



Unpacking the Balance is Better principles

A guide for Sport Leaders
& Administrators

Sport NZ's Balance is Better philosophy has been developed by the New Zealand Sport System to support the culture change needed to provide quality sport opportunities for tamariki (5-11) and rangatahi (12-18), regardless of their ability, needs and motivations.

This guide has been developed for Sport Administrators and Leaders working or volunteering in national, regional or local (club and school) youth sport settings. In this guide are examples and ideas to help the reader to apply the principles of the Balance is Better philosophy. Ultimately, the advice has been targeted around designing and delivering youth sport experiences that:

- encourage young people to stay involved in sport for life;
- support young people to realise their potential at the right time;
- enable wider wellbeing outcomes to be generated for young people in and through sport



How to use this guide

This is a long-form guide and doesn't have to be read all at once. Use the principles to jump straight to relevant sections of interest and come back to other areas when you're ready.

What might good practice look like?

Below are some key ideas or 'big rocks' that will help sport leaders and administrators bring each of the Balance is Better principles to life. You'll find a range of practical examples such as tactics, tools and routines.

Lastly, it's important to acknowledge that leading change in youth sport can be complex and take time. We encourage Sport Leaders and Administrators to be patient with their efforts - *"Watch the compass not the clock"*.

Signals to act

We know that even with a good grasp of the Balance is Better philosophy, sometimes it's hard to know where to start in your organisation or community. Signals to act can be formed from behavioural observations, challenges to be solved or recurring issues that keep coming up. These signals help leaders and administrators take action in the right areas to make positive change.

Resources and examples

Resources to help understand and apply each Balance is Better principle, including real-life examples.

Important:

We know context will be different between sports, regions, schools and clubs. As such, alongside the advice in this guide and examples provided, sport leaders & administrators should also factor in their own local knowledge and insights.

Principles

Nine Balance is Better principles were created to support the whole sport system (sport leaders, administrators, coaches, parents, whānau) to think about how they can provide quality sport experiences for young people. These principles should help guide thinking about the design and delivery of sport experiences for young New Zealanders aged 5-18, so that these experiences:

- encourage young people to stay involved in sport for life;
- support young people to realise their potential at the right time;
- enable wider wellbeing outcomes to be generated for young people in and through sport

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**Quality experiences,
regardless of ability
or motivations**

All young people should receive a quality sport experience, irrespective of the level at which they are involved





Quality experiences, regardless of ability or motivations

Prioritising participant-centred sport

What does this look like?

- Your organisation 'looks beyond the scoreboard' to define success in youth sport.

This might look like:

- The growth and development of all young people (both athletically and as people), e.g. confidence, self-leadership, service to others, etc.
- Young people are staying in your sport programme.
- Young people are happy when they are involved in your programmes.

Importantly, your organisation measures itself against these other definitions of success, for example:

- Getting feedback from participants about whether they feel they have improved in their sport.
- Tracking rates of retention.

- Getting feedback from participants about their satisfaction; whether they want to come back; whether their families had a good time; whether young people have developed their character qualities (e.g. confidence, resilience, etc.).

Documenting this type of data over time is a great way to gauge how 'successful' your programme / organisation is.

- Your organisation documents the minimum standard of experience every participant should expect to receive from your programme, regardless of ability.
- Your organisation allocates resources (e.g., facility space and time, coaching expertise, budgets) in a fair and consistent manner for all youth.
- Your organisation reviews how resources (e.g., facility space and time, coaching expertise, budget) are allocated to different groups by ability, and motivation, and addresses inequities in allocation.



Quality experiences, regardless of ability or motivations

Prioritising participant-centered sport (continued.)

- Your organisation designs and delivers your sport so that it is age and stage appropriate.

Constraints that can be adapted here include:

- Size of field/court/space.
- Number of people per team.
- Equipment.
- Other rules are modified to increase ‘time-on-task’ for every participant.
- Ensuring all players get fair playing time and play different positions.
- Use of competition and reward structures are appropriate for age and motivation (e.g. consider adapting rules around scorekeeping, results, other measures of success, based on age and motivations of participants).
- Your organisation factors in participants’ lifestyles to inform how it delivers its programme/s.

