

An athlete's long term development "the integral preparation of the developing player"

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ABSTRACT

Tennis is a sport that requires the combination of general and specific skills. Traditionally, when talking about the preparation of an athlete, one usually refers to his physical preparation giving an added value to the preparation of the "body or the physical aspect". This article intends to provide an approach in which the preparation of the player is an integral method. It includes a physical conditioning programme delivered at the tennis schools and will be the foundation for the long term development of an athlete.

Key words: integral preparation, movement, coordination, athlete

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INTRODUCTION

It is interesting to see the skills that a tennis player produces for each point: from using his perceptive skills to get as much information as possible from the incoming ball; movement skills to react and to choose a direction (generally variable) towards the bouncing ball, and stopping skills and specific adjustment to impact the ball, to using all his coordination and technical skills to make an accurate shot. All this is governed by a cognitive process of decision making that helps a tennis player hit the ball as quickly as possible to the other side, making it difficult for his opponent to retrieve the ball. The skills above must be practised continuously in milliseconds and must last over approximately 90 minutes, equivalent to the duration of a match.

That is why a coach should propose an integral preparation for the players, in which physical conditioning includes not only the physical-motor aspects, but, at the same time, perceptive aspects and decision making that can include the specific problems of the game.

Research on the player development process states that to reach elite levels it is necessary to train between eight and twelve years (Bloom, 1985; Ericsson et al. 1993; Ericsson and Charness, 1994). This is called the 10 year or 10,000 hour rule. For athletes, coaches and parents, this means training three hours a day, during ten years (Salmela, 1998). On the other hand, in many cases, working targets are set for the short term. However it is my belief that to develop elite athletes in all sports, it is necessary to make a long term training commitment.

Having made a short introduction, I would like to focus on the first stages of a player's development, since many of the above mentioned skills are work-sensitive phases or apparent from an early age. In general, there are no physical-motor programmes in tennis schools, nor do they integrate perception, or visual components or the like.

body movement and dynamic activities. It is for this reason that I consider it key to include motor development related activities at tennis schools. The development of basic motor skills, coordination skills and perceptive - motor adjustments are the ideal complement and the basis for the development of more specific and complex skills, such as sport technique.

PROPOSED METHODOLOGY

The road to the integral preparation of the player is presented by developing 3 axes that are progressively integrated, according to the development stage of the player.

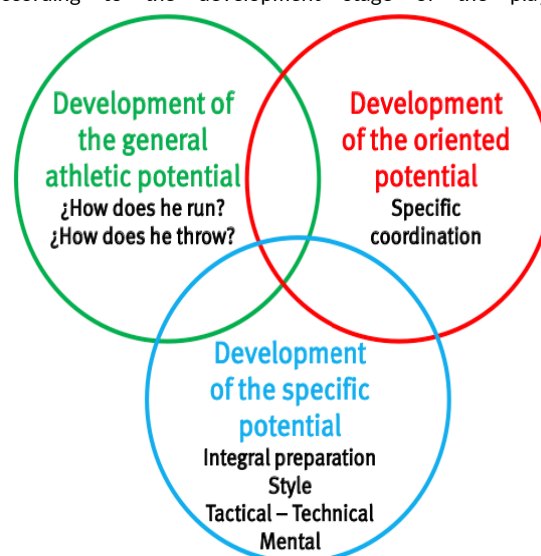


Figure 1. Tennis school model implementation.

The new pupil and his/her relationship with movement

Because of the technological advances, kids receive a number of stimuli (most of them visual) that restrict them mostly to sedentary and passive activities, instead of being involved in

DEVELOPMENT OF THE GENERAL ATHLETIC POTENTIAL

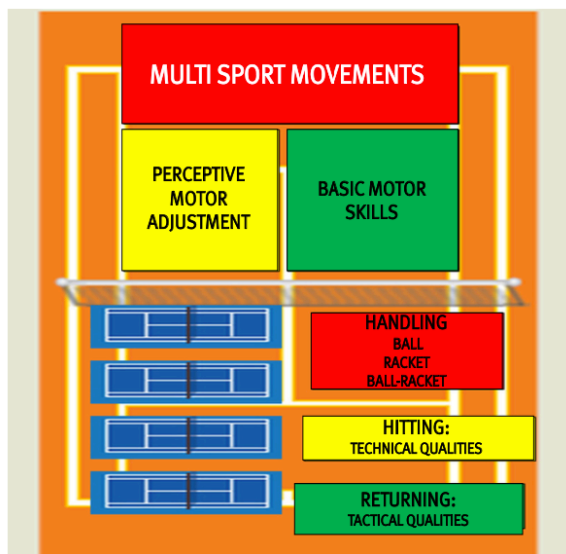


Figure 2. Application of integral development plan during the first stages of tennis school.

