

Long Term Athlete Development



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The Long-Term Athlete Development (LTAD) model was created to implement general athletic principles in all sport programs in Canada. The main premise of the LTAD is to ensure that programs are designed to address specific outcomes for participants based on their stages of biological development. With this Canadian Sport Policy implemented across the country, Judo Canada has adapted it to make it specific for judo.

It is important to recognize that the original LTAD does not consider weight categories in sports, whereas the LTAD adapted to judo does. This helps balance any inequalities or advantages some children may have due to their personal rate of biological development.

This model for development in physical activity and sport not only provides guidelines for safe, enjoyable, and progressive pathway for athletes to pursue healthy physical activity, but also provides a pathway to excellence.

Following the guidelines in the LTAD enhances the quality of training and competition by taking into account the athletes developmental age and critical periods that are optimal for training.

It also takes into consideration the physical, mental, emotional and cognitive development of the athlete. The first three stages of the LTAD focus on physical literacy and sport for all.

The next three stages are critical if the focus is on excellence, but are optional depending on the athlete's personal goals. The final stage encourages life-long physical activity.

The principles of the LTAD are to develop athletic abilities by starting with fundamental movement skills and with the introduction of fitness and sport skills at the appropriate developmental age.

Each of the following stages represents a different point in an athlete's development.

Active start (Ages 0-6) - U7

Active play in a safe and challenging environment is the best way to keep children physically active.

U7 focuses on daily, physical activity in unstructured and semi-structured environments

The emphasis is put on learning proper basic movement skills. The objective is to learn fundamental movements such as running, jumping, throwing etc. as well as the ABC's of Athleticism which include agility, balance, coordination and speed.

In this stage the children link these two elements together into play. Participation in a structured judo program should be 1-2 times a week, for a duration of 40 - 60 minutes.

The activities should be designed to be non-competitive and foster participation as well as develop self-esteem.



Fundamentals (Ages 7-8) - U9:

This is a critical stage for the development of coordination and physical literacy. Basic movement skills and general development leading to physical literacy are most important, in order to then be able to introduce sport specific skills later on.

In the Fundamental Stage focus is on the ABC's of athleticism in a fun environment where participation is promoted.

The objective is to learn all fundamental movement skills and build overall motor skills. Children this age should take part in a wide range of sports instead of specializing in a single one.

In this stage, children will be introduced to the simple rules and ethics of sports as well as basic tactics and decision making



The Introduction and development of speed, agility and coordination can be achieved through the intermediary of games.



Children need to participate in a variety of well-structured activities that develop basic skills all while having fun. Formal competition should only be minimally introduced at this stage with modifications allowed to the competition rules.



Judo practices should be attended two times a week for approximately 60 minutes.

Learning to train (Ages 9-10 & 11-12) - U11 & U13

The integration of physical, emotional, cognitive and affective development begins in this age group. The emphasis is attributed to skill development and consolidation by focusing on aerobic and strength development according to the child's growth spurt.

While competition is important, it is learning to compete that should be the focus. The understanding of the concept of fair play and mental training are acquired at this stage. The objective is to learn overall sport skills.



Children are ready to begin training according to more formalized methods, but the emphasis should still be on general sports skills suitable for various other activities. Practices should be 2 to 3 times a week for a period of 60 to 90 minutes.

During this stage judokas typically decide if they want to pursue elite development or practice the sport of judo recreationally.

It is important to recognize that at this development stage the difference between the two streams (elite or recreational) is simply the volume of training required.



Technical, physical, mental and cognitive aspects of the program do not differ in the streams at this stage. It takes a great amount of effort and dedication for a talented athlete to reach Olympic glory.



The principles of training presented in the following three stages are relevant if the athlete has chosen to pursue elite development.

Participants who chose otherwise can continue their sport experience in the Active for Life stage.



Training to Train (Ages 13-14) - U15

Consists of developing sport-specific skills by putting the emphasis on endurance and strength training according to the athletes growth spurt. At this stage, children are ready to consolidate their basic sport-specific skills and tactics. Although we introduce in this stage the possibility of pursuing a career in High-Performance Judo, athletes still need to pay more attention to skill training and physical development instead of competition.

Practices should be four to five times a week from sixty to one hundred and twenty minute time frames.



Judokas should also attend six to eight tournaments per year with four to five bouts per tournament. Rules should follow the IJF (unless considered dangerous).

For athletes aspiring to pursue the high performance path, the minimum training hours per week are 8 hours of judo training and 2 - 4 hours of supplementary training.

Training to compete (Ages 15-16 & 17-19) - U17 & U20

The U17/20 stages emphasize sport-specific technical, tactical and fitness preparation.

The athlete must master the skills already acquired and continuously develop and improve new skills and techniques.

Focus is on strength and endurance training as well as advanced mental preparation in order to lead to an Ideal Performance State.

An individualized training plan should be developed for each athlete to address their individual needs.

Training must be year round at high intensity with breaks scheduled for recovery. Practices must be between 60 - 120 minutes, 45 weeks throughout the year (48weeks for U20).

In order to pursue the high performance path, athletes must train for a minimum of 10 - 12 hours of judo a week including an additional 4 - 6 hours of complementary training.

Athletes should be exposed to national and international competitions at this stage. A minimum of eight tournaments a year should be attended (10 for U20) with full IJF rules.



Training to win (competitions at the "Senior" level) 18+/-

When an athlete is training to win, the focus is on specialization, specificity and intensity. Athletes develop strategies and tactics to combat different types of opponents using their individual strengths to exploit their opponent's weaknesses.

Judokas must maximize all physical, mental, emotional and ancillary capabilities in view to succeed competitively on an international stage.

Judokas must follow a high performance athlete lifestyle with weight control and proper nutrition. At this stage, both world-class athletes with a disability and able-bodied athletes require world-class training methods, equipment, and facilities that meet the demands of the sport, the athlete and international competition.

Sport specific technical, tactical and fitness training must be administered 9 - 15 times a week at high volume with increased intensity. Complementary but low-risk activities for active rest and recovery should also be included 4 - 6 hours a week. A minimum of 10 tournaments per year should be attended.



Active for Life (for participants over 13 who not interested in the competitive stream)

Provides an opportunity to remain in or move into an active, recreational or age-group competitive lifestyle with increased participation in other facets of the sport experience (refereeing, coaching, instructing, administration). Different needs must be taken into consideration depending on the age of which the participant enters the sport.

According to LTAD, if children have been correctly introduced to activity and sport through Active Start, Fundamentals and Learning to Train programs, they will have the necessary motor skills and confidence (physical literacy) to remain Active for Life in virtually any sport they like.



For all of the judo specific objectives that must be attained at every stage, consult "Taking it to the mat"