

The Introduction stage of Basketball players. A view from Basketball Experts

La etapa de introducción de los jugadores de baloncesto.

Consideraciones de expertos de baloncesto

A fase de introdução dos jogadores de basquete.

Uma visão de especialistas em basquete

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Abstract: This study aimed to examine the introduction stage of basketball participants in countries that are ranked within the top 20 basketball countries by FIBA. Through the use of semi structured interviews, data was collected from 16 technical experts from 6 countries. We analysed the introductory phase determining: the age at which participants start in the programs; the different avenues or forms of entry in to the sport; the objectives defined and pursued in these stages; the structure of the competitive contests and the multi-sport involvement and specialization.

The data revealed an age range of 5 to 12 years for the introduction of participants to basketball. Various settings for the introduction in the sport were found to exist. USA stands out with a maximum of 7 options. Regarding the main objectives in basketball introduction, the data revealed a balance between the three learning domains, with a slight increase of the affirmative and psychomotor over the cognitive. In terms of competition there is a common standard across countries that contests during the period of introduction are focused in enjoyment and stimulation. Several strategies are used in all countries, (e.g. reducing the size of the ball, number of players, height of the basket) are used to accommodate the game to the children abilities and to the objectives of the introductory stage.

In terms of multi-sport participation and the ages at which specialization in basketball should occur, opinions are favourable to a multi-sport diversification, and the average age of specialization was 15.

Key words: Basketball; Long Term Player Development; Introductory Stage.

Resumen: Este estudio tuvo como objetivo examinar la etapa de presentación de los participantes de baloncesto de los países que se clasifican dentro de los 20 países de baloncesto superior por la FIBA. Mediante el uso de entrevistas semiestructuradas, se recogieron datos de 16 expertos técnicos de 6 países. Hemos analizado la fase de introducción determinando: la edad en que los participantes comienzan en los programas; las diferentes vías o formas de entrada en el deporte; los objetivos perseguidos y definidos en estas etapas; la estructura competitiva y la participación multi-deportiva y la edad de especialización.

Los datos revelaron un rango de edad de 5 a 12 años para la presentación de los participantes al baloncesto. Se comprueba la existencia de varios parámetros para la introducción en el deporte. USA se destaca con un máximo de 7 opciones. En cuanto a los principales objetivos en la introducción

de baloncesto, los datos revelaron un equilibrio entre los tres dominios de aprendizaje, con un ligero aumento de la afirmativa y psicomotor sobre el desarrollo cognitivo. En cuanto a la competición, hay un estándar común en los países definiéndose el disfrute y la estimulación como los objetivos principales. Varias estrategias se utilizan en todos los países, (por ejemplo, la reducción del tamaño de la bola, número de jugadores, la altura de la canasta) se utilizan para acomodar el juego de las habilidades de los niños y para los objetivos de la etapa de introducción.

En cuanto a la participación del multi-deporte y las edades en las que la especialización en el baloncesto debe ocurrir, las opiniones son favorables a una diversificación multi-deporte, y la edad media de especialización fue de 15 años. Palabras clave: Baloncesto; Desarrollo De Los Jugadores A Largo Plazo; Etapa De Iniciación

Resumo: Este estudo teve como objetivo analisar a fase de introdução de participantes de basquete de países que são classificados dentro dos primeiros 20 países de basquete pela FIBA. Através do uso de entrevistas semiestructuradas, os dados foram recolhidos a partir de 16 especialistas técnicos de 6 países. Analisou-se a fase introdutória determinando: a idade em que os participantes começam nos programas; os diferentes caminhos ou formas de entrada para a modalidade; os objetivos definidos e perseguidos nessa fase; a estrutura competitiva, o envolvimento multidesportivo e a especialização.

Os dados revelaram uma faixa etária de 5 a 12 anos para a introdução de participantes para o basquete. Foram reveladas várias formas de introdução na modalidade. Os EUA destaca-se com um máximo de 7 opções. Em relação aos principais objetivos, os dados revelaram um equilíbrio entre os três domínios de aprendizagem, com um ligeiro aumento da afirmativa e psicomotor sobre o cognitivo. Em termos de competição há um padrão comum entre os países centrando-se os objetivos competitivos na diversão e estimulação. Várias estratégias são utilizadas em todos os países, (por exemplo, reduzindo o tamanho da bola, o número de jogadores, altura do cesto) para acomodar o jogo às capacidades crianças e aos objetivos da fase introdutória.