Proposed work:

- 1) The game as the main focus of this stage: All activities are within the structure of the game. Other sports are included in the tennis lessons, adapting the rules to be able to practice them on a tennis court. The inclusion of other sports lets the child work motor development, solve problematic situations and practice decision making (sports like football, hockey, basketball, baseball are included).
- 2) Development of basic motor skills: The practice and combination of motor skills is a fundamental pillar to learn more complex ones, such as sport techniques (with emphasis on movement, throwing and receiving skills).
- 3) Motor perceptive adjustment: These tasks are related to the knowledge of one's own body and its relation with time, space, and objects. This contributes greatly to the manipulation of complex elements like the ball and the racket simultaneously. During this stage everything is adapted to the child through the game and amusing competitions, always respecting the individuality and personal experience of each child.

DEVELOPMENT OF THE ORIENTED POTENTIAL

During this period the work is oriented towards the specificity of the sport, and in line with the athletic potential developed in the previous stage.

Proposed work:

- 1) Development of coordination skills: They are fundamental at this stage and the progression of the activities is the following:
 - Development of a specific skill
 - Combination of 2 or more skills.
 - With a specific orientation (Ex. Service).
 - Combining a conditional capacity.
- 2) Simple complexity circuits: It consists of a series of circuits that combine general and specific skills that include game situations like changing direction, reacting to a stimulus, deceleration, playing accurately, etc.
- 3) Multi- complexity circuits: They consist of organisation exercises that are similar to the previous ones, but with the added value of decision making and adaptation to a specific game situation.

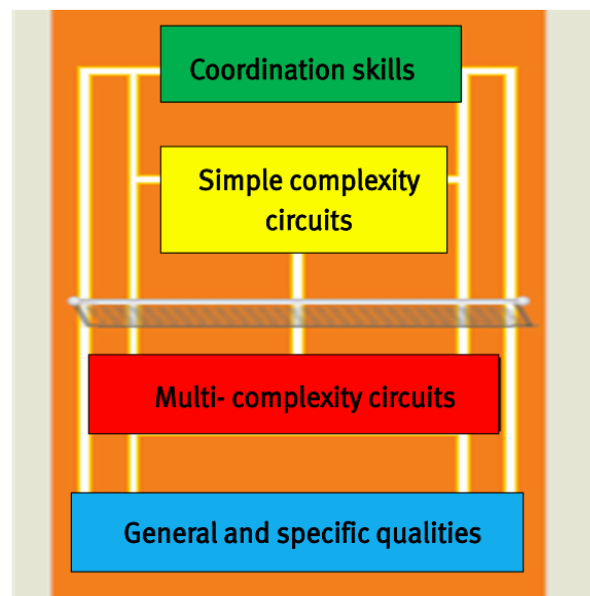


Figure 3. Development of oriented potential.

- 4) General and specific qualities: Exercises for the integral development of capabilities, including technique of the exercises and proprioception and injury prevention.

DEVELOPMENT OF THE SPECIFIC POTENTIAL

This stage consists of the integration of all working areas (physical- technical-tactical-mental). The work is adapted to the style and individual needs of the players.

- 1) Planning work according to the competition calendar.
- 2) Specificity of each capacity and coordination complexity.
- 3) Decision making, anticipation, peripheral vision exercises.
- 4) Injury prevention work.
- 5) Periodic follow up and evaluation of the player.

CONCLUSION

The methodology of an integral physical conditioning plan is one of the main pillars in the development process of a player. This programme can be deployed from the tennis schools up to top performance levels, considering the characteristics and the work needs of each stage of the player.

This work helps to adjust the traditional contents of physical conditioning to the current needs of the sport by integrating all areas, improving the dynamics, the creativity and the specificity of each coaching session.

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