Consider how the following barriers addressed:

- Time (e.g. when?; how long for?; what happens to late entrances?).

- Cost.
- Travel.
- Uniforms.
- Culture (especially for new people).

- Your organisation considers how it works with participants’ parents and whānau so that they can better support their children to have quality sport experiences (e.g. workshops, emailing key information).
- Your organisation understands how great coaches contribute to quality experiences.

Importantly:

- Consider how great coaches can be accessed by more young people (not less).
- Consider the role of coach development or developing a network of great coaches to support young people.
- Support coaches to view and value their role in developing the person (not just the athlete).



Quality experiences, regardless of ability or motivations

You know that being participant-centred starts with understanding your participant

What does this look like?

- Your organisation has feedback mechanisms in place to capture insights from young people about what they enjoy and don't enjoy about sport.

Examples include:

- End of season / exit surveys.
 - Observations and feedback from coaches, parents and participants.
 - Getting feedback from young people that have exited your programme.
- Even better, your organisation takes a co-design approach to design and deliver programmes, opportunities, events, and competitions.

- Your organisation develops strategies and tactics to recruit and retain participants with barriers to participate in sport (e.g. ethnicity, gender, disability).

Examples include:

- Developing alternative programmes and initiatives.
- Creating targeted promotion and marketing initiatives.
- Recruiting coaches who are skilled at coaching participants with real or perceived barriers.



Quality experiences, regardless of ability or motivations

Act with urgency if

- Your organisation has a narrow definition of success focused on performance outcomes and results. For example, the results of your school/ club in/across competitions is the only indicator used to measure whether your organisation is successful.

Consider action if

- Your organisation has not documented or captured how it defines success/quality with regards to the opportunities or programmes it provides. Consider using measures such as:
 - Rates of retention (e.g. '70%' or participants return the following year).
 - User satisfaction.
 - Feedback from participants.

- Your organisation doesn't get feedback from young people on the programme/s it delivers (e.g. at the end of season / end of the programme).
- Resources are not allocated fairly across the organisation. For example: competitive versus participation; women and girls versus men and boys.

Types of resources to think about include:

Budgets. Do some groups of people benefit (much) more than others when it comes to where money is spent?



Quality experiences, regardless of ability or motivations

Consider action if

- Access to facilities. Do some people get better access to facilities over others; or are certain time slots prioritised for some groups over others?
- Uniforms and equipment. Do some groups get access to certain equipment or the best equipment? Do women and girls get uniforms that fit them?
- Coaching. Who gets access to the best coaching?
- Photo and video imagery. Who is represented in the photos on your walls, or on your website? Who is represented in the videos and photos you share on social media?
- Your organisation does not support coaches with development or education opportunities (these could be formal or informal).



Quality experiences, regardless of ability or motivations

Resources

Participant-centred

What does quality look like for young people?

What does sport in a non-traditional format look like? Ideas for sport leaders and administrators

Setting coaches up for success – A guide for Sport Leaders & Administrators

Creating a positive parent culture: A guide for schools and clubs

Understanding the participant

Sport NZ Insights Approach

Examples

The Golf for Life insights project: How Golf NZ is helping clubs to better understand their participants

Case Study: New Zealand Cricket's new social innovation: Yeah! Girls



Safe, fair and inclusive

All New Zealanders have the right to participate in sport in a safe, fair and inclusive environment





You prioritise the safeguarding & protection of young people in sport

What does this look like?

- Your organisation has child safeguarding and protection policies and procedures in place. These policies and procedures are reviewed regularly (e.g. annually) and all members of your organisation are aware of them and know how to act accordingly should they need to (e.g. what channels to report through etc.).
- If your organisation leads a member network (i.e. has affiliate members, e.g. clubs), your organisation supports your network with education, advice and resources so that they can develop their own child safeguarding policies and procedures.

You prioritise equitable design and delivery of sport

What does this look like?

