American Rugby Model

The objectives of USA Rugby are to improve the international success of all US teams (age groups, 15’s, 7’s, Olympics, World Cup, and World Series) and to increase participation in rugby in the US at all levels.

The American Rugby Model (ARM) is an integrated strategic sport development system which aligns the major components of the Long-Term Development Model with the organizational and competitive structure of rugby and sports participation in the US.

The Focus

It is the Players that are at the core, and the heart of USA Rugby. All the other stakeholders, services, programs, features are important but are secondary to being “player focused”. Success requires extraordinary commitment, fueled by passion, born of love for the game. The well-being, development, and support of the players is paramount to rugby in the US being successful, both in participation and in competition. US Rugby will not compromise the well-being of the players for ANY reason.

The Strategy

1. **Protect our Players and Coaches**
   - Mandatory Requirements for all registered coaches
     - Background check
     - Rugby Fundamentals and Laws
     - Sexual abuse and molestation education
     - First Responder Training
     - Concussion prevention and management training
     - Ethics and sportsmanship education
     - Harassment and bullying education
   - Background check and all mandatory training requirements included in annual USA Rugby Coach Membership Fee
   - Top-level education partners
     - USOC
     - USADA
     - IRB
     - NFHS
     - ASEP
     - CDC

2. **Grow our Coaches and Volunteers**
   - Clear Path Development and Certification Pipeline
   - Multiple coach certification entry points and equivalents
   - Best training from the US and around the world
• No repetition just progressive education and professional development
• Scope of curriculum based with National Standards for Sport Coaches
• Brand and recruiting strategy based on the top level of coach development and player protection in the USA

3. Prepare for Victory
• Elite Performance Model – Best Practices
• Rigid Requirements for advancement to top levels
• International rugby, coaching and sport science experts at Annual Rugby Coaches Academy
• Coach Development Network to support coaching expertise

The Principles

Based on the Long Term Athlete Development, the American Rugby Model will stress the following principles:

1. 10-Year Rule
   Research has shown that it takes 10,000 hours of quality training for athletes to achieve their full potential and perform at an elite level. In most examples of top-ranked athletes and star performers, their 10,000 hours are usually accumulated over at least 10 years of training and competing.
   This translates into an average of 3 hours of daily training, applied practice and competition over 10 years. Again, this is an average over the span of 10 years.
   It is not desirable to see children formally “training” in one sport for three hours every day when they are 7 years old. Training hours increase during adolescence, and this rounds out the average.
   Children should be active in a variety of sports and physical activities throughout the year while they are elementary school age. They should have daily physical activity that includes a blend of free play and formal activity that features quality coaching and instruction. By the time an athlete has chosen to specialize in one sport – usually around age 14 – they should begin formal daily training for that sport. Their overall training hours should begin to approach 3 hours per day or more if they want to reach an elite or professional level.
   Not all of these “training hours” will involve training directly in their sport. Many of the hours will include generalized components such as flexibility training and fitness training (e.g. running, gym workouts).

2. FUNdamentals
   Children won’t develop into high performance athletes or stay active with recreational activity if they don’t have physical literacy, and they won’t have physical literacy if they don’t get the FUNdamentals.
   The FUNdamentals include a wide variety of fundamental movement skills and fundamental sport skills that should be learned at young ages in four different environments: earth, water, air, and snow and ice. With these basic skills, children gain the ability and confidence to practice any sport or physical activity they choose.
   Research strongly suggests that the FUNdamentals should be learned before the adolescent growth spurt begins. After the start of the growth spurt, it becomes much more difficult for the body to develop fundamental skills and the ABCs of agility, balance, coordination and speed.
   Athletics, gymnastics and swimming are good sports for developing FUNdamentals.
   The key to learning the fundamentals is FUN. Young children learn best when the activities are fun, and having fun helps them to develop a love of physical activity and sport.

3. Specialization
   There are right times and wrong times to specialize in any one sport or physical activity. It depends if the sport is a late-specialization or early-specialization sport.
   Athletes have better success in late-specialization sports such as basketball, soccer and hockey if they have participated in a
range of different sports and activities prior to their teen years. Athletes have greater success in early-specialization sports such as gymnastics and figure skating if they begin to specialize in those sports during their elementary school years.

In most sports, athletes should not specialize until they are between the ages of 12 to 15. Prior to that age, they should participate in a wide range of sports to ensure they become good, well-rounded athletes who have acquired physical literacy.

4. Developmental Age

To optimize the development of our athletes, we can’t paint everyone with the same brush. We need to take into account the developmental ages of our athletes as well as their chronological ages. The terms “growth” and “maturation” are often used together, but they mean different things. Growth refers to measurable changes in body size such as height and weight. Maturation refers to qualitative changes in the body’s progress toward maturity, such as the change of cartilage to bone in the skeleton. The term development brings together growth and maturation. Development refers to how growth and maturation occur together over time. It includes physical, social, emotional and intellectual realms of the child.

