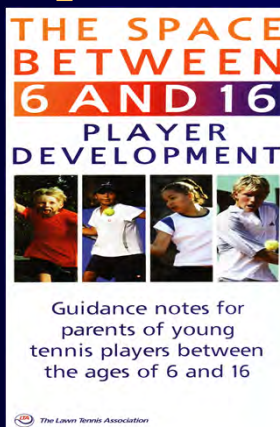
## Implications for Professional Practice

- **Develop a Philosophy Relative to the Role of Talent Development in Your Program**
- **Inform/Educate Parents & Coaches About The Stages of Talent Development**
- **England LTA Example: At each stage the 'windows for development' need to be used - specific things need to be coached, we cannot do the same thing all the time with players**





## The LTA Long Term Player Development Program



### Guidelines

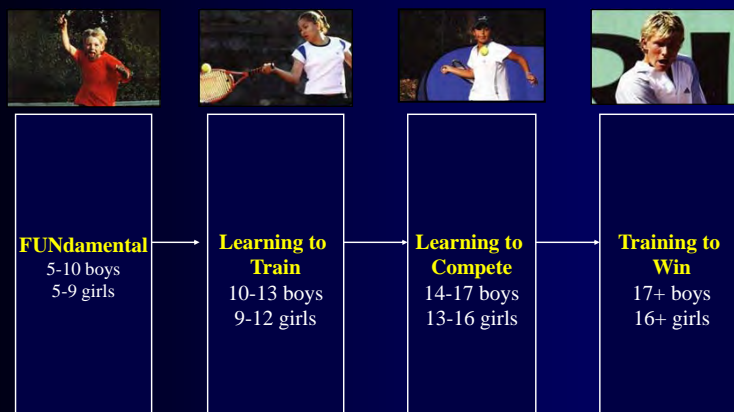
It takes 10 years (and 10000 hours) to develop potential in anything

**to get players to the top we must do the right things**  
at the right time in the player's development and plan their training

the process of developing potential has 4 simple stages and ages  
each of which has specific characteristics



# Stages and Ages of Tennis Talent Development



<b>FUNDamental</b> 5-10 boys 5-9 girls	<b>Learning to Train</b> 10-14 boys 9-12 girls	<b>Learning to Compete</b> 14-17 boys 13-16 girls	<b>Training to Win</b> 17+ boys 16+ girls
<p><i>Athletic skills +Athleticism</i> <i>Body Awareness</i> <i>Co-ordination/balance</i></p> <p><i>Basic tennis 'shapes'</i></p> <p><i>Learning to score</i></p> <p><i>FUN Team challenges/ comps</i> <i>FUN Intra /Inter club teams</i> <i>Matches 4 (at 5) – 40 max (at 10)</i></p> <p><i>Other sports 30 –35%</i> <i>Structured, but flexible program</i></p>	<p><i>Physical skills (4 S's) according to puberty</i></p> <p><i>Motor (tennis) skills with technique solid</i> <i>Tennis specific (technical, tactical and fitness)</i></p> <p><i>Begin individual competition</i> <i>Matches 40 (at 10) – 80 (at 14)pa 25% of time</i> <i>Training games unlimited</i></p> <p><i>Other sports 5-30% of time in sport</i> <i>Double peaked year</i></p>	<p><i>Physical development very important</i></p> <p><i>Developing games style</i></p> <p><i>Tennis specific (technical, tactical and fitness)</i></p> <p><i>Individual competition</i> <i>Matches 80 (at 14)- 90 (at 17)pa 50% of time</i> <i>Training games unlimited</i></p> <p><i>Other sports 5%</i> <i>Double or triple peaked year</i></p>	<p><i>Physical programme Individualised with high intensity programme</i></p> <p><i>Tennis specific sessions</i></p> <p><i>Individualised matchplay 75% of time</i> <i>Matches 90+pa</i></p> <p><i>Triple peaked year</i></p>

## Summary & Conclusions

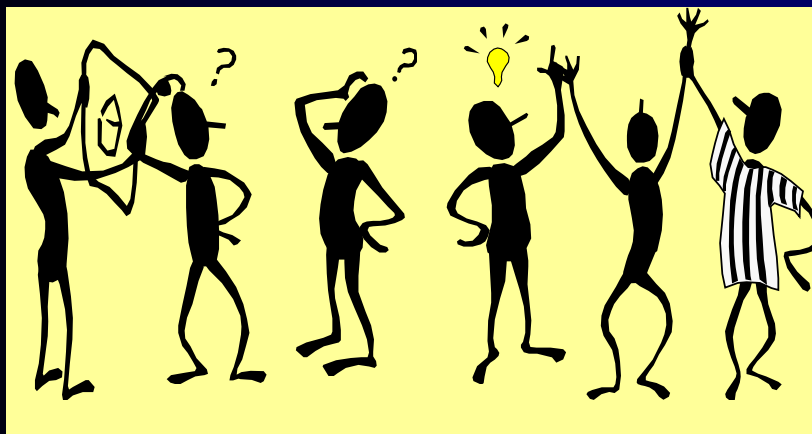
- We have learned a good deal about talent development in young athletes.
- **We must use this information to eliminate myths surrounding the role of youth sports in the development of champions.**
- We must begin to educate coaches and parents relative to talent development issues in sport.

## Why Develop Athletic Talent?

*“We cannot map people’s lives in advance but much can be done to make desirable outcomes more likely. Acquiring high abilities is one such outcome. We can and should act to make it happen more often.”*

-Howe (1999)

# QUESTIONS



# THANK YOU