- Your organisation reviews how resources are shared between different groups (e.g., field/court allocation, money spent on uniforms and equipment, access to coaching expertise) and addresses inequities.
- If relevant, your organisation considers how space and facilities, and the design of space and facilities may be improved for women & girls, and people with a disability (e.g., are changing rooms adequate for women & girls, for people with a disability?; can space be provided for women only sessions?).



Safe, fair and inclusive

You prioritise equitable design and delivery of sport

- Your organisation addresses differences in the value and visibility shown towards different groups (e.g., consider how many stories your organisation publishes in e-newsletters, on your website, on socials about women & girls, people with a disability).
- Your organisation understands its obligations to Te Tiriti o Waitangi.

You ensure that the programmes, competitions, and culture of your organisation is fair

What does this look like?

- Your organisation protects against competition manipulation.
- Your organisation has transparent selection policies, that are shared with parents, coaches and participants/athletes well before selection processes begin.
- Your organisation has an induction process to ensure all coaches, officials administrators understand the club philosophy and expectations.
- Your organisation signposts access to independent complaints and mediation services.



Safe, fair and inclusive

Act with urgency if

- Your organisation does not have a child safeguarding policy in place. Or your organisation does have a child safeguarding policy but it is not referenced or discussed (i.e. “it is just gathering dust”).
- You have concerns or there have been recent issues around child safety.
- You aren’t meeting minimum legislative requirements.

Consider action if

- Your organisation doesn’t have a designated Child Safeguarding rep.
- Your organisation doesn’t have a way to regularly review its child safeguarding policies and procedures (e.g. standing agenda item in board/ committee meetings).
- Resources are not allocated fairly across your organisation, for example, competitive versus participation, women and girls versus men and boys. Types of resources to think about include:
 - Budgets. Do some groups of people benefit more than others when it comes to where money is spent?
 - Access to facilities. Do some people get access to facilities over others; or are certain time slots prioritised for some groups over others?
 - Uniforms and equipment. Who gets access to certain equipment or the best equipment? Do women and girls get uniforms that fit them?



Consider action if (continued.)

- Coaching . Who gets access to the best coaching?
- Photo and video imagery. Who is represented in the photos on your walls, or on your website?Who is represented in the videos and photos you share on social media?
- Your organisation doesn't feel confident that it can accommodate and provide young people with a disability a quality sport experience?
- Your organisation does not have a relationship with mana whenua.



**Safe, fair and
inclusive**

Resources

Help keep sport safe, fair and inclusive

Safeguarding & protection

Getting child safeguarding right – what sport leaders and administrators need to know?

Sport New Zealand Safeguarding Bite-sized Learning Series

Sport New Zealand Child Safeguarding Policies and Procedures Tool Kit

Organisational Risk Assessment Form

Equitable Design & Delivery

Young Women's Profile – September 2021 (Sport New Zealand)

Spotlight on Disability (Sport New Zealand)

Te Whetū Rehua – a framework to help play, active recreation and sport providers consider how they might design or adapt activities to be culturally responsive to Māori

Fair competitions, programmes, organisations and culture

Sport New Zealand Member Protection Policies and Procedures Tool Kit



**Safe, fair and
inclusive**

Examples

Safeguarding & protection

[Getting child safeguarding right - with Badminton New Zealand](#)

Equitable Design & Delivery

[Cameron Leslie: Paralympic Pioneer](#)

[Coaching young people with autism](#)

[Women aren't little men: developing female athletes](#)

[Girls Smash with Otago Cricket](#)

[MaraeFit Case Study](#)



Bold and courageous leadership

Bold and courageous leadership at national, regional and local levels is required to design and deliver quality youth sport participation and development opportunities





Bold and courageous leadership

The actions you make, in line with Balance is Better, are transparent, visible, purposeful, and accountable

What does this look like?