As opiniões dos especialistas são favoráveis à participação multidesportiva e a idade em que a especialização deve ocorrer em basquetebol, foi em média de 15 anos.

Palavras-chave: Basquetebol; Desenvolvimento Do Jogador A Longo Prazo; Etapa Introdutória;

Introduction

The introduction to sport and the appropriateness of sporting programmes for beginners through to elitism continues to receive considerable attention in academic literature (Ford et al., 2011; Pankhurst y Collins, 2013; Vierimaa, Erickson, Côté, y Gilbert, 2012). The understanding that elite performances and elite athletes are the result of carefully sculptured developmental programmes has never been clearer. An increasing number of countries along with their basketball federations and in some cases governments now adopt and make strides towards developing models that improve their competitiveness. The ability to maintain high levels of performances depends on the existence of a luring, accommodating, developmental environment, together with supportive systems. Genetic predisposition to growth can be fully expressed only under favourable environmental conditions (Georgopoulos et al., 2010).

This study aimed to focus on the introduction stage of basketball participants in countries that are ranked within the top 20 basketball countries by FIBA, and to discuss these practices in the light of two theoretical models of athlete development. The Long-Term Athlete Development (LTDA) (Baly y Hamilton, 2010) and Developmental Model of Sport Participation (DMSP) (Coté et al, 2003).

Method

A qualitative approach methodology was used for the purpose of obtaining valuable insight from experts that are involved with the development of participants. The design was not aimed at quantification but to provide answers and an understanding about the way participants are developed. The environment through which players grow and develop was effectively explored through dialogue with the very experts whom actively create the environment. Such an understanding cannot be accessed through a quantitative approach. Through qualitative approach valuable attitudes and perspectives with depth and detail was revealed. More than the discovery of the behaviours of these experts was the understanding of the reasoning or circumstances that guided their behaviour as well as their feelings. According to Côté, Salmela, Baria, and Russell (1993), the main goal of the qualitative process is to reduce the amount of data and obtain a unified picture of the phenomena under study.

This study uses interviews to examine the participant development practices of six countries that are within the first 20 ranked by FIBA. Working within the constraint of different locations, the interviews were conducted over the internet using Skype; utilising both audio and video streaming. Prior to the meeting a semi-structured interview made up of open-ended questions was designed to explore the Participant Development practices within their federation.

Through the use of semi structured interviews, data was collected from 16 technical experts with four officials of each of the following Basketball Federation: Australia, Canada, Great Britain, Spain and United States of America which were nominated by their Federation. Qualitative inquiry typically focuses in-depth on a relatively small sample selected purposefully (Patton, 1990). For this reason, their selection was based upon their technical leadership roles because of their potential to illuminate the questions under study (Patton, 1990). Two pilot interviews were conducted to assist in the development and tuning of both the question guide, and the interviewer technique.

The contents of the transcripts were then analysed according to established qualitative analysis procedures (Côté, et al. 1989). The transcripts were then inserted into the QSR Nvivo 10 software for qualitative analysis. This software helped manage, analyse and report the interviews by classify, sorting and arranging information; examine relationships in the data; and keep a systematic classification of each meaningful unit and its source. Electronic coding makes the process involved with the presentation of data, relatively smooth, and facilitated the analyses to be carried out in more depth and generates invaluable reports (Basit, 2003). Two basic factors influenced the amount of emphasis that was placed on a specific topic. The first factor is the number of participants that mentioned the subject. The second is the amount of energy and enthusiasm that was generated from the participants. Whenever a specific topic generated a constant level of attention among a consistent proportion of the participants throughout the countries, it was highlighted. This is called 'group-to-group validation' and it is important in ensuring reliability and validity. To increase validity, the method of triangulation was applied to deliberately seek evidence from all sources (Patton, 1990). Further validation was exercised through participant checking (Quinn, 2002). This involved feeding findings of the analysis back to the participants and assessing how far they consider them to reflect the issues from their perspective.

