



LTAD and Water Polo

Most parents and carers would like their children to be active throughout life. Concerns about health, crime and national well-being have brought sport and physical activity into the political debate. All this and a generally held belief that, taught well, sport and physical education can develop qualities like self-esteem, leadership and teamwork, make sport a potential force for good. Many people remember the fun of sport, while others with less enjoyable experiences might welcome a more logical approach to the development of their children.

British Water Polo is concerned with developing a sport that is sustainable and viable. It aims to create a model that enables every person who wishes to participate to be given the best chance to succeed at whatever level they aspire to – be that recreational or international. Such an approach requires the development of a well-researched and structured player pathway. Traditionally, water polo has had competition-based programmes (rather than training-based programmes). As with many other sports, far too little emphasis has been placed on aligning skill development with the developing maturity of the player. British Water Polo's player pathway tackles this issue through best practice at every age and stage of growth and development. It ensures that every player who wants to do so can start, stay and succeed in water polo, allowing them to reach their own potential. Such an approach to player development should ensure that success at the international level comes as a matter of course.

The British Water Polo model is based on Dr Istvan Balyi's Long-term Athlete Development model (LTAD). This focuses on ensuring that, at each age and stage of development and level of performance, players train, compete and recover in the manner most appropriate to them.

There are a number of important factors in the generic LTAD model and these have been incorporated into the sport-specific British Water Polo model. This means that coaches and teachers can train the appropriate skills and abilities for the age and stage of the player to ensure that the level and amount of training, competition and active recovery is correct. Coaches will know that they are working to researched and high-quality methods. In addition, revisions to coach education in the UK mean that coaches will be trained in the principles and detail of LTAD from the outset.

This leaflet shows how water polo uses LTAD to identify, plan and communicate all the elements of training, competition and active recovery for players of all ages. LTAD, used well, therefore ensures that water polo can attract, develop and retain players as part of a healthy lifestyle.



QUESTIONS

Is LTAD important in Water Polo?



How does water polo, which is a late specialisation sport, provide opportunities for young players who are 'late maturers'?

During age-group competition, water polo, like most sports, has traditionally selected the more physically mature players because they were biggest and strongest for their age. This has meant that the early maturers are selected for teams ahead of late developers in the year(s) above. These late developers then become disillusioned at younger players being selected ahead of them and may drop out of the sport. Water polo is a late specialisation sport (Olympic athletes average mid to late 20s for men and mid-20s for women) and it is therefore important that the channels are kept open for all athletes to stay in the sport until they reach full maturity.

The underlying principle of LTAD is to move away from this process of picking the biggest kids in the youngest age groups. LTAD identifies all athletes and details the necessary levels of training, competition and recovery, so that all athletes can reach their potential by the time they reach maturity – and not get left behind. It's a central concept of LTAD to recognise that different players mature at different times. We need to develop the potential in every young player on a long-term basis.

Will water polo clubs be able to provide the full range of training and support for all levels of player, but especially those who want to achieve gold medal success?

It is unlikely that many clubs will be able to provide the right environment for those with the talent and desire to succeed at an elite level. So Senior and Junior Performance Centres and National and Regional Academies will fill the gap. In addition, Water Polo 21, the Club development and accreditation programme, will help clubs implement LTAD principles and link with other clubs to create a support network.

Are there specific ways of developing and improving sports performance in young people?

There are two main 'tools' that should be used together to help every young player. The first is to teach skills at optimal times – that is when the player has the capacity and ability to learn that skill at the fastest speed. We know from research at what ages and levels different skills should be learned and the chart on this leaflet lists them. These times are called windows of trainability (or opportunity). The second 'tool' is to create a progressive training, competition and recovery environment that is properly planned for every age and level.

Are there enough facilities in the UK for water polo?

Facilities have to be affordable and appropriate to each player's level of development. The ASA's Facility Strategy 'From Armbands to Gold Medals' highlights the relevant issues of provision. Water polo will undoubtedly benefit from an increase in pool developments across the country. In addition, the use of mini-polo! by clubs and local sport providers, along with the provision of regional development and national performance centres, will help.