- The people who lead your organisation (e.g. board members, managers, etc.) are knowledgeable about Balance is Better. Importantly, they understand 'why' it is important.
- Change can take time to embed. Leaders driving change in your organisation are persistent and continue to reinforce the 'why' when they encounter coaches, parents, or volunteers that are resistant.
- Leaders stand strong when faced with criticism or political pressure to do what is right for young people and continue to push forward with change.
- Your organisation's strategic documentation is reviewed, and where appropriate realigned with Balance is Better.
- When thinking about making changes to the design and delivery of programmes, you consider how the change will be managed. For example, if you were to remove or change the structure of trials for an age group beforehand you should:
 - Begin by sending topical messages to all relevant stakeholders so they can become more informed. For this example, this doesn't have to be about trials per se, but could be information about long-term athlete development, or relative age effect, etc.
 - Consult people who may be affected by this change (coaches, parents, participants).
 - Identify people in your community who can be used as advocates for the change and inform them on the rationale for change and what messages they can share.
 - Make sure communication about the change refers to the vision or purpose of the organisation.
 - Be open to receiving feedback about the change.



Bold and courageous leadership

The actions you make, in line with Balance is Better, are transparent, visible, purposeful, and accountable (continued.)

- Your organisation values and makes time for your workforce (coaches, administrators, etc.) to learn about Balance is Better, as well as develop the skills and knowledge to support bringing about change aligned to Balance is Better. Examples of this include:
 - Promoting learning opportunities (workshops, webinars, etc.).
 - Sharing research, evidence, resources and case studies.
 - Providing the time and space for you community to think how Balance is Better applies in their contexts.



Bold and courageous leadership

Act with urgency if

- Your organisation is someway along the journey to bring about a large change (which will likely be met with some resistance) and no one has yet thought about how to best manage the change

(e.g. consulting with key stakeholders, sharing and communicating rationale for change with members).

Consider action if

- Influential people within your organisation resist change due to not understanding the evidence or in some situations gain personally or their family do by not doing what is best for all young people.
- Your organisation doesn't do anything to communicate with its members about Balance is Better or what good practice in youth sport looks like (e.g., sharing relevant content on social channels for parents, coaches etc.).

- Your organisation doesn't refer to Balance is Better in its strategic documentation.
- Your organisation has yet to turn 'words into tangible action' (e.g. changes to programmes, reallocation of resources, etc.).



Bold and courageous leadership

Resources

[Unpacking the Balance is Better principle – Bold and Courageous Leadership](#)

Read: [Collaborating for \(better\) impact.](#)

Examples

[Sports Bodies Join Together to Change Youth Sport](#)

[Canterbury Commits to Season of Change](#)

[Hawke's Bay's Top Sporting Codes Join Forces for Player Wellbeing](#)

[Capital Hockey: Addressing a Hockey Crisis](#)



Working together

Aotearoa's sport sector must work collaboratively to encourage the widest possible change for the wellbeing and sport participation of young New Zealanders



IMAGE
POSITIONAL
ONLY



You prioritise collaboration within your own network and more widely across the Aotearoa New Zealand sport system

What does this look like?

- Your organisation meets regularly with other similar organisations to share learning and best practice aligned to Balance is Better.
- Your organisation collaborates purposefully in projects aligned to Balance is Better.

Examples include:

- Summer and winter sports working together to address season-transition issues (e.g., season transition guidelines).
- Multi-sport delivery models.
- Sharing coaching expertise and coach development expertise across organisations.

- Monitoring and managing athlete training and competition workload.
- Coordinating meetings between schools, clubs and other providers to share scheduling and prevent overloading of at-risk athletes. It's important that these conversations are about the person, not just the athlete (i.e. ensure thought is put to how school, social and/or work commitments also impacts the schedule and loading of an individual).
- Your organisation encourages its workforce to collaborate within their networks and more broadly across the NZ sport system.



You value and work with coaches to ensure they can support quality sport experiences for young people

What does this look like?

- Your organisation invests time and money into coach development.
Examples include:
 - Employing a dedicated coach development role
 - Providing opportunities for coaches to regularly gather, share and reflect
 - Appointing a person to support and mentor coaches and provide them with a sounding board for challenges and advice.
- Your organisation encourages and supports your coaches to work with parents and other sport coaches.

