

TOTAL TRAINING FOR YOUNG ATHLETES

By Richard Bell

Few athletes will be the best in their respective sports at such a young age as LeBron James or Tiger Woods. But accelerated athletic development is now possible at a younger age because of better, smarter training. A lot of times I am asked, "When is a good time to start my son or daughter lifting weights?" The best time is when the young athlete is ready *mentally* for the focus and commitment needed to improve their physical skill and abilities.

More often than not it's the parents who want to push the kid into the weight room, with hopes s/he'll put on enough size to take down the big kid on the football or soccer field. What I want parents and sports coaches to understand is that success in any arena is usually the result of planning, hard work, and most importantly, commitment to one's self to improve. Athletic training is no exception. In sports, training is the process of repetitive progressive exercises — work that improves the potential to achieve optimal performance. For athletes, this means long-term training programs that condition the body and mind to the specifics of competition, and that lead to excellence in performance.

Far too often, the sports programs of children imitate programs of well-known elite athletes: those who, through their national/international achievements, have captivated the imaginations of young athletes and their coaches. Coaches often employ these programs, not taking into consideration the background and biological makeup of young athletes, and with no guiding concepts, such as training principles.

When I begin interviewing athletes about their training regimen, I always hear that in their weight lifting classes they bench for 1rm and are performing power cleanses as well. Some of these kids have no idea what the training principles are for these particular lifts, and many have a hard time walking and chewing gum at the same time. If they can't walk and chew gum at the same time, why would they be able to perform these lifts to perfection?

In closing, I would like to suggest this quote from Dr. Tudor Bompa, who single-handedly revolutionized Western training methods: "If we encourage young athletes to develop a variety of skills, they will probably experience success in several sporting activities, and some will have the inclination and desire to specialize and develop their talents further."

Stay tuned for part 2 of Total Training for Young Athletes...