Will all coaches be qualified to implement LTAD?

New coaches will be trained under the UK Coaching Certificate and LTAD is a significant part of that training. Continuous professional development will ensure that all coaches are kept well trained and up to date on all aspects of LTAD.



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Based on the generic **sports coach UK** LTAD leaflet *Preparing for a Life in Sport*, which is published by **Coachwise Ltd**, this water polo-specific leaflet has been written by Anne Pankhurst and British Water Polo. The model included in this leaflet is British Water Polo's interpretation of the Long-term Athlete Development model.

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To book on to an LTAD workshop please contact the **sports coach UK** Business Support Centre and for other LTAD resources, please contact **Coachwise** or British Water Polo:

Coachwise 1st4sport
Tel: 0113-201 5555 Fax: 0113-231 9606
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PREPARING FOR A LIFE IN SPORT

A GUIDE TO GOOD PRACTICE FOR ALL PEOPLE INVOLVED IN

Water Polo

Administrators • Coaches • Clubs • Leaders • Officials • Parents • Players • Teachers



FUNDamentals • Learning to Play • Training to Train • Training to Compete •
Training to Perform • Training to Win • Retirement



In Association With

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FUNdamentals

Male 6–9 years
Female 5–8 years

Important for
Movement Literacy in a FUN, Play-focused, Child-centred Environment

- Focus on:
- swimming skills
 - 1st speed window
 - agility, balance, coordination
 - running, jumping and throwing
 - kinaesthetics, gliding, buoyancy, striking
 - catching, passing and kicking
 - own body strength
 - other sports
 - simple rules and ethics
 - simple decisions.

Volume/intensity and type of training

- High volume, low intensity
- 20% water polo, 20% swimming and 60% dry land including other sports.

Sessions

- 5–6 sessions of physical activity per week
- 30–60-minute sessions.

Training hours per training week

- 5–6

Type of programmes

- Quality semi-structured and progressive programmes
- Learn to swim
- Unlimited, informal and fun.

Coaches – experience and qualifications

Minimum Level 2, with experience of young players, assisted by Level 1.

Learning to Play

Male 9–12 years
Female 8–11 years

Important for
Sports Literacy – Skill Development, Building Water Polo Technique

- Focus on:
- FUN with peak development of motor skills
 - swimming and water polo skill acquisition
 - own body strength
 - core and joint stability
 - flexibility
 - warm-up, cool-down, hydration/nutrition (ancillary capacities)
 - basic mental skills
 - other sports.

Volume/intensity and type of training

- Low volume and intensity – swimming
- Low volume, high intensity for skill
- 25% water polo, 25% swimming and 50% dry land.

Sessions

- 6 sessions of physical activity per week (eg 2 x PE, 2/3 x 1st sport, 1/2 x 2nd sport)
- 30–90-minute sessions.

Training hours per training week

- 5–10

Periodised programme and competition

- Double periodisation
- Local and county Water Polo 21 mini-polo! festivals
- Ratio of formal competition to training should be 30:70.

Coaches – experience and qualifications

Level 2 with experience of young players.

Training to Train

Male 12–16 years
Female 11–15 years

Important for
Building the Engine – Sport Selection/ Talent Detection

- Focus on:
- consolidating sport-specific skills
 - endurance, core stability, joint stability and strength
 - 2nd speed window
 - developing ancillary capacities
 - flexibility
 - introducing tactics
 - mental skills
 - other sports.
- Individualise training as result of growth spurt.

Volume/intensity and type of training

- High volume, low intensity – swimming
- Low volume, high intensity for skill
- 30% water polo, 50% swimming and 20% dry land.

Sessions

- 7–9 sessions of physical activity per week (eg 2 x PE, 3/5 x water polo, 2 x other sports)
- Maximum 120-minute sessions.

Training hours per training week

- 14–20

Periodised programme and competition

- Double periodisation
- County and regional
- Ratio of formal competition to training should be 30:70.