- Your organisation invests time and money into parent engagement.

Examples include:

- Providing clear opportunities for parents to feedback on their experiences
- Engaging and onboarding new parents so that they feel welcomed and have a clear understanding about the values and culture of the organisation and how it operates
- Supporting parents to connect with each other, particularly to help manage logistics around youth sport; sharing your safeguarding policies and processes with parents, and making them aware of their responsibilities.



You value and work with parents and whānau to ensure they can support quality sport experiences for young people

What does this look like?

- Parents are viewed by your organisation (and by coaches) as positive contributors to the youth sport experience. For example, consider the language your organisation uses to talk about parents (do you “work with parents” or “deal with parents”?).
- Your organisation has a clear strategy for communicating with parents that considers the type of information, and the frequency, timing and channels for relaying information. Importantly engagement with parents is consistent (and not just a one off).

Example messages include:

- The values of your organisation.
- What quality sport experiences look like for young people.

- How you define success as an organisation (and for the participants you support).
- How parents can support their children.
- How parents can look after themselves and become more knowledgeable about youth sport.

Example methods for delivering information include:

- Pre-season meetings.
- Onboarding emails.
- Website page containing key information/ documents about your organisation’s philosophy and key processes.
- E-newsletters.
- Social media.



You value and work with parents and whānau to ensure they can support quality sport experiences for young people (continued.)

- You find ways to get open and constructive feedback from parents, for example:
 - Pre-season and end-of-season forums.
 - Surveys.
 - Club days where whānau are actively encouraged to attend (e.g. BBQs, festival type events).
- You consider how to support and improve the 'parent experience'. For example, supporting parents and whānau with the coordination of travel logistics.
- You acknowledge that parents are diverse (e.g. in background, level of understanding about youth sport, motivation for supporting their children) and factor this in to working with different parents.



Act with urgency if

- Your organisation shares participants with another organisation (for example, between a club and school) and your organisation and/or coaches have low or no awareness of the overall training and competition demands on these participants,

such as the collective training load, or schedule clashes. Where this does occur organisations should arrange welfare meetings to look at managing risk around overuse injury and burnout.

Consider action if

- Your organisation doesn't have a working relationship with other organisations that are co-located in the same facility or around the same space.

- Your organisation does not have a relationship with mana whenua.



**Working
together**

Resources

[Collaborating for \(better\) impact](#)

[Setting coaches up for success – A guide for Sport Leaders & Administrators](#)

[Creating a positive parent culture: A guide for schools and clubs](#)

Examples

[Canterbury sports MoU on season length and windows](#)

[Hawke's Bay's Top Sporting Codes Join Forces for Player Wellbeing](#)

[Season of change](#)



Collective attitudinal change

Sport leaders, coaches, administrators, parents, and caregivers involved in youth sport must collectively lead attitudinal change





Collective attitudinal change

You know that behaviour change aligned to Balance is Better is contingent on attitude change

What does this look like?

- Your organisation considers change management principles to lead and support communities and organisations to undertake change aligned to Balance is Better (see the resource on Kotter's 8-Step Change Model below).

This looks like your organisation creating time and space to consider and plan how you will go about implementing change.

- Your organisation considers behaviour change strategies to raise awareness and compel action by individuals and organisations aligned to Balance is Better. This includes considering how to best weave evidence and story in ways that are appropriate for the people you are targeting change towards.
- Your organisation works together with other organisations, sports, schools, etc. to reinforce the same key messages.

You understand how a whole-of-system approach is required for the Balance is Better philosophy to be realised

What does this look like?

- Your organisations recognises that changes to programmes, structures, processes etc. will require multiple 'points of intervention'. For example, delaying representative structures into older age groups needs to be supported with

good communication and messaging to parents, coaches, players; and an introduction of a new skill development programming.

- Your organisation works with all its 'stakeholders' to raise awareness and educate them about Balance is Better, (e.g. through coach education, parent engagement etc.).



