



LONG-TERM PLAYER DEVELOPMENT GUIDE



The objective of Softball's Long-Term Player Development (LTPD) Guide is to provide a clear, well-illustrated pathway for player development in softball. This pathway will give each player the best opportunity to reach their potential, whatever that might be – club, regional, provincial, national, or even at the international level. This brochure is a brief overview of what is covered in detail within the Long-Term Player Development Guide for Softball in Canada. It identifies some of the key benchmarks that need to be in place as a player progresses through softball's developmental stages. It is important to realize that the pathway described and the ages referred to in this document are a guide to effective programming and that there is some degree of flexibility and an understanding of the need for individualization when appropriately implementing the suggested direction. The LTPD guide recognizes the need to promote a physically active lifestyle with informed healthy choices being made by all concerned and that the notion of being 'Active for Life' is a cornerstone objective.

A key component that must be kept at the forefront of any player development pathway is that development takes time. Statistics indicate that it takes at least 10 years of focused training and competing to win on the international stage. Thus the need for a LTPD Guide. The time between the ages of 9 to 16 is critical to laying down the foundation for not only a solid skill base in their development of technical/tactical capabilities but also a foundation for their physical, mental, cognitive, emotional and social development.

We also know through scientific research that there are "windows of trainability" where accelerated development can occur. If these windows are missed, it will be very difficult for players to reach their genetic potential later in their careers.

We hope that this information gives everyone a clearer understanding and ability to guide the development of softball players.

For more detailed information about Softball's Long-Term Player Development model visit Softball Canada's web site (www.softball.ca).

Active Start - AGES 0-6 (MALES & FEMALES)

OBJECTIVE

- To have fun while being physically active on a daily basis.

PHYSICAL DEVELOPMENT

- Develop fundamental movement skills (running, jumping, throwing, and catching) through play.
- Encourage being physically active daily for a minimum of 30 minutes for toddlers, and 60 minutes for preschoolers.

MENTAL DEVELOPMENT

- Provide positive reinforcement for effort to build self-esteem and confidence.

SEASON STRUCTURE

- Pre-Season: No pre-season recommended
- Competitive Season: 8 to 10 weeks
- Number of Practices & Games: 10 to 20 combined practice/modified game sessions lasting 60 minutes with fun, non-competitive activities followed by lead-up games.
- Frequency: 1 to 2 times per week

RECOMMENDATIONS

- Participate in a variety of structured and unstructured physical activities.
- Learn, practice, and master fundamental movement skills through the

process of play.

- Select activities in which success is high and the focus is on participation rather than outcome.
- Be a role model for your child. Be physically active with your child making it fun and a natural part of your child's day.



Fundamentals - AGES 6-9 (MALES), AGES 6-8 (FEMALES)

OBJECTIVE

- To have fun, develop fundamental movements skills, and introduce fundamental softball skills (throwing, fielding, baserunning, hitting, pitching, and sliding).

PHYSICAL DEVELOPMENT

- Window of trainability for speed (duration less than 5 seconds using linear, lateral, and multi-directional sprints) and flexibility.
- Develop strength and power using own body weight exercises.
- Develop fundamental movement skills and ABCs (agility, balance, coordination, and speed) using fun games and activities.

TECHNICAL DEVELOPMENT

- Introduce fundamental softball skills once fundamental movement skills are mastered.

MENTAL DEVELOPMENT

- Provide positive reinforcement for effort to build self-esteem and confidence.

SEASON STRUCTURE

- Pre-Season: No pre-season recommended early in this stage but progress to 8 to 12 practices later in the stage
- Competitive Season: 8 to 10 weeks
- Number of Practices & Games: 10 to 20 combined practice/modified game sessions for 60 minutes using activities and lead-up games. Progressing to 45 minute structured pre-game training session followed by a 45 minute modified game and then to a 30 minute structured pre-game training session followed by a 60 minute modified game.
- Frequency: 1 to 2 times per week for 60 minutes early in the stage and 90 minutes per session later in the stage.

RECOMMENDATIONS

- Encourage daily participation, regardless of weather, through a combination of unstructured play with friends and structured programs offering quality instruction from knowledgeable teachers/leaders/coaches in community

recreation activities, schools, and minor sport programs (at least 90 minutes per day).

