

DEVELOPING PHYSICAL LITERACY

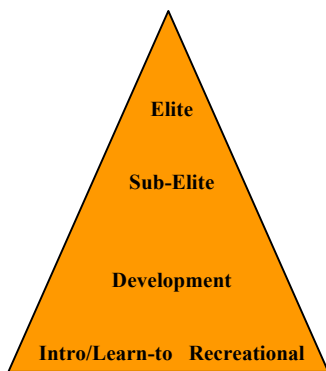
THE FOUNDATION OF THE UTAH SPORT FOR LIFE MODEL



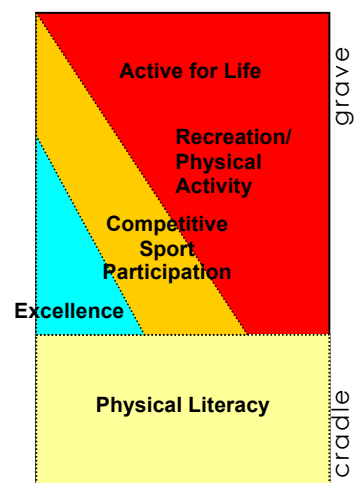
INTRODUCTION

The “Utah Sport for Life” model focuses on the general framework of Long-Term Athlete Development with special reference to growth, maturation and development, trainability, and sport and recreation system alignment and integration. It incorporates information from a number of sources and draws on the experiences of community organization’s best practices.

A better sport and recreation model is inclusive and allows for continued participation whether you are an elite athlete or someone who loves to play because it’s fun. The difference between this new model and the old model is that the bottom level emphasizes the importance of teaching “Physical Literacy” to the entire population. Once the fundamentals are learned, everyone can stay involved in sports long-term. In this new paradigm, there is no point at which a person is eliminated from participating in physical activity.



Old Model



Utah Sport for Life

Developing “Physical Literacy” is at the root of The Utah Sport for Life model which focuses on our youth, yet it identifies the importance of including the entire population within a sport model. Too often, sport models focus the majority of funding and expertise on the portion of the population striving to be elite-level athletes. “Utah Sport for Life” will emphasize the importance of every level and ability.

Participation in sport teaches lessons like teamwork, fair play and goal setting. It’s also a main ingredient in maintaining a healthy body and a healthy community, making this all-inclusive approach integral to the success of this model. The Utah Sport for Life guide will be the result of countless discussions and input from Utah individuals involved in a wide range of sport (and non-sport) organizations.

DEVELOPING PHYSICAL LITERACY IS THE NAME OF THE GAME

Physical literacy is at the heart of the Utah Sport for Life model. Being physically active is more important to health than virtually any other part of life over which we have control. A University of Michigan School of Public Health and Albert Einstein University Study suggest that it is better for your health to be overweight and active than to be of normal weight and be inactive.

For this reason alone, it is critical that children develop the knowledge, skills and attitudes that give them the very best chance of staying active throughout their lives.

When a child has confidence in his or her ability to take part in recreational and sporting activities, the probability that he will join in is high. If he enjoys the activity, he will likely continue to participate. A child's movement confidence develops gradually as he grows and learns, and the child is constantly comparing his own level of ability with the ability of the children with whom he plays.

Physically literate children who move with skillful purpose know that they move well. This confidence encourages them to try new and different activities without fear.

Physical literacy also provides a foundation from which sporting excellence can grow. To develop the highest levels of sporting excellence requires about 10 years of deliberate practice. An athlete involved in sports such as hockey, alpine skiing and soccer must first develop and refine her athletic abilities before she specializes in sport-specific techniques and skills.

All too often, early over-specialization in a single sport leads to a failure to become physically literate, poorer ultimate performance (than would otherwise be the case), injury, burnout and early retirement from sport. Physical literacy is, therefore, the key both to developing habits of lifelong physical activity for enjoyment and health, and to the development of world-class athletes.

Physical literacy is the combination of the development of fundamental movement skills and fundamental sport skills that permit a child to move confidently and with control, in a wide range of physical activities, rhythmic (dance) and sport situations. Physical literacy also includes the ability to "read" what happening around you in an activity and to assess and react appropriately to those events.

Physical literacy is developed during the first three stages of the Seven Stages of Long-Term Athlete Development, on which the Utah Sport for Life model is based. These three stages go from birth to the start of adolescence: approximately age 11 for girls and to age 12 for boys.

