



To develop athletes over the long term requires careful planning. The goal of long-term athlete development (LTAD) is to provide a clear path to better sport, greater health, and higher achievement. The Canadian Sport for Life organization provides a comprehensive LTAD framework for children, youth and adults to do the correct things at the right time to develop in their sport or activity. Many sports within Canada have successfully adopted a LTAD model. WMSC will be changing the program structure from age category (i.e., two-year U groupings) to a comprehensive structure that adopts a LTAD model. The new structure will consider the long-term development of athletes, sporting age and development along with chronological age.

Why the change? It is now well known that children and adults will get active, stay active, and reach the greatest heights of sport achievement if they do the right things at the right times. This is the logic behind the LTAD model.

What will the change look like? By using the stages of development as outlined in the LTAD models training groups will work together to encompass more years (four) than the previously used two-year span. This will have the greatest impact in the Train to Train stage where there will be greater interaction between U14 and U16 athletes. This better accommodates the individual growth and maturity rates of athletes and the individual skiing ability based on 'time on task' and athletic history.

Athletes will be grouped according to their ability within each stage of development and will also be influenced to some extent by program (core / extended) and will be around 6 athletes per coach. These groups will continue to use the defined FIS age groupings in order to ensure consistency with the coach during training and racing through the season. However, these smaller groups will work together within the stages of development during training periods to ensure that the task is appropriate for the needs and ability of the athlete. The grouping of athletes within each stage of development will be continually adjusted at 3-4 periods throughout the year based on times in WMSC 'in-house' racing.

Hopefully this helps everyone understand the change and the structure of the program moving forward. We will be covering more topics in the future to ensure we are all on the same page. It is recognized that changes will bring questions, therefore please reach out to Mark at [marktilston@wmsc.info](mailto:marktilston@wmsc.info).



**1. LEARN TO TRAIN.** Within the LTAD model the Learn to Train stage is very important for two reasons. First, it is a stage where skills training and motor control are developed. Second, it becomes a time when children learn to have fun practicing skills and seeing improvement. Children grow physically and mentally at different rates. There is often a ‘growth spurt’ where physical growth occurs at a fast pace and is often accompanied by a disruption in coordination, which makes acquiring new skills difficult. The Learn to Train stage encourages children to play different sports throughout the year in addition to skiing. This fosters a sense of confidence and helps to build fundamental movement skills. The focus is spent on practice and less on formal competitions. At this stage it is important to recognize that children will have begun to establish what sports and activities they prefer, and they should be provided opportunities to participate in multiple sports and not yet focus on only one sport for an entire year.

**2. TRAIN TO TRAIN.** The Train to Train stage of LTAD includes girls and boys of different ages (females 11-15, males 12-16). This is done to account for the fact that there are sex-based differences in growth and maturation and this can affect training for sport and vice versa. It is important to recognize that there are also significant differences between children with respect to growth. It is expected that athletes are entering their growth spurt during this stage and this can occur at very different rates. During a period of significant growth motor skills and movement abilities can be negatively affected (temporarily) and athletes, coaches and parents need to appreciate this is often a normal part of biological growth. The Train to Train stage is critical in the development of the athlete. Athletes may have already developed a high attitude, but it is important to emphasize training skills and physical capacities. To maximize their long-term potential, winning should remain a secondary emphasis.

**3. TRAIN TO COMPETE.** The Train to Compete stage of LTAD is designed to teach the athlete how to cope (and hopefully excel) with the distractions of elite sport, such as travel, weather, different competition venues, etc. Here, the emphasis is on the athlete’s physical, mental, cognitive, and emotional capacities of the athlete in addition to the foundational skills obtained in the Learn to Train and Train to Train stages. This stage provides year-round sport-specific training with an emphasis on optimal preparation for high level competition. Coaches work with athletes to develop a periodized training and competition during this stage. An important feature of this stage is to refine individual programs with respect to fitness, recovery, and mental preparation along with continued technical development. An emphasis is individual preparation that recognizes the strengths and weaknesses of the athlete. A focus for the athlete is consistency in performance in both training and competition.