- Play a wide variety of sports and activities while being sensitive to preferred activities and which include land-based, water-based and ice/snow based activities. Play all positions in the sport.
- Ensure competitions are structured around participation and having fun.
- Be involved in your child's sport experience. Practice the fundamental movement skills with your child at home. Assist the coach at practices by participating with your child or take small groups of four to six children and lead the drills the coach has organized.



Learning to Train - AGES 9-12 (MALES), AGES 8-11 (FEMALES)

OBJECTIVE

- To develop overall sports skills and softball-specific skills.

PHYSICAL DEVELOPMENT

- Window of trainability for skill development, flexibility and speed (duration less than 5 seconds using linear, lateral, and multi-directional sprints).
- Develop strength, power, speed, agility, and quickness using fun games/activities early in the stage and own body weight exercises, medicine balls and Swiss balls later in the stage.
- Monitor growth to determine Peak Height Velocity (PHV-maximum rate of growth in height or growth spurt).
- Encourage daily participation in numerous sports or activities and participation in 2 to 3 complementary sports over the year.

TECHNICAL DEVELOPMENT

- Develop fundamental softball skills.
- Follow a 70% to 30% practice to competition ratio to take advantage of the window of trainability for skill development and to ensure enough time is spent developing these skills. This is the most important stage for the development of softball-specific skills as it is a period of accelerated learning of coordination and fine motor control. The brain is nearing adult size and

complexity, and is capable of very refined skill performance.

- Ensure equal playing time for all players with players getting a chance to play all positions early in the stage and then encourage playing 3 to 4 positions later in the stage. Encourage all players to pitch.
- Focus on the process of the individual and team development through giving best effort and improving skills rather than on the outcome of games.

MENTAL DEVELOPMENT

- Introduce goal setting and guided decision-making.

SEASON STRUCTURE

- Pre-Season: 8 to 12 practices early in the stage and 12 to 16 practices later in the stage
- Competitive Season: 8 to 10 weeks early in the stage and 12 to 15 weeks later in the stage
- Number of Practices & Games: 10 to 20 combined practice/modified game sessions that include a 30 minute pre-game training session followed by a 60 minute modified game progressing later in the stage to 42 to 52 practices and 18 to 22 games, plus structured skill development prior to games.
- Frequency: 1 to 2 times per week for 90 minutes early in the stage and 2 to 3 times per week for 90 minutes later in the stage

RECOMMENDATIONS

- Engage in physical activity every day. Try different sports or activities at school, during physical education classes, intramurals, on school teams or through community club-based sports.
- Ensure your child is not over-training, over-competing or specializing in one sport or position too early. It is still too early for specialization in late specialization sports like softball. Although many children at this age will have developed a preference for one sport or another, for full athletic development they need to engage in a broad range of activities, playing at least 2 to 3 different sports.
- Think long-term, not short term with regards to athletic development. Games are a forum for players to test their skills and should be considered an additional means of development, rather than the objective.
- Understand that sudden changes in growth may occur and this may result in temporary decreases in performance. This is normal and will improve as the athlete adapts to their new body.



Training to Train - AGES 12-16 (MALES), AGES 11-15 (FEMALES)

OBJECTIVES

- To consolidate fundamental softball skills and introduce more advanced softball skills. Focus on transferring the performance of skills developed in training into the competitive environment. There is now an additional focus on optimal team performance.
- To develop physical fitness, general mental skills and introduce softball-specific mental skills.

PHYSICAL DEVELOPMENT

- Window of trainability for speed (Window 2), strength, and stamina.
- Introduce general physical conditioning.
- Develop strength and power using formal weight training emphasizing proper lifting technique under the supervision of a qualified fitness instructor.
- Develop speed, agility, and quickness by using activities that focus on change of direction using intervals between 5 to 20 seconds. These activities can be done during the warm-up.
- Develop aerobic capacity prior to PHV and aerobic power after PHV.
- Develop flexibility with special attention during the growth spurt.
- Introduce injury prevention.
- Monitor Peak Height Velocity (PHV - maximum rate of growth in height or growth spurt). Visit www.softball.ca for more information on PHV.
- Encourage participation in complementary sports 2 to 3 times per week during the softball season. Your child should be active every day. Encourage participation in 1 to 2 complementary sports in the off-season.