The Right Start

Learning and practice of fundamental movement skills are the basic building blocks for the development of physical literacy. While it is true that many children DO develop physical skills on their own, there are many who do not; and for those the consequences can be severe.

Children who are physically skilled enjoy vigorous healthy play while the less skilled are often left out. This creates a vicious cycle. Those with the skills play, and through that play further develop their fitness and skill.

In contrast, those who are less skilled play less, have fewer opportunities to refine and develop their skills, and fall farther and farther behind their skilled peers. Eventually many of the less skilled children stop trying, and withdraw from physical activities that would help them become fitter and develop their skills.

To prevent this from happening, appropriate physical literacy needs to be taught to every child in Utah, which is where community recreation and sport programs come into play. Community recreation programs for pre-pubescent children could be organized to ensure that children are enrolled in general programs that cover a range of physical literacy skills, rather than single sport programs.

Sport programs offered by minor sport organizations are obviously going to focus on their own sport, but could do a much better job of teaching broad physical literacy skills (particularly in warm-ups and small-game activities), rather than teaching over-specialized, sport-specific skills in isolation.

What This Means for Parents

Ultimately the responsibility for developing a physically literate child rests with parents and guardians. Just as parents and guardians ensure their children are in learning situations that result in them having the ability to read, write and do mathematics, they must also ensure their children develop physical literacy.

Parents and care-givers play a vital role in exposing their children to all of these activities during the critical physical literacy years. However, in communities with limited recreational opportunities (and for parents with limited financial resources) this may be difficult to achieve. Therefore, school physical education and park and recreation programs play a crucial role in developing physical literacy in EVERY Utah child.

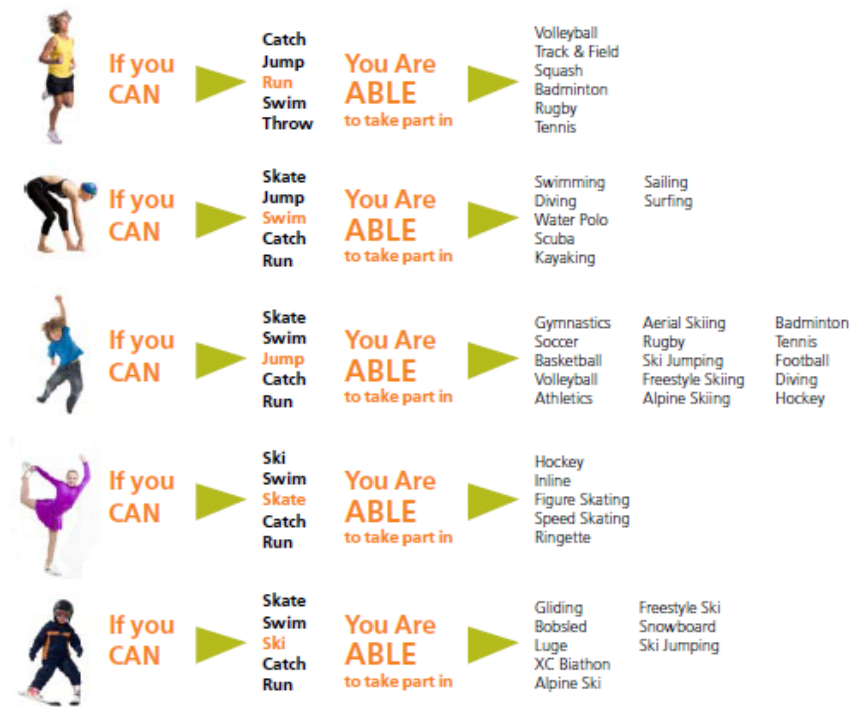
Building Fundamental Movement Skills

To become physically literate, children need to master fundamental movement skills. These are basic movements that are the building blocks for sport skills. For example: in this stage, children learn a basic kicking action with each foot. They kick a wide variety of balls and try different things such as kicking as far as they can, kicking to hit a target, kicking to keep the ball on the ground or high in the air. It seems simple enough, however, mastery of fundamental movement skills does not come all at once and we need to remember that children are not just “miniature adults.” The goal here is to help each child move to the next most mature version of the skill he is learning, rather than pushing him to perform the skill like an adult.