Collective attitudinal change

Act with urgency if

- You notice a lot of actions in your community that are underpinned by win-at-all-costs attitudes (e.g. cheating, stacking of talent or poaching in young age groups).
- The language used in your community contradicts the Balance is Better philosophy, (e.g. "choosing one sport", referring to young people and programmes that they are involved in as "elite", or "high performance").

Consider action if

- Your organisation doesn't share any messaging or stories aligned to Balance is Better with its community (e.g., in e-newsletter, on social media, etc.).
- Your organisation only recognises and celebrates results based on competition outcomes (e.g., competition titles).



Collective attitudinal change

Resources

[Unpacking the Balance is Better principle – Collective Attitudinal Change](#)

[Breaking the machine](#)

[Good Sports: Making Sense of Youth Sports](#)

[What is a good youth sport experience?](#)

[Promoting Balance is Better Messages](#)

[Kotter's 8-Step Change Model Explained](#)

Examples

[The Golf for Life insights project: How Golf NZ is helping clubs to better understand their participants](#)

[Replacing Year 7 & 8 representative programmes with skill development opportunities for more participants – lessons from the roll out of Netball New Zealand's Player Development Programme](#)

[Responding to falling participation numbers in under-12 boys rugby – lessons from New Zealand Rugby in changing under-11 boys rugby competition structures](#)



Skill development for all

All young people should be offered participation and skill development opportunities





Skill development for all

You believe all young people should have access to skill development opportunities (not just the 'best')

What does this look like?

- Participation, development and performance environments (e.g., training, coaching, competition) are underpinned by evidence-based Long Term Athlete Development principles, and cater for more (not less) young people. This includes ensuring the design of programmes and competitions are appropriate for the age and stage of the participants and their motivations.
- The design of selection and grading processes (e.g., trials and team selection, position selection and playing time) factor in adults' unconscious biases and how to mitigate these (e.g., relative age effect, early maturer bias or political decisions).
- The impact of deselection on participants is considered in the design of programmes and opportunities. This includes, considering the wellbeing of individuals deselected, providing clear guidelines around reentry pathways, as well as creating alternative opportunities for those not selected (e.g. festival events).
- Different sport opportunities are available for varying needs and motivations of young people. For example, modified games and activities are offered to cater for skill development and to challenge participants at different ages, stages and abilities.
- Coaches are supported with coach development and education to understand how to take a constraints-led approach to coaching a group of young people with diverse skillsets at the same time.
- Coaches are supported with coach development and education to learn about skill development. Key concepts to introduce to coaches include, autonomy-supportive coaching, mastery climates and the Developmental Model of Sport Participation.
- Coaches are supported with coach development and education to understand and support the wellbeing of their athletes.



Skill development for all

Act with urgency if

- Your organisation runs trials and young people that are not selected are not provided with a programme or opportunity they can participate in.
- Your trials and selection processes only consider the physical, technical and tactical attributes of athletes (and not the social or emotional).
- Your coaches, regardless of age/stage, do not coach in ways that promote long term athlete development.

Consider action if

- Your 'top' teams are dominated by young people who are 'early maturers' or people born in the first three months of the year for their year group.
- Your organisation doesn't provide alternative sport offerings to cater for groups with different motivations or levels of ability.
- Your organisation doesn't feel confident that it can accommodate and provide young people who are 'late maturers' a quality sport experience.
- Your organisation doesn't feel confident that it can provide a quality sport experience to young people who have entered the sport late.



Skill development for all

Resources

Are we only supporting the kids in the top team?

What does sport in a non-traditional format look like? Ideas for sport leaders and administrators

International Olympic Committee consensus statement on youth athletic development

A guide to running good trials and selection processes

Examples

Innovative strategies to maximise youth skill development: Lessons from NZ Cricket, Auckland Cricket and AUT

Replacing Year 7 & 8 representative programmes with skill development opportunities for more participants – lessons from the roll out of Netball New Zealand's Player Development Programme from previous section.



Encourage variety

All young people should be supported to participate in a range of activities and play multiple sports





Encourage variety

You understand and advocate for the long-term benefits young people receive from playing multiple sports

What does this look like?

