

# 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?

Parents and coaches aren't the only ones who need to respond, but there is an important role for you to play.

And Sport NZ is here to help. In fact, 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 your child or 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**



## Parents & coaches – what you can do

Working together we can provide a positive sporting environment for our kids.

We can:

- Encourage kids to be involved in a variety of sports during their school years, so they experience a wide range of sporting activities, stay engaged and have time to pick the sport that's best for them
- Wait before selecting one sport and avoid forcing kids to specialise too early
- Allow kids to experience a variety of playing positions
- Be patient and focus on the long-term goal. Emphasise that athlete development can take time. Everyone improves at different rates.
- Provide positive support through the good and challenging times. Keep winning in perspective and focus on developing a love of sport
- Make the focus on kids' learning and development needs. Motivate our kids to get better by relating improvements in their performance to their effort
- Put kids' needs first. Leave out our egos – it is not about us.

***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](http://www.sportnz.org.nz/talent) to view 'Balance is Better', our full Talent Plan and other athlete development resources.

## Parent checklist

Is your child playing modified sport?

Is the field or court size appropriate for their age?

Are they using smaller or modified equipment, and playing under modified rules and scoring?

Is your child smiling and laughing most of the time?

Do they look forward to practices and games?

Do they want to play outside of normal practice times?



Community sport