Results and discussion

The introduction to sport and the appropriateness of sporting programmes for beginners through to elitism, continue to receive considerable attention in the academic literature (Ford et al., 2011; Pankhurst y Collins, 2013). In particular the early phases of intervention set the tone. The quality of initiation is therefore impactful considering, according to Georgopoulos et al. (2010), that genetic predisposition to growth can be fully expressed only under favourable environmental conditions.

We analysed the introductory phase of these sport programmes probing the following categories: the age at which

participants start in the programs; the different avenues or forms of entry in to the sport; the objectives defined and pursued in these stages; the structure of the competitive contests and the multi-sport involvement and specialization.

Age

The age at which participants get involved in sporting activity is significant for various reasons (physiological, psychological, technical, tactical, cognitive and perceptual), and it is a widely studied and debated subject. The data revealed an age range of 5 to 12 years for the introduction of participants to basketball and an average of 7, which is consistent with the two beginning phases of the Models referred previously: LTAD Model (Fundamentals, 5 – 9 years and Learning to train, 8–12 years) as well as the first phase of the DMSP Model, (Sampling, 6–12 years).

Avenues

The LTAD Model highlights the need for ‘creative environments’ and ‘fun based environments’ during the introduction to basketball. Likewise in its distinction between Deliberate Play (associated with the Sample phase) and Deliberate Practice, DMSP makes the point that Deliberate Play occurs in various settings. Côté (1999) introduced the term ‘deliberate play’ to describe a form of sporting activity that involves early developmental physical activities that are intrinsically motivating, provide immediate gratification and are specifically designed to maximise enjoyment but can nonetheless contribute to the development of expertise. Various settings for the introduction in the sport were found to exist as can be seen in table 1. Each Country indicated at least three of these options for the introduction to basketball with the opportunity for participation in any number of them. This is a very good feature that enables as much participation as possible. USA, the number one Fiba ranked country stands out with a maximum of 7 options.

Table 1. Avenues for the introduction to basketball according to basketball experts

	Australia	Brazil	Canada	Germany	Spain	USA	Sum of Countries
Biddy Basketball						U4	1
Boys and girls clubs						U3	1
Camps			C3			U4	2
Catholic Youth Organizations						U1	1
Clinics			C2				
Clubs	A	B1, B2	C1, C3	G1,G2	S2	U1	6
College					S2, S3		1
Elementary Schools	A	B1,B2	C3,C4	G1,G2	S1	U2,U3	6
House Leagues			C1				1
Mini Ball	A						1
Non – Governmental institutions		B2					1
Sport School				G3			1
YMCA						U3	1
Sum of avenues	3	3	5	3	3	7	

Objectives

As for objectives, during the introduction to basketball, both LTDA and DMSP define objectives that can be broadly grouped into domains: cognitive is associated with knowledge, affirmative is related to fun and excitement and movement and sports skills are related to psychomotor activities.

Regarding the main objectives in basketball introduction, as we can see in table 2, the data revealed a balance between the three learning domains, with a slight increase of the affirmative and psychomotor over the cognitive. This practice is in accordance with, Balyi y Hamilton (2000), prescription of a more generalised approach, with an emphasis on fundamental movement skills in the early stages.

Table 2. Objectives associated with the introduction to basketball according to basketball experts.

	Responses C=Cognitive – A=Affirmative – P = Psychomotor	Domain		
		C	A	P
	Just introduce them to sport	C		
A	Be enthusiastic... want to have fun... get them to like sport... capture their interest		A	
	Skill is for us to develop... develop them along the way			P
B1	To create a repertoire of tactics	C		
	The skills are the end product of that decision making... learn how to run, jump...			P
B2	Introduction to the riht tactic	C		
	Techical skills, sensorimotor			P
	More understanding that I have to stop the ball	C		
C1	Comfortable with the game		A	
	Dribble			P
C2	To catch... to bounce the ball... to mimic a shot or to put the ball to theheight of the basket			P
C3	The satisfaction they get in playing the game and the fun part of it		A	
	The ball in the basket is the primary pay off they get			P
C4	It is more for just fun and participation		A	
G1	Understanding of the game...decisions making... reading game situations... play with intelligence	C		
	Mostly coordination speed and agility			P
	Like moral rules... have a creative mind	C		
G2	Built up also of the personality of the player.. cooperation... being able to accept advice		A	
	Develop a certain skill level... take part in scrimmages...			P
S1	Change behaviours		A	
	Change skills			P
S2	Making basketball and its context as attractive as possible... commit to the sport in the long run.			
	Develop the hand eye, and the foot eye coordination without being to specific			
	Learn the basic rules of the game... and the values of the sport	C		
S3	Are willing to play and learn		A	
	Basic techincal fundamentals			P
U1	The ability to be a team player and to function within a team	C		
	You learn to be unselfish, to be competitive and to be passionate		A	
U2	Passion for the game... getting to like the game...		A	
	Skill development, ball handling, dribbling , footwork pivoting, then court shooting			P
U4	We were teaching them how to compete	C		
	Played that for fun... I wanted them to have fun...		A	
	Total	9	11	12