- Your organisation communicates the benefits of young people playing multiple sports and other physical activities with your club and community, as well as raise awareness of the risks of early specialisation. For example, winter sport coaches encouraging players to have a break and play another sport in the summer.
- Your organisation communicates with other sports and is mindful of scheduling events and trials too early or tournaments and events too late in your sports season, recognising the challenge this presents for participants.
- Your organisation develops guidance and education on sport specialisation; including:
 - When it is appropriate to specialise in a position.
 - When it is appropriate to specialise in your sport.
 - What support should be provided to young people that are specialising.



Encourage variety

Act with urgency if

- Programmes in your organisation incentivise or cause young people to train in an organised setting for nine months or more of the year.
- There is no support in place for young people who do begin to show signs of specialising early. This support could look like: monitoring competition and training load; ensuring good recovery (i.e. rest, sleep, nutrition); encouraging development in non-sport facets of their life; and encouraging them to try other types of physical activities during the time they spend being physically active, outside of said sport.
- There are people in your organisation or community who pressure young people to select one sport over another (e.g. you hear people talking about having to "pick one sport").
- Trials and pre-season activity or tournaments and events post-season are putting pressure on participants that do not allow them to play the sport that is in-season.

Consider action if

- Your 'top' teams are dominated by 'early maturers' or people born in the first 3-4 months of the year.
- Your organisation's programmes do not accommodate young people wanting to play multiple sports at the same time.
- Coaches in your programmes use repetitive drilling.
- Coaches don't let players play multiple positions and focus instead on getting results.



Encourage variety

Resources

[The value of variety](#)

[How to Raise a Generalist: The Key Lessons from Range, by David Epstein](#)

[How much is too much when it comes to youth sport? - A guide to understanding specialisation, playing multiple sports, and training load](#)

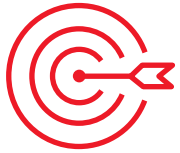
Examples

[Jeff Wilson's Journey](#)

[Temepara Bailey on why young people shouldn't specialise too soon](#)

[Playing other sports made me a better cricketer and person - White Fern Captain, Sophie Devine](#)

[Balanced development: Kane Williamson and Sophie Devine share their stories](#)



Talent ID occurs later

Talent Identification should occur later in young people's development; reviewing the role and nature of national and regional representative selections and tournaments is an important step in ensuring elite sport attitudes and practices are at introduced developmentally times





You recognise that talent is a complex phenomenon

Research shows that:

- Early talent ID is unlikely to lead to long-term athletic success.
- Early talent ID may mean those with long-term potential fall through the cracks.
- Early talent ID systems may lead to more young people walking away from sport.

What does this look like?

- Review the role and nature of national and regional representative selections and competitions.
- Develop and provide policy, guidance, and education to inform stage and age-appropriate talent ID practices within respective communities.

- Where selection processes and structures are implemented to identify talent, a broad assessment approach is taken to evaluate individuals' technical, tactical, physical, social and emotional attributes.
- Ensure that all young people are supported and stretched in quality learning environments with great coaching.
- Explore the use of innovative talent development practices in the design of development opportunities and programmes (e.g., bio banding, competitive engineering).
- Ensure systems are in place to engage parents and whānau to support their understanding about talent development and pathway opportunities.



Act with urgency if

- Programmes in your organisation incentivise or cause young people to train in an organised setting for nine months or more of the year.

Consider action if

- Your 'top' teams are dominated by 'early maturers' or people born in the first three-to-four months of the year.
- Trials are occurring before young people have had a chance to develop (i.e. before 12 years).
- 'Top teams' are introduced before young people have had a chance to develop.
- Your organisation sets performance KPIs for coaches working with youth (e.g. must finish top 3 at Under 15 nationals).



Resources

Are we writing them off too early?

Are we pushing young people to live up to our expectations, instead of their own?

A guide to running good trials and selection processes

Are we expecting young people to all develop at the same rate?

