

EDITOR'S NOTES

20.2.07

There was an interesting email from Brian Richardson after last week's piece by Paddy Mortimer and the rest of the Leicester Tigers (England) Academy.

"I write with regards to this week's article in the Technical Journal (Feb 13th – Ed) by Carl Douglas and Paddy Mortimer. I thoroughly enjoyed the piece and most of it made perfect sense. I have met Carl before when he was with Gloucester and I believe Paddy may have been there too. Both gentlemen left a good impression with their knowledge and ideas.

I have researched a little into LTAD and found Bayli very interesting. My questions are:

- Who are the modern day products of LTAD?
- Bayli suggests that it takes 10,000 hours for a good athlete to become an elite athlete. That is almost three hours a day for 10 years - can we really expect children to dedicate so much time to training/playing?
- Would most parents allow that amount of time?
- Would peer pressure put children off doing so much training, being seen as some kind of 'geek'?

It is unfortunate for us that the infrastructure was lost within schools to maintain the GPP of children. I coach at Petersfield RFC and I am always a little dismayed by the lack of fitness from the majority of youngsters who attend any of my sessions. I find that it is the more senior players who are the most regular at attendance - and the fittest. I continually ask myself where I am going wrong but wonder whether the players have the attitude and commitment to train when it is cold, wet and windy."

If you want answers, always start at the top – so the Editor passed this one straight over to Conor O'Shea, Director of the National Academy. I had half expected the request to get passed on down the line, but Conor came straight back with some answers and opinions.

"Interesting, and I am glad that the article was well received and thought provoking. In a lot of ways Brian's last paragraph underlines the need to embrace the concepts of LTAD. To answer each one of his queries in turn:

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- The RFU academy system has been in place since 2002 so strictly there are no products of the LTAD model of 10,000 hours to achieve world class standards. In athletic terms, we know the eastern bloc look to follow this to the detriment of the youngster - but to them, results are everything and they *do* achieve. So there is a balance to hit.
- I agree that 10,000 hours are too many to expect from a kid with demands of school, but as Brian says himself, where has the commitment gone in the game? With so many diverse draws on kids' time these days we must, from an early age, educate them as to what is required to be world-class; we have to be masters of our own destiny. That is why the LTAD model is a good system to roll out. We may not get 10,000 hours but the closer we get to that sort of commitment, the better odds we have for success.
- No, but they would in golf, ballet or piano etc, but some may.
- Agree totally, but being the best demands sacrifice and, in this regard, kids have to be made aware of what is required. Jonny Wilkinson didn't become the best in the world by cutting corners. We live in a society of quick fixes and there are no quick fixes to being the best."

There are, of course, so many other factors that need to be considered. Do children still play outside in free time or is the computer age really overpowering? Do they have a bank of experiences of the physical life that children engaged in once, when running around, cycling, handling your own body weight when climbing trees, camping with cubs or scouts and just being generally active was the norm, if for no better reason than there was possibly not a lot else to do?

If the yardstick is what 'others' get up to, perhaps the struggle for excellence is going to be uphill until there is a massive sea-change in how youngsters spend their time.

So, coaches, you know where to send your opinions – but I'll remind you anyway. The email address is Keithrichardson@therfu.com

Keith Richardson, Editor.