TECHNICAL DEVELOPMENT

- Divide players based on skill levels.
- Consolidate all fundamental softball skills and introduce advanced softball skills in practice using game simulations. Position-specific skills are developed but with players still learning at least 2 to 3 positions. Develop at

- least 4 pitchers per team early in the stage and at least 3 pitchers later in the stage.
- Play to win during competitions but the major focus is on learning softball skills and tactics and successfully applying them in competitions rather than on wins and losses.
- Ensure fair and reasonable playing time.
- Use rule modifications to prevent injury and to ensure the focus is on player development.

MENTAL DEVELOPMENT

- Introduce and develop visualization skills, autonomous decision making during games, goal setting, emotional control, game plans, pre-game and game routines, stress management and coping strategies, and attentional control that are specific to softball.

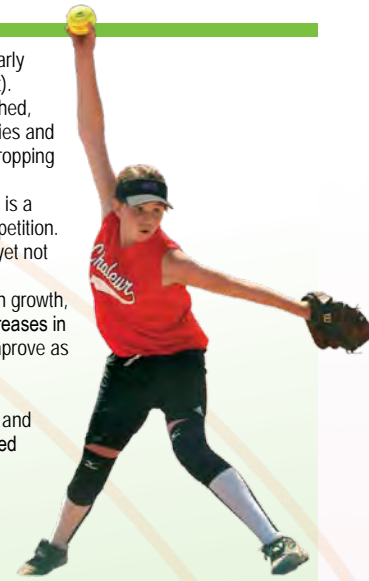
SEASON STRUCTURE

- Pre-Season: 14 to 20 practices
- Competitive Season: 12 to 16 weeks
- Practice to competition ratio: 60% practices:40% games
- Number of Games: 24 to 36 games plus structured skill development prior to games
- Number of Practices: 36 to 54 practices
- Frequency: Softball-specific activities – 2 to 4 times per week for 90 minutes per session

RECOMMENDATIONS

- Understand that coaches are beginning to identify 'talent' at this stage. But be aware that there may be up to a 4-year physiological advantage for early maturers over late maturers when selecting teams. Enroll in enrichment programs and follow the Softball Canada approved Achievement Award Program to ensure continual development to advance to a higher level.

- Caution should still be shown against early specialization (in either position or sport). You should ensure your child is not pushed, over-training or over-competing as injuries and burn-out can result leading to players dropping out of the sport.
- Ensure programs are fun and that there is a balance between participation and competition. Ensure the environment is challenging yet not overwhelming.
- Understand that with sudden changes in growth, players may experience temporary decreases in performance. This is normal and will improve as they adapt to their new body.
- Understand that this is a major fitness development stage for speed, strength, and stamina. Seek assistance from a qualified fitness instructor to develop all physical capacities.
- Learn ancillary capacities that enhance performance such as: warm-up and cool-down procedures, stretching, nutrition, hydration, rest, recovery, restoration, regeneration, mental preparation, and taper and peak.
- Understand that to properly accommodate all the development that should be completed in this stage, an increase in time and financial commitments will be required. Ensure a balance between sport participation and other aspects of life such as school, jobs, family, and relationships.
- Encourage increased independence as the player becomes more responsible for making decisions about their athletic career.



Training to Compete - AGES 16-23 +/- (MALES), AGES 15-21 +/- (FEMALES)

OBJECTIVE

- To refine fundamental softball skills, further develop advanced softball skills, develop softball-specific mental skills, and physical fitness. Focus on the preparation for optimal performance in competition.

PHYSICAL DEVELOPMENT

- Introduce softball-specific physical conditioning.
- Maintain flexibility and practice injury prevention.

TECHNICAL DEVELOPMENT

- Begin to individualize instruction and preparation to address each player's individual needs, strengths, and weaknesses.
- Teach players, who are now proficient at performing fundamental and advanced softball-specific skills, to perform those skills under a variety of conditions during training and competitions.
- Specialize in softball. Specialize in 1 position but play 1 to 2 other positions.
- Ensure fair and reasonable playing time.
- Increase opportunities to develop player's autonomy in terms of decision-making regarding individual and team preparation and play.
- Utilize multiple periodization as the optimal framework of preparation for learning to taper and peak for important competitions throughout the season.