Why specialising later can reduce the risk of injury and burnout

Examples

Innovative strategies to maximise youth skill development: Lessons from NZ Cricket, Auckland Cricket and AUT on bio banding and constraints based coaching sessions.

Netball New Zealand Case Study



Balance getting better with doing too much

Adults need to proactively monitor and manage the workload (intensity and volume) of motivated young people to mitigate the risks of overtraining and overloading





Balance getting better with doing too much

You believe that athletic development and performance should not be at the expense of young people's overall wellbeing

What does this look like?

- Developing sport specific guidance/policy/ education about training and competition loads for young people.
- Education targeted at community (particularly parents and coaches) on how to recognise for signs of overuse and burnout.
- Developing and providing guidance and education to your community on what good rest and recovery looks like for young people playing sport.



Balance getting better with doing too much

Act with urgency if

- Programmes in your organisation incentivise or cause young people to train in an organised setting for nine months or more of the year.
- There is no support in place for young people who begin to show signs of specialising early.
- There is no support in place for young people that show signs of burnout, overuse injury or/and declining motivation.
- Your organisation shares participants with another organisation (e.g. club and school) and you have low or no awareness of the how other organisation's training and competition demands impact these participants.

Consider:

- Do you see lots of schedule clashes?
- Do you know the collective training and competition load of your participants?

Consider action if

- Your organisation doesn't share guidance with participants about good recovery.
- Your organisation doesn't have any policy or protocols in place to guide coaches, parents and participants around return from injury.



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Resources

[How much is too much when it comes to youth sport? - A guide to understanding specialisation, playing multiple sports, and training load](#)

[A practical guide for monitoring athlete training and competition load](#)

[Balance is Better at the heart of wellbeing](#)

Examples

[Erika Pedersen – Finding Balance](#)

[Capital Hockey Case Study](#)

Glossary



Competition & training load

Load can be defined by the sum of the quantity (how much) and quality (intensity and type) of physical activity in a given period of time.

Specialisation

Sport specialisation is defined as the intensive, year-round training in a single sport at the exclusion of other sports. The extent of a young athlete's (18 years and under) specialisation can be initially gauged by asking three questions:

- Does the athlete play or train for more than eight months per year in a given sport?
- Does the athlete have a main single sport?

- Has the athlete stopped playing other sports to focus on a single sport?

Answering yes to two of the questions indicates that the athlete has begun to specialise.

Early specialisation

'Early' specialisation is defined as sport specialisation occurring before the age of 12. It is important to understand, however, that just because a young person has reached age 12, does not necessarily mean it is now appropriate for them to specialise in a sport.

The appropriate time for each young person to specialise is context specific, and will depend on a number of things including:

- The sport
- A range of growth and development factors

We believe that for most sports the appropriate age to specialise will be much later than 12. In addition, we believe intense training in one sport at the exclusion of others should be delayed until middle to late adolescence (i.e. 15 years plus).

Sporting system

The sport (sector) system includes: National Sport Organisations (NSOs), Regional Sport Organisations (RSOs), Territorial Authorities (TAs), tertiary education

organisations, schools, and other organisations and individuals supporting athletes' development.

Talent

A dynamic, multi-dimensional aptitude. Through its very nature and the environment with which it interacts, talent is difficult to identify, let alone predict. Talent = committing to being good in the future. That involves

knowing the demands of your sport, understanding the development pathways, and committing to continuous learning and displaying growth behaviours.

Talent identification

Can be defined as recognising and selecting players/athletes who show the potential to excel on the world stage as a senior athlete.

Talent development

Has been defined as “provision of the most appropriate environments for athletes to support their learning and performance” (Abbott & Collins, 2004). Successful talent development consists of four aspects:

- extensive knowledge of the performance demands within a particular sport (sport-specific insight and knowledge, building an athlete profile).
- an accurate assessment of the athlete’s capabilities in relation to these demands.
- the performance planning, daily training environment and competition exposure to support athlete development.
- the ability to track an athlete’s progress and understand if they have the potential to deliver senior podium success on projected targets.