Building Fundamental Sport Skills

Sliding, gliding, running, jumping, catching, kicking, throwing, and hitting something with a stick, bat, or racquet of some kind, are the basic building blocks of the many sports played by the vast majority of people on earth. A person who can perform these fundamental sport skills well can learn to play many sports with ease. Making good decisions in sport situations is another skill fundamental to each sport.

The following chart illustrates the concept that by teaching children to become physically literate and showing them what they CAN do, they stand a much better chance of continued participation in physical activity and sport.



1:

The Difference between Fundamental Movement Skills and Fundamental Sport Skills

Throwing is a fundamental movement skill. A child learning this skill will learn to throw lots of different sized balls with one hand, or with both hands, and will learn to throw the ball at different targets at different speeds – sometimes for accuracy, sometimes for distance.

When the child learns to throw a baseball, using a baseball pitching motion and trying to get the ball to pass over home plate, he has moved from a fundamental movement skill to a fundamental sport skill.

A child should learn fundamental movement skills and fundamental sport skills in each of the five basic environments:

on the ground

most games, sports, dance and physical activities occur here

in water

basis for aquatic activities

on snow

basis for skiing sports

on ice

basis for skating and sliding activities

in the air

basis for gymnastics diving and other aerial activities

Research shows that without the development of physical literacy, many children and youth withdraw from physical activity and sport and turn to more inactive and/or unhealthy choices during their leisure time.

To promote a child's healthy and logical development in sport and physical activity, Utah Olympic Legacy Foundation acknowledges sequential stages for training and competition that respect physical, mental and emotional development.

This approach encourages lifelong physical activity for athletes of all levels of ability and also provides an effective route for those that choose to pursue excellence at the national and international level of competition.

The number of stages differs slightly between early specialization and late specialization sports.

SPORT FOR LIFE MODEL

The first three stages of the Utah Sport for Life basic 7-stage pathway focuses on physical literacy.



STAGE 1: ACTIVE START

Key Objective: Learn fundamental movements and link them together into play.
Ages: Boys and girls 0 – 6 years

From ages 0-6 years, children need to be introduced to relatively unstructured play that incorporates a variety of body movements. An early active start enhances development of brain function, coordination, social skills, gross motor skills, emotions, leadership, and imagination. It also helps children build confidence, develop posture and balance, build strong bones and muscles, promote healthy weight, reduce stress, improve sleep, learn to move skillfully, and learn to enjoy being active.

Physical activity should be fun and a part of the child's daily life, not something required. Active play is the way young children are physically active. Because this is a period when children rapidly outgrow their mobility aids, communities need to find effective ways — equipment swaps or rentals, for example — to ensure that all children have access to the equipment they need to be active.

Active Start Goals

- Provide organized physical activity for at least 30 minutes a day for toddlers and at least 60 minutes a day for preschoolers.
- Ensure that games for young children are non-competitive and focus on participation.
- Provide unstructured, active physical play for at least 60 minutes a day and up to several hours per day for toddlers and preschoolers. (Toddlers and preschoolers should not be sedentary for more than 60 minutes at a time except while sleeping.)
- Provide infants, toddlers, and preschoolers with opportunities to participate, rain or shine, in daily physical activity that promotes fitness and movement skills.
- Provide parents and caregivers with age-appropriate information.
- Encourage basic movement skills. These skills do not just happen as a child grows older. They develop depending on each child's heredity, activity experiences, and environment. For children with a disability, access to age and disability appropriate adapted equipment is an important contributor to success.
- Focus on improving basic movement skills such as running, jumping, twisting, wheeling, sliding, gliding, kicking, throwing, and catching. These motor skills are the building blocks for more complex movement.
- Design activities that help children to feel competent and comfortable participating in a variety of fun and challenging sports and activities.
- Because girls tend to be less active than boys, ensure that activities are gender-neutral and inclusive so that active living is equally valued and promoted for all children.

Early childhood educators have become increasingly aware that movement plays an important role in the healthy development of a young child. In particular, the development of rhythmic activities during this critical period assists in the enhancement of coordination, language and reading, voice reproduction, intelligence, and future complex movement patterns.

STAGE 2: THE FUNDAMENTALS

Key Objectives: Learn all fundamental movement skills and build overall motor skills in an atmosphere of FUN.

Age: Girls 6 – 8; Boys 6 – 9

Children need to participate in a variety of well-structured activities that develop basic skills. However, activities and programs need to maintain a focus on fun. Formal competition should only be minimally introduced at this age.