Competition

LTDA places the emphasis on development of basic movement skills and not formal competitive events between ages 5 to 9, followed by the introduction of appropriate competition, while maintaining the emphasis on learning. DMSP makes no reference to competition in the first phase, what merely suggests that competition is of little or no significance outsi-

de the perimeters of fun and excitement. In addition DMSP reference to deliberate play usually involves a modified version of standard rules, requires minimal equipment, flexible contexts and challenges, and allows children the freedom to experiment with different movements and tactics.

Emphasis in enjoyment and stimulation of competition and strategies are well supported from the data. Competitive contests abound throughout all the countries and there

appears to be several strategies used in all countries, (e.g. reducing the size of the ball, number of players, or the height of the basket) to accommodate the game to the children abilities and to the objectives of the introductory stage.

Multi-sport participation

Engagement in many sports during childhood appears to meet the approval of many researchers. It appears that early diversification is most beneficial when children begin their involvement in organized sports and are learning new skills and once these general adaptations have been made, training adaptations become much more specific in nature and more difficult to attain thereby shifting the need for training to become more specific and deliberate (Baker et al., 2009). This is in sync with the long-term concepts of the LTAD and the Sampling phase of the DMSP. There is no clearer understanding of multiple sports engagement than the beginning phase of DMSP; 'Sampling'. It is self-explanatory. Here children are given the opportunity to sample a range of sports and develop a foundation of fundamental movement skills. LTAD is not left on its own here. In fact, LTAD's key points include sampling a wide range of movement activities. No sport-specific specialisation but rather a multi-skills approach aimed at developing basic movement skills that is achieved through participation in many different activities.

From the data, in terms of multi-sport participation and the ages at which specialization in basketball should occur, opinions were in general favourable to a multi-sport diversification, with only one expert showing some concerns with that option. The average age of specialization was 15. These two factors are in accordance with both models which refer that a youth sport specialization may have detrimental implications for long-term sport involvement.

Conclusions and practical implications

The data support the emphasis on a broad and generalized introduction to the sport. The introductory phase sets the tone for the long term development of participants. The data revealed an age range of 5 to 12 years for the introduction of participants to basketball which is consistent with the two beginning phases of the LTAD Model as well as the first phase of the DMSP Model. Both models highlight the need for various settings characterised as 'creative and fun-based environments' during introduction. Each Country indicated at least three of the thirteen avenues that were identified for the introduction. Regarding the objectives, the data revealed a balance between the learning domains; cognitive, affective and psychomotor. The data supports the emphasis on development and learning coupled with the gradual introduction of appropriate competition as is outlined in the models. There exists the common sentiment among the countries that competitive contests during the period of introduction are for enjoyment and stimulation. This is demonstrated through a number of accommodations and adjustments; duration of the game, equipment, playing time, rules, playing area, strategy and officiating. Multi-sport participation and a later specialization seems to be the norm in these countries. Consistent with the models, the data offer the range of 11 to 19 with an average of 15 years for the specialisation in Basketball.

We have found great similarities in the introductory stages of the development model of the countries in our sample with the theoretical models referred, suggesting therefore the applicability and overall long term development success of such models. Countries looking to implement or restructure a long term development program are advised to take these considerations into account, making sure that the introductory stage is the basis from where the rest of the program can build itself in time. Further studies can, following the same methodology, focus their attention on the next stages of development and their specificities mainly the specialization and competition stage.

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