

Building Your Athlete One Step at a Time

Finding the Proper Fitness Regiment For Your Child's Level of Development

By: Dr. Brandon Crouch

Regardless of the sport your child may be interested in they must start with the fundamentals or building blocks. Using the analogy of building a house is a great way to build an athlete. Certain steps along the way must be learned or developed in order to progress to the next level. Just as a child must learn to balance before they can walk an athlete's ability to excel is only as good as their foundation. Skipping steps is like building a house with no foundation. It is not very stable and can be pushed over very easily.

Prepare the Body for Learning:

In order to build the foundation you must first prepare the land. For an athlete the nervous system must be prepared for learning. Haven't we all been there at one time or another? Were you ever at the opening of a basketball game where you saw a tall young athlete towering over all the other players? You can almost hear the opposing team's parent's question, "just how old is that kid anyway?" Moments later however, everyone sees that same dominating child move and handle the ball with the grace of a duck with two left feet. The body was growing faster than the nervous system could learn.

The nervous system is responsible for every single cell, tissue, organ, and system in your body and the coordination of those systems. For the athlete the nervous system is crucial in developing coordination, left and right brain communication, and basic motor skills. Children develop these skills just by moving and playing. Unfortunately, kids these days spend way too much time watching tv and playing video games. Mastering coordination can be achieved at any age by exercises such as: fast crawling (forward and backward), skipping (forward and backward), hopping front to back and side to side, and throwing and catching a ball.

Build the Foundation:

The next step after we know the brain and body can communicate effectively is to work on the foundation of the athlete. The foundation of an athlete is built on mobility and stability. Mobility is creating maximum joint range of motion combined with muscular flexibility. Your athlete needs to maintain joint mobility as they grow since their bones are growing larger and their muscles are getting larger. Stability is overall balance, strength around a joint, and muscular endurance. A solid foundation of these can be built through fitness training using only your body weight. Key exercises for this stage are: single leg balance drills, lunges, wall squats, deep squats, planks, crunches, push-ups, pull-ups, chair dips, small and large arm circles.

Raise the Walls:

Once your athlete has built a solid foundation of mobility and stability it is time to move on to building the explosiveness inside your athlete. Early in an athlete's career an important component to develop is power and speed. They are harder to develop as the

athlete gets older. The walls can be built as high as the athlete can go. How fast can they run, how high can they jump, how far can they throw, etc. This is the stage to build the walls and the stage younger athletes love the most. All of these exercises can also be performed with minimum weights. During this stage exercises to focus on are: interval sprints, plyometrics (jumping related exercises), medicine ball throws, and lateral bounding exercises.

Raise the Roof:

After coordination, mobility, stability, power, and speed have been developed the next step is skill development and fine motor skills related to their sport. The athlete must be able to put all their skills together to work in unison. A basketball player can be quick, strong, and powerful, but if they can not handle and shoot the ball then they will have a tough time winning the game. These exercises are dependent upon the sport. A golfer needs to work on hip rotation drills, separation of lower and upper body exercises, wrist re-education drills, weight shifting drills, ball striking, etc. A basketball player would benefit from ball handling drills, shooting drills, defensive drills. A soccer player would focus on ball dribbling, shooting, and passing skills.

Regardless of your child's sport it is essential to build the athlete in them from the ground up. If you feel your child has missed a step in the process take time to stop and work on it. Over the past decade Tiger Woods has become one of the best golfers who has ever lived. Along the way however, he took the time to rebuild his already phenomenal golf swing several times. Why would he do that when he was already at the top of his sport? He did this because he knew that by taking a few steps back it would enable him to build an even greater golf swing than before. How good does your athlete want to be? Guide them through these building blocks and they will develop into a solid athlete!

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