

## Multiple Perspectives on the Organizational Implementation of an Athlete Development Framework

*Ryan Clutterbuck, Western University*

*Marie-Pier Charest, Université Laval*

*Patti Millar, Western University*

*Alison Doherty (Advisor), Western University*

*Guylaine Demers (Advisor), Université Laval*

**Management/leadership**

**Saturday, June 1, 2013**

**60-minute symposium,  
roundtable, or workshop  
(Room 416)**

**Abstract 2013-274**

**11:15 AM**

In 2004, the Canadian Sport for Life (CS4L) movement instituted the Long-Term Athlete Development (LTAD) model, a framework for elite athlete development and lifetime participation in sport and recreation. The LTAD is closely tied to the 2012 Canadian Sport Policy (and its 2002 predecessor), and the implicit notion that “Canada is a leading sport nation where all Canadians can pursue sport to the extent of their abilities and interests, including performing at the highest competitive levels” (Canadian Sport Policy, 2012, p. 5). The LTAD is intended to guide action at multiple levels of the sport system that promotes athlete excellence and an active lifestyle.

Ten key factors (10-Year rule, FUNdamentals, Specialization, Developmental age, Trainability, Physical/Mental/Cognitive/Emotional development, Periodization, Competition planning, System alignment/integration, Continuous improvement) are the basis for seven stages of athlete development in the LTAD, from Active Start (age 0-6 years) through to Training to Win (girls 18+, boys 19+) and Active for Life (any age) (Canadian Sport for Life – Long-term Athlete Development Resource Paper, n.d.). A guiding principle is the need to consider “the impact of growth and maturation upon the developing child/adolescent/young adult and the repercussions of ineffective or inattentive sport/activity programming” (Norris, 2010, p. 381). There are recommendations for training and competition at each stage; however, Norris notes that “the role and extent of competition through the various stages has been and continues to be a highly emotional debate” (p. 381).

For the most part, sport-specific LTAD models have been developed and are to be implemented by the national sport organizations, with federal government funding tied to that (Charest, 2012). Models, such as Find Your Edge (Speed Skating Canada) and Football for Life (Football Canada), outline both training guidelines specific to developmental levels and modified competition parameters such as rules, age classifications, and season length. To date, 57 sports have established LTAD models, with varying degrees of implementation through lower levels of the sport system. In the Province of Quebec, the Government used its jurisdictional right to allow the provincial sport associations to develop and implement their sport-specific models; thus, initiatives are developed and distributed from that level. In both contexts, the LTAD is expected to be implemented largely at the grassroots or community sport level. Thus, it is important to understand factors that influence its successful implementation there. Governments are often unaware of the onus they are putting on implementers, but community sport organizations need to be considered active agents in the policy implementation process (Harris, Mori, & Collins, 2009).

Most research to date has focused on the content of various athlete development programs (cf. Martindale, Collins, & Daubney, 2005), with little consideration of their management. Government policies are implemented by organizations, so it is useful to conceptualize implementation as an organizational problem (Montjoy & O’Toole, 1979). The purpose of this symposium is to bring together and present research examining LTAD implementation from different organizational perspectives. In doing so, the symposium introduces this athlete development framework that is gaining increasing international notoriety, and presents foundational insights into the issues, challenges, and effective practices associated with its implementation in the Canadian sport system.

The first presentation reports the findings of a qualitative study (Merriam, 2009) that used content analysis (L’Écuyer, 1987) to explore the particular strategies that provincial sport organizations (n=24) in Quebec incorporated in their respective LTAD models with the intention of successful implementation within their sport’s system. A preliminary survey and further indepth interview were undertaken with each organization for the purpose

## 2013 North American Society for Sport Management Conference (NASSM 2013)

of describing those strategies, their goal, their potential efficacy, and the factors that ease and compromise their implementation. Five broad strategies emerged from the data, representing Awareness (informing stakeholders), Education (training/development tools), Regulation (new competition and training guidelines), Administration (new structure and procedures), and Recruitment (of participants by level). A total of 66 different tactics or activities were identified across these broad strategies. It also became evident that the organizations tended to focus on Awareness and Regulation strategies in particular, which included various means of introducing the model to regional and community sport organizations and establishing new structures and rules in the practice of the sport, respectively. The findings have implications for the design and use of strategies for effective LTAD implementation.