Coaches – experience and qualifications

Level 3.

Training to Compete

Male 16–20 years
Female 15–18 years

Important for
Optimising the Engine – Position-specific Specialisation and Developing Potential

- Focus on:
- developing advanced sport-specific skills
 - position- and individual-specific physical conditioning
 - developing maximum strength
 - refining ancillary capacities
 - developing advanced mental skills
 - alternative activity.

Volume/intensity and type of training

- High volume, increasing intensity – swimming
- Low volume, high intensity for skill
- 50% water polo, 30% swimming and 20% dry land.

Sessions

- 9–12 sessions of sport-specific technical, tactical and fitness training per week.

Training hours per training week

- 20–24

Periodised programme and competition

- Double/triple periodisation
- Regional and national
- Ratio of formal competition to training should be 60:40.

Coaches – experience and qualifications

Level 4.

Training to Perform

Male 20–25 years
Female 18–23 years

Important for
Maximising the Engine – Gaining Experience at the Highest Levels

- Focus on:
- integrating and improving all physical capacities
 - individualised training of speed, endurance, strength and flexibility
 - core and joint stability
 - maximising ancillary capacities
 - ensuring recovery/regeneration
 - advanced technical, tactical and mental capacities.

Volume/intensity and type of training

- High volume, variable intensity – swimming
- Low volume, high intensity for skill
- 55% water polo, 30% swimming and 15% dry land.

Sessions

- 9–15 sessions of sport-specific technical, tactical and fitness training per week.

Training hours per training week

- 24–30

Periodised programme and competition

- Double/triple/multiple periodisation
- International
- Ratio of formal competition to training should be 75:25.

Coaches – experience and qualifications

Level 5.

Training to Win

Male 25+ years
Female 23+ years

Important for
Maximising Performance – Expert Performer and Realising Potential

- Focus on:
- integrating all physical capacities
 - individualised training of speed, endurance, strength and flexibility
 - core and joint stability
 - maximising ancillary capacities
 - ensuring recovery/regeneration.

Volume/intensity and type of training

- High volume, variable intensity for swimming
- Low volume, high intensity for skill
- 55% water polo, 30% swimming and 15% dry land.

Sessions

- 9–15 sessions of sport-specific technical, tactical and fitness training per week.

Training hours per training week

- 24–30+

Periodised programme and competition

- Double/triple periodisation
- International
- Ratio of formal competition to training should be 75:25.

Coaches – experience and qualifications

Level 5 with high-level knowledge and research.

Retirement

Important for
Identification of Individuals with Key Skills

- Focus on training:
- officials/referees
 - coaches
 - development officers
 - media personnel
 - administrators
 - recreational players
 - Masters players.

Volume/intensity and type of training

- Variable volume, variable intensity for swimming
- Low volume, medium intensity for skill.

Sessions

- To suit individual.

Training hours per training week

- 5–10+

Periodised programme and competition

- Double/triple/multiple periodisation
- Masters events
- Recreational events
- To suit individual.

Coaches – experience and qualifications

Level 4 and 5.

AS A YOUNGSTER, I USED TO PLAY LOTS OF SPORTS COMPETITIVELY. AS I GOT OLDER, I FOCUSED MORE AND MORE ON WATER POLO. THE WHOLE EXPERIENCE HAS BEEN A GREAT JOURNEY IN GETTING TO WHERE I AM TODAY.

Fran Leighton, GB Women's Captain



TO DEVELOP SUCCESSFUL SENIOR ATHLETES, THE FOCUS MUST BE ON LONG-TERM SKILLS DEVELOPMENT, RATHER THAN SHORT-TERM AGE-GROUP SUCCESS.

Nick Hume, National Performance Director, British Water Polo



TO COMPETE ON THE WORLD STAGE, IT IS VITAL FOR ALL OUR PLAYERS TO TRAIN HARDER AND SMARTER THAN IN THE PAST.

Craig Figs, National Development Officer, British Water Polo