- Conduct a critical evaluation of the program at regular intervals throughout the season with coach and player(s) thoroughly examining competition results, achievement of team and individual goals and how the player and team prepared. Together, the coach and player(s) will make modifications for the next cycle.

MENTAL DEVELOPMENT

- Develop and refine visualization skills, autonomous decision making during games, goal setting, emotional control, game plans, pre-game and game routines, stress management and coping strategies, and attentional control.

SEASON STRUCTURE

- Pre-Season: 15 to 20 practices
- Competitive Season: 12 to 16 weeks
- Practice to competition ratio: 50% practices:50% competitions
- Number of Games: 44 to 52 games plus structured skill development prior to games
- Number of Practices: 44 to 52 practices
- Frequency: Softball-specific activities – 4 to 8 times per week including fitness and mental training

RECOMMENDATIONS

- To continue to develop, an increase in time and financial commitments will be required to provide a year-round, high-intensity training program that includes softball-specific training and testing. Balance softball participation and other aspects of life such as school, jobs, family, and relationships.
- Become more responsible for making decisions about their athletic career.
- Find the most skilled and qualified coaches to ensure technical/tactical, physical, mental, and emotional needs are correctly addressed within softball. Seek out the best training and competitive situation.
- Seek out experts to assist your child to individually tailor to a greater degree fitness programs, recovery programs, and psychological preparation to meet the player's individual needs and address their strengths and weaknesses.



Learning and Training to Win - AGES 19+ (MALES & FEMALES)

OBJECTIVE

- To refine advanced softball skills, softball-specific mental skills and fitness to sustain high volume and high intensity training and maximize performance in competition.

PHYSICAL DEVELOPMENT

- Develop softball-specific physical conditioning and introduce position-specific physical conditioning.
- Practice injury prevention. Special attention should be paid to injury prevention, recovery, and regeneration as players will be especially vulnerable to over-training.

TECHNICAL DEVELOPMENT

- Individualize player instruction and preparation in order to address each player's individual needs, strengths, and weaknesses in a year-round program.
- Perform advanced softball and position-specific skills under a variety of conditions during training and competitions.
- Specialize in softball and 1 position but have the ability to play a second position well.

- Playing time is dictated by performance.
- Utilize multiple periodization as the optimal framework of preparation to learn to taper and peak for important competitions. Expose players to national multi-sport games and begin the transition from high-level national competitions to international competitions.
- Conduct critical evaluation of the program so that coach and player(s) thoroughly examine competition results and how the player/team prepared. The cycle should occur after each major event.

MENTAL DEVELOPMENT

- Refine visualization skills, autonomous decision making during games, goal setting, emotional control, game plans, pre-game and game routines, stress management and coping strategies, and attentional control.

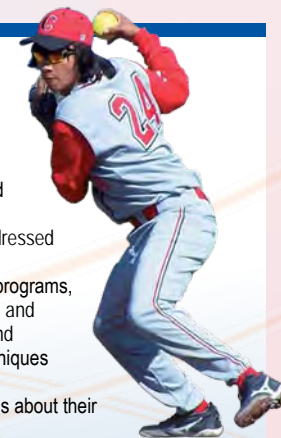
SEASON STRUCTURE

- Pre-Season: 10 to 20 practices
- Competitive Season: 14 to 16 weeks
- Practice to competition ratio: 40% practices:60% competitions
- Number of Games: 44 to 48 games plus structured skill development prior to games
- Number of Practices: 30 to 32 practices

- Frequency: Softball-specific activities – 6 to 9 times per week including fitness and mental training

RECOMMENDATIONS

- Seek out the best training and competitive situations including finding skilled and qualified coaches to ensure physical, technical/tactical, mental, and emotional needs are correctly addressed within softball.
- Individually tailor, to a greater degree, fitness programs, recovery programs, psychological preparation, and technical development to address strengths and weaknesses. Employ the most advanced techniques and sport science information.
- Become more responsible for making decisions about their athletic career.
- Give back to the sport and be a positive role model.
- Help others by directing them to the appropriate authorities to become aware and informed.