The second presentation reports the findings of a subsequent study that explored the implementation process of an LTAD model within a single club in Quebec, specifically in the sport of gymnastics. The purpose of this study was to understand the process by which an established model is considered and taken up by a community level club. Observational and interview data for the case study (Merriam, 2009; Stake, 2005) were collected during a six month period, from the time the general director and head coach decided to adopt the model for their club until they were ready to implement the particular activities. The findings describe the planning process involved in preparing for the delivery of the new initiatives, and identify the particular strategies adopted by the club. The findings have implications for the important role of the provincial association as a support for effective LTAD implementation at the club level.

The third presentation reports findings of a prospective study of the anticipated reception to and implementation of the LTAD within one minor football club. Football for Life is the guiding document of Football Canada with regard to implementing the principles of the LTAD in this sport, but it has yet to make its way to the community level. Thus, it provides a useful context to examine attitudes and conditions for LTAD implementation in advance of that process. A policy implementation process framework guides this particular investigation (Skille, 2008; Van Meter & Van Horn, 1975). The framework contends that the successful implementation of a given policy will be a function of (1) the policy itself (its content; associated resources), (2) the organization (the amount of change the policy implementation will generate; the extent of organizational consensus about the policy goals), and (3) the individuals charged with its implementation (their disposition towards the policy) (Van Meter & Van Horn, 1975). This is a particularly useful framework for the examination of policy implementation at the club level as it focuses on those club level implementers whereas other frameworks favour the central level policymakers in the analysis of implementation (cf. Donaldson, Leggett, & Finch, 2011; Harris et al., 2009). The study, which is currently in progress, involves interviews with coaches at all levels of the club's programs as well as club administrators to determine their perceptions with regard to these factors. The particular conditions that may increase the likelihood of successful LTAD implementation are also explored.

Together, the studies provide a range of perspectives on the organizational implementation of the LTAD, with insight into the nature, use and (anticipated) efficacy of various strategies intended to promote its adoption. The findings of the three studies will be reconciled in concluding comments, including a discussion of implications for LTAD model development and implementation and directions for future research. The session is structured to allow time after the presentations for audience interaction and further discussion of the management of this, and perhaps other, athlete development framework(s).

### References

- Canadian Sport for Life – Long-term Athlete Development Resource Paper (n.d.). Ottawa: Canadian Sport Centres. Retrieved from <http://canadiansportforlife.ca/sites/default/files/resources/CS4L%20Resource%20Paper.pdf>
- Charest, M.-P. (2012). Long term participant and athlete development: Where are we now? Retrieved from <http://www.speedskating.ca/sites/default/files/125agm-ltpad-regionaldevelopment.pdf>
- Donaldson, A., Leggett, S., & Finch, C. F. (2011). Sports policy development and implementation in context: Researching and understanding the perceptions of community end-users. *International Review of the Sociology of Sport*, 1-18.
- Harris, S., Mori, K., & Collins, M. (2009). Great expectations: Voluntary sports clubs and their role in delivering national policy for English sport. *Voluntas*, 20, 405-423.
- L'Écuyer, R. (1987). L'analyse de contenu: notion et étapes. In J.-P. Deslauriers (Ed), *Les méthodes de recherche qualitative*, (pp. 49-65). Québec: Les Presses de l'Université d Québec.
- Martindale, R.J.J., Collins, D., & Daubney, J. (2005). *Talent development : A guide for practice and research within*

## **2013 North American Society for Sport Management Conference (NASSM 2013)**

sport. Quest, 57, 353-375.

Merriam, S. B. (2009). *Qualitative research: A guide to design and implementation*. San Francisco: Jossey-Bass.

Montjoy, R.S., & O'Toole, L. J. (1979). Toward a theory of policy implementation: An organizational perspective. *Public Administration Review*, 39, 465-476.

Norris, S.R. (2010). Long-term athlete development in Canada: Attempting system change and multi-agency cooperation. *Current Sports Medicine Reports*, 9, 379-382.

Skille, E.A. (2008). Understanding sport clubs as sport policy implementers. *International Review for the Sociology of Sport*, 43, 181-200.

Stake, R.E. (2005). Qualitative case studies. In N.K. Denzin & Y.S. Lincoln (Eds.), *The Sage handbook of qualitative research* (3rd ed.) (pp. 443-466). Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage.

Van Meter, D.S., & Van Horn, C.E. (1975). The policy implementation process: A conceptual framework. *Administration & Society*, 6, 445-488.