

Your role in developing participants / athletes

We need to stop and think

We've got some **really good things going on in sport** in our country – from a large number of committed community sport volunteers to punching above our weight on the world stage.

But our world is changing - and **we're facing some pretty big challenges**: societal changes, the role of technology, a lack of physical activity and a drop in sport participation.

We need to stop and think. We need to question what is happening and how we keep our young people active in competitive sport.

What are we doing? What are the consequences of what we are doing? How can we do things differently or better?

Sport leaders play an important role in helping the sport system respond, especially around the support we give our parents and coaches.

Sport NZ is here to help, and we've got **a new way of thinking** we'd like to share.

Developing participants/athletes to realise their potential in sport and in life – winning in the long run.

Sport NZ's Talent Plan and accompanying document 'Balance is Better' help us understand what we can do to encourage young people to stay active in competitive sport for longer and realise their sporting potential in the future.

At the heart of this is putting the emphasis on the needs of the participant. Is the sport system geared up for meeting their needs at each stage of their development? Are our athlete's needs at the centre of your decision making?

When we dug deeper at what was happening in participant/athlete development here and overseas we identified three key issues:

1. **Childhood success is not a reliable predictor of future success**
We're all different, and our development doesn't occur in a simple straightforward manner – or at the same speed. We need our competitive sporting opportunities to reflect this, rather than over-investing (both time and money) in just the kids who show the most promise at a young age.
2. **Identifying athletes early and specialising early on is taking its toll on young people**
Too many young athletes are specialising in one sport in the belief this is the best way for them to develop into elite adults. In truth, burnout, overuse injuries and declining motivation are more likely to be the outcomes of early specialisation. We need to delay selection decisions, and find ways to keep more young people involved in a range of quality experiences in competitive sport – for longer.
3. **A focus on winning rather than development**
We need to stop focusing on high performance and overemphasising 'winning' in youth sport. This approach is creating a lack of balance and leads to high workload and high pressure for our young people too soon. A focus on development and getting better is what young people want and what successful athletes and people focus on.

18-24 year old participation has declined 13.9% in 16 years

To turn this around we need to work better with young people to ensure they stay in sport



Sport leaders – what you can do

As leaders we need to be bold and courageous to tackle the change needed. We need to know how to create and manage change in a competitive sport environment so that it provides appropriate, relevant, and meaningful development opportunities for all participants.

Here's what you can do:

- Provide more time to develop all kids – keep a broader base for longer, and ensure more participants receive quality experiences, opportunities and support
- Be patient. Hold off on making early selection decisions
- Focus on the appropriate development of all participants
- Cater for the diverse range of young people's motivations
- Promote the playing of multiple sports
- Find creative ways to re-engage the disengaged
- Put the kids' needs first – leave out the adult egos.

Remember why young people participate in sport – it's about fun, the challenge, being part of a team or group, being with friends and self-improvement.

Where can I get more information or help?

Visit www.sportnz.org.nz/talent to view 'Balance is Better', our full Talent plan and other athlete development resources.

As leaders we need to be bold and courageous to tackle the change needed

Findings continue to highlight some concerning themes:

- wellbeing of participants not being put first
- lack of clear leadership and structure
- lack of capable people (selectors and coaches at the development level)
- disconnect between NSO and regional/local practice
- lack of understanding and a number of misguided practices



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