

# Too Soon: When is Too Soon?

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# Fixed To Grow?

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Encouraging Our Coaches and Youth Players  
To Think Outside The Cones & Play Outside  
The Lines

Ability vs Maturation vs Mindset



# Discover - Learn - Play

- Players: Free Play, Unstructured, Social, Comfortable, Develop a Love for the game.
- Overplayed - Undertrained
- Over Coached - Underestimated
- Incorrect Pathways - Create a Path
- Parents: Long Term Process - Education
- Coaches: Developmental Competencies

COMPETITION  
100 HOURS

HEAVY TRAINING  
300 HOURS

FRANCO  
DELIBERATE  
PRACTICE  
600 HOURS

Optimal  
Soccer year  
focuses on the  
foundation of  
the Pyramid



Optimal Yearly Training = 1000 hours



# Discover

**Is there a youth player you worked with who you are especially proud of?**

I worked in the Feyenoord academy in the Netherlands. You have midfielder Jordy Clasie, who is the current captain of Feyenoord and he also played in the 2014 World Cup semi-final against Argentina. When he was 14, he was so small – just 150cm. Every year, it was 50/50 whether to keep him or let him go. He was too good, playing a few age groups up.

I said because he was thrown in at the deep end, he did not have the energy to grow. I recommended reducing his training by 50 per cent, so by 2010 he had grown 20 cm. That is still not big, but he would have never reached 170cm. We saved his career. It is very nice.

*- Raymond Verheijen*



# Learn - Play

"I think that it is important to play within your age group or 1 year on either side of your age group, which should be determined by the player's psychological, social and physical development. I also believe that playing up or down can be accomplished in our youth soccer environment through a guest player system...thus, relaxing the stringent rules that many leagues enforce."

Tom Goodman, M.Ed.

NEFC Director of Coach Education

USSF National Staff Instructor



# Develop

- Social Skills - Life Skills
- Physical / Motor Skills
- Behavioral Skills
- Emotional Skills
- It's not “One Size Fits All”
- Position Specific?
- Nature vs Nurture or Nature AND Nurture



# Challenge

## **Pre-Maturation (6-12 Yrs)**

During these years, a difference in age up to one year can be significant. At six years of age, a participant could realistically be 20% older than his or her peer.

- Know your players date of birth
- Equal playing time and involvement
- Multiple positions across the field
- Educate parents to understand realistic expectations
- Development over Winning
- Training: Create competition based on ability not physical attributes
- Challenge every player to grow and develop their skills

Source - Sports Coach UK



# Train (13-19 Yrs)

## **Adolescence (13-19 Yrs)**

The Relative Age Effect can become more pronounced due to the effect of maturation. Athletes advanced in age are usually also advanced in maturation. In males maturation usually occurs at approximately 14 years of age, and in females, its 11-12 years of age, but the timing and tempo of maturation can vary considerably between individuals (+/- 2-3 years - Lloyd et al, 2014)

- Focus praise on effort (never has a bad day), achievement and progress
- Assess maturational status where possible - Height, Sitting Height, body Mass, DOB
- Growth spurt: Allow time for brain to adjust

Source - Sports Coach UK





# Compete

## Bio-Banding

"The potential issues with having only a chronological age group games program is that all players develop and mature at different rates, this can often lead to players biologically being three years apart but training and playing together all the time.



"Early-maturing players will often rely on their physicality to dominate training and matches"  
- James Bunce

James Bunce - Former Head of Athletic Development at Southampton FC Academy.



# Mindset & Motivation

What difficulties  
did you have with  
this exercise?



# ARE WE THEIR LAST CHANCE?

“We must educate parents, administrators, coaches and referees to let the players mature physically, socially, cognitively and emotionally so that the chances of staying in soccer until their late teens actually has a chance.”

US Youth Soccer

**SAM SNOW**



# Relative Age Effect vs Relative Deprivation

- Coaches measure success by wins and losses
- Players measure success by performance
- Parents measure success by comparison

*When performance is measured, performance improves. When performance is measured and discussed between coach and player, the rate of improvement significantly accelerates*

*“Tell me and I forget, teach me and I may remember, involve me and I learn”*

*- Benjamin Franklin*



# Relative Deprivation

Does Poaching and Tapping up impact parents decisions to want their child to play up or move between clubs? - Is it results oriented or a developmental decision? Does it differ from boys to girls? - Comparison to other sports?



# DETERMINATION OF BIOLOGICAL MATURITY AND CONTROLLING FOR ITS CONFOUNDING EFFECTS

Since the birth date distribution and the importance of maturation on body size and physiological performance are shown to be an important influence in selection in youth soccer, there is a need to reconsider the theoretical question of age grouping and comparing young players on the sole principle that they are born in the same year. Previous reviews on RAE have offered some recommendations to the problem:

- 1) expansion of age group bandwidths to 15 to 21 months and rotation of cut-off dates across particular ages and constantly change group composition
- 2) reduce bandwidth to 9 months to reduce potential age inequalities;
- 3) change cut-off dates by 3 months between seasons of competition to ensure players experience being in each quartile positions across their youth career
- 4) implement players-quota for each quartiles
- 5) group players according to physical characteristics (i.e., height and weight).

- César Meylan, John Cronin, Jon Oliver and Michael Hughes



# Ability, Maturation, Mindset

Alex Singer & Greer Barnes were both born in November 1987. Went to the same high school, played on the same NY Rush Patriots team for 4 years, were members of the ENY ODP program, both made the USYS Region 1 ODP Team. Alex went to UVA, Greer went to WVU. Alex signed with the Washington Freedom and Greer signed with the LA Sol. Alex has also played in Australia, Germany and Norway. Both were NSCAA All-Americans

Late birthdays, both successful, why?



# Mindset

- Construct/Implement their own ideas during training
- Ownership of their personal development on and off the field
- Accountability - Honesty - Leadership
- Influence on self and teammates
- Motivation: Self - Players - Internal/External
- Parents Role: Balanced
- What triggers a growth mindset? Coach? Player? Both? -  
Examples...





There were 70,000 people in the stadium and we're warming up like Germans, serious and focused. There's music playing, the song is 'Live is Life' and Maradona starts juggling the ball off his shoulders. What's this guy doing? We couldn't warm up anymore because we had to watch this guy.

Jurgen Klinsman  
US Mens National Team Coach



NOS.nl

Professional Debut Shortly Before 16th Birthday

Born October 30, 1960



USYOUTHSOCCER.ORG

# Questions

- Is the transition to calendar year too soon?
- How do coaches prepare and encourage players to think outside the cones? What does this mean?
- Relative Age Effect vs Relative Deprivation
- How important is motivation in relation to ability vs maturation vs mindset?



## Resources:

Sports Source UK (2014) Relative Age Effects: Implications for Performer Participation and Development

Lloyd, R. Oliver, J., Faigenbaum, A., Meyer, G. and De Ste Croix. (2014) Chronological Age vs Biological Maturation: Implications for exercise programming in youth, Journal of Strength and Conditioning Research, 28: 1454-1464



# Too Soon: When is Too Soon?

Ultimately the answer is simple...It's never too soon. But, it may be too late unless we all understand how important the future is when it comes to the growth and development of our children.

