



NETBALL
NEW ZEALAND

Player development and specialisation

There is much discussion around when young players should start specialising in sport and whether developing “talented” young players at an early age actually leads to high performance or becoming the next Silver Fern.

Sport New Zealand Talent Plan

Sport NZ has undertaken extensive research and engagement both internationally and nationally to develop the Talent Plan.

The Plan was released in July 2016 and provides the mandate and direction for sports to take bold and courageous steps to make changes to pathways and competition structures to ensure:

- More kids stay involved in sport
- Those with potential for the future are able to realise that potential later in life as a senior athlete (to be able to win when it counts)

Three firm messages sit in the Talent Plan

- Early specialisation in sport is not good (we encourage kids to play multiple sports)
- In most case childhood success does not lead to adult success.
- Successful adults don't focus on winning...they focus on development and getting better.

Check out this link to see the [first of three videos](#) that help to help debunk common myths of Talent Development

What does this mean for Netball?

We know that Netball is a late specialisation sport requiring a more generalised approach to early training, with the emphasis on the development of general, fundamental motor skills and technical/tactical skills.

The key messages at junior level are:

- ✓ Focus on individual development and developing all players.
- ✓ Focus on having fun so interest is maintained until players are at an age and stage to specialise.
- ✓ Junior players should be encouraged to participate in a wide range of sporting activities.

- ✓ Expose players to as many different Netball experiences as possible (rotate position and teams).
- ✓ Be mindful that players develop differently and at different rates (early vs. late development). Research evidence has clearly shown that at youth level it is often the early developer (taller, bigger, stronger kid) who is selected over the late developer. However, it doesn't always stay like this when maturation evens out and the kids become adults! Those that mature early are viewed as talented as a youth yet may not be as talented or able to maintain this advantage in the long-term, when development is finished and everything evens out.
- ✓ Ensure programmes and tournament structures allow a broad base of players to have opportunities to develop. I.e. School based entries.
- ✓ Provide development programmes for all players that focus on holistic development in an inclusive and fun environment.
- ✓ Be patient, leave decisions about specialisation as late as possible. Commence talent development once players reach high school.

References

Sport New Zealand Talent Plan

<http://www.sportnz.org.nz/assets/Uploads/SportNZ-TalentPlan-v01.pdf>

Balance is Better

<http://www.sportnz.org.nz/assets/Uploads/SportNZ-BalencelsBetter-v01.pdf>