Skill development in the FUNdamentals stage should be well-structured, positive, and FUN! The first window of accelerated adaptation to speed occurs between the ages of 6 to 8 for girls and 7 to 9 for boys. Bypassing the specialized skill development in the FUNdamentals stage is detrimental to the child's future engagement in physical activity and sport.

No periodization, or time management takes place; however, all programs are structured and monitored.

FUNDamentals Goals

- Practice and master fundamental movement skills before sport-specific skills are introduced.
- Encourage participation in a wide range of sports, introducing children to the simple rules and ethics of sports.
- Teach the ABCs of athleticism: **A**gility, **B**alance, **C**oordination, and **S**peed.
- Using the ABCs of athleticism, teach appropriate and correct running, wheeling, jumping, and throwing techniques.
- Introduce basic flexibility exercises and develop speed, power, and endurance using games.
- Develop linear, lateral, and multi-directional speed with the duration of repetitions less than 5 seconds.
- Include strength training exercises using the child's own body weight as well as medicine ball and Swiss ball exercises.
- Ensure that sporting and disability equipment are size, weight, and design appropriate and that communities explore ways to share and provide access to appropriate equipment.
- Ensure that activities revolve around the school year and are enhanced by multi-sport camps during summer and winter holidays.

- Emphasize motor development to produce athletes who have a better trainability for long-term, sport-specific development.
- Participate once or twice a week if children have a preferred sport, so long as there is participation in many other sports 3 or 4 times per week to ensure future excellence.

For children who decide not to pursue the competitive stream long-term, the skills they acquire during the FUNDamentals stage will benefit them when they engage in recreational activities, enhancing their quality of life and overall health.

According to “The Path to Excellence: A Comprehensive View of Development of US Olympians who competed from 1984-1998,” youth sport programs that emphasize fun, enjoyment and love of sport provide a springboard for athletes to continue their development upward.

STAGE 3: LEARNING TO TRAIN

Key Objective: Learn overall sports skills.

Age: Girls 8 – 11; Boys 9 – 12

One of the most important periods of motor development for children is between the ages of 9 and 12. This is a window of accelerated adaptation to motor coordination. At this stage, children are developmentally ready to acquire the general sports skills that are the cornerstones of all athletic development.

From ages 8-11 in girls and 9-12 in boys to the onset of the growth spurt (usually around the ages of 10-12 for girls and 12 – 14 for boys), children are ready to begin training according to more formalized methods. However, the emphasis should still be on general sports skills suitable to a number of activities.

While it is often tempting to over-develop “talent” at this age through excessive single sport training and competition (as well as early positioning in team sports), this single-sport approach can be very detrimental to later stages of development if the child is playing a late specialization sport. It promotes one-sided physical, technical, and tactical development and increases the likelihood of injury and burnout.

- Change the training-to-competition ratio to 25:75, with the competition percentage including competition-specific training activities.

SUCCESS THROUGH COLLABORATION

Utah Olympic Legacy Foundation is excited by the opportunity to further collaborate on a project that not only streamlines our winter sport athlete pipelines, but also nurtures a community of lifelong athletes.

The success of defining a new model depends on every stake holder's commitment to making it work. Continued discussions and learning from one another as we put Utah Sport for Life strategies into practice, can only strengthen the overall system.

Utah Olympic Legacy Foundation will utilize meetings, summits, and the distribution of a future Utah Sport for Life resource guide as a means to outline added details of our discussions with a broadened network of organizations throughout Utah.

At Utah Olympic Legacy Foundation, we have set clear goals but know we cannot achieve them without collaboration with others. We look forward to working to address common issues and devise strategies that will mean success for all.

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

This document is our way of providing background information about what Utah Olympic Legacy Foundation has come to believe are the cornerstones of successful athlete development and how to keep participants effectively engaged in physical activity.

The Utah Olympic Legacy Foundation would like to acknowledge **Istvan Balyi & Richard Way**, the architects of "*Canadian Sport for Life*" & *Long Term Athlete Development Strategy* (www.canadiansportforlife.ca), from which the underlying sports philosophies and diagrams of this document are based. We also relied on its supplements, *Developing Physical Literacy* and *No Accidental Champions*. These internationally recognized best practices are used as the base of information for the creation of Utah Sport for Life.

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