Living to Win - AGES 23+ (MALES), AGES 19+ (FEMALES)

OBJECTIVE

- To optimize performance to peak at major international competitions.

PHYSICAL DEVELOPMENT

- Refine softball- and position-specific physical conditioning, strength, power, speed, agility, and quickness.
- Maintain flexibility and practice injury prevention.
- Conduct detailed physiological and biomechanical testing and monitoring, two to five times annually to optimize physical performance.
- Ensure that physical training programs employ the most advanced techniques, sport science information, and testing protocols in order to maintain a high level of fitness so that softball can be played without the risk of fatigue or injury.

TECHNICAL DEVELOPMENT

- Individualize instruction and preparation in order to address each player's needs, strengths, and weaknesses. Work with an Integrated Sports Team that is led by the head coach to ensure players and team reach high levels of performance.
- Teach players, who are now proficient at performing advanced softball and position-specific skills, to perform these skills in pressure situations at the international level.
- Specialize in softball. Specialize in one position, but develop the ability to

play a second position well.

- Playing time is dictated by performance.
- Utilize multiple periodization as the optimal framework of preparation. Train players to taper and peak for major international competitions. Set very high objectives for competitions (podium).
- Continue the critical evaluation program by which coach and players thoroughly examine preparation for competition and how the team and players performed. The cycle should occur after each event.
- Be aware of environmental factors such as time change, altitude, pollution, and food choices on performance and develop strategies to compensate.

MENTAL DEVELOPMENT

- Refine visualization skills, autonomous decision making during games, goal setting, emotional control, game plans, pre-game and game routines, stress management and coping strategies, and attentional control.

SEASON STRUCTURE

- Pre-Season: 18 to 22 weeks
- Competitive Season: 14 to 16 weeks (longer if climate permits)
- Practice to Competition ratio: 25% practices:75% games
- Number of Games: 40 to 50 games
- Number of Practices: Daily skill development, fitness training, and mental training with appropriately scheduled rest and recovery.

- Frequency: Softball-specific activities – 9 to 12 times per week including fitness and mental training.

RECOMMENDATIONS

- Seek out the best training and competitive situations including finding skilled and qualified coaches to ensure physical, technical/tactical, mental, and emotional needs are correctly addressed within softball.
- Individually tailor, to a greater degree, fitness programs, recovery programs, psychological preparation, and technical development to address strengths and weaknesses. Employ the most advanced techniques and sport science information.
- Make final decisions regarding athletic career.
- Be aware of the indicators of physical and mental fatigue and be knowledgeable about how to deal with them.
- Celebrate becoming an international champion.
- Give back to the sport and be a positive role model.
- Help others by directing them to the appropriate authorities to become aware and informed.



Active for Life - ENTER THIS STAGE AT ANY AGE

OBJECTIVE

- Pursuit of lifelong participation in softball or other physical activities.

PHYSICAL DEVELOPMENT

- Develop general physical conditioning (stamina, strength, power, speed, agility, and quickness).
- Maintain flexibility and practice injury prevention.
- Encourage daily participation in sport or unstructured moderate intensity physical activity (minimum of 60 minutes 3 times a week).
- Play desired number of sports according to interest.

TECHNICAL DEVELOPMENT

- Select the position according to the player's interest.
- Use modified rules as required.

MENTAL DEVELOPMENT

- Transfer mental skills learned in competitive softball to the recreational or Master's level, everyday life, work life, or volunteering.
- Use softball as a stress reliever and for relaxation.

SEASON STRUCTURE

- Preseason: 4 to 6 practices
- Competitive Season: 10 to 14 weeks (possibly longer if climate permits)
- Practice to Competition ratio: As desired by player. Recommend 10% practices:90% competitions
- Number of Games: 28 to 36 games
- Number of Practices: As desired by player
- Frequency: Softball-specific activities - As often as desired by player

RECOMMENDATIONS

- Be active every day and be a positive example for others.
- Explore new disciplines (fast pitch, slo-pitch, or orthodox) or positions in softball or new sports or activities.
- Ensure programs are fun and that there is a balance between participation and competition. Community softball tends to be more socially motivated so encourage team activities.
- Give back to the sport by becoming a volunteer, coach or umpire or going into a career in sport administration.



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