5. Trainability

All sport skills and physical abilities are trainable at any age. However, as children and athletes grow and develop, there are times when practice and training will have the greatest positive effect. These times are called “sensitive periods of accelerated adaptation to training.” Science shows that we can maximize each child’s skills and physical abilities if our coaching and instruction takes advantage of the sensitive periods of trainability. The sensitive periods affect five different areas of physical development that we call “the Five Ss”:

1. Stamina (endurance)
2. Strength
3. Speed
4. Skill
5. Suppleness (flexibility)

If our sport programs and coaching don’t take advantage of the sensitive periods, our children may never develop the strength, speed, skills, flexibility or stamina they could have had. If we take advantage of the sensitive periods, our children are much more likely to reach their peak performance abilities. They have a better chance of staying active for life and even becoming professional athletes.

6. Physical, Mental, Cognitive and Emotional Development

LTAD addresses the complete physical, mental, cognitive and emotional development of athletes—not just physical characteristics and performance qualities. Training, competition and recovery programs need to consider the mental, cognitive, and emotional development of each athlete. A major objective of LTAD is a holistic approach to athlete development. This includes emphasis on ethics, fair play, and character building throughout the various stages. Programming should be designed to consider athletes’ cognitive ability to address these concepts.

7. Periodization

Periodization is time management. It outlines all annual and seasonal training within a logical schedule to bring about optimal improvements in athlete performance at the right times, while minimizing injury and burnout. Periodization plans connect the LTAD stage of the athlete with the training and development requirements of that stage.

Periodization breaks training into months, weeks, days and individual sessions. It helps coaches to organize all aspects of volume, intensity, frequency and type of training, competition and recovery programs through long-term and short-term timelines. Periodization is a highly flexible tool. When it is used in combination with proper training techniques, athlete monitoring and athlete evaluation, it becomes an essential component to deliver optimal sport performance and athlete development at all stages of LTAD.

8. Competition Planning

Science shows us that talent and ability are developed through thousands of hours of practice and training—whether it’s sport, music, art or mathematics. In Canadian sports, we often get the formula backwards, if we have any formula at all. Many sports reduce their training hours in favour of more games and competitive events, especially in youth sport where practice and skills learning is most important. They have inverted the “training to competition ratio.” At most stages of
development, athletes should spend more hours training than competing. Precisely how much they should train and compete varies at each stage of development and differs according to different sports. Training to competition ratios always aim to achieve optimal performance while avoiding athlete injury and burnout. At the same time, proper competition scheduling allows for tapering and peaking in the athlete’s cycle of training and competition.

9. System Alignment and Integration

LTAD calls for system alignment and integration by bringing together athletes, coaches, clubs, school sports, recreation, state and national organizations to build a better sport system in the US. Athlete development is the core business of national, regional/state and local sport organizations. Without quality athletes in sport programs, these organizations would not be viable. Consequently, it is in the best interests of these groups to collaborate, align and integrate in delivering optimal athlete development programs. LTAD initiatives and support programs must be designed and implemented with a focus on the needs of athletes, and a commitment to cross-sectoral collaboration and cooperation. Coaches, teachers, and recreational professionals may lead athlete training and physical activity programming at the ground level, but they need to be supported by administrators, sport scientists, health, and government across multiple sectors.

10. Continuous Improvement

The concept of continuous improvement, which permeates LTAD, is drawn from the respected Japanese industrial philosophy known as Kaizen. By applying a willingness to always seek improvements in our understanding and practice, LTAD will continuously evolve to accommodate new breakthroughs in sport science research, new innovations in technology, and evolving best practices in coaching. By focusing on continuous improvement, we will also ensure that LTAD reflects all emerging facets of physical activity, sport, recreation and education to ensure that it is inclusive of all types of activity. LTAD promotes ongoing education and sensitization of federal, provincial/territorial, and municipal governments, the mass media, sport and recreation administrators, coaches, sport scientists, parents, and educators about the interlocking relationship between physical education, school sport, community recreation, lifelong physical activity, and high performance sport.

The Stakeholders

The key stakeholders involved in the American Rugby Model are:

1. Players
2. Coaches
3. Administrators
4. Referees
5. Parents/Supporters

All of these stakeholders need to have defined roles and responsibilities, but need to work together to develop the “sports community” that will allow for beneficial synergies to develop across all of the levels of structure.

The Structure

To achieve the mission and objectives we need to develop a “structure” on which to build the program and its components. For our purpose we will base our model on the Long Term Athlete Development model that has been successfully used by sports and municipalities in Canada, UK, SA, and several NGBs (USA Hockey, USA Cycling, USA Triathlon) in the US. The traditional 7-8 phases of LTAD have been adapted to the US environment to allow for better continuity and application by the participants, partners, and stakeholders. They are:

A. Play
B. Development
C. Compete
D. Lead
For this strategy to be successful it will require extraordinary commitment, fueled by passion, born of love for the game. The program will build on the successes of the process, not the outcomes. The overriding principle will be to coach the right thing at the right time to the right player.

**Play**
- Ages: 2 – 9
- Training windows for: suppleness and speed
- All activity is fun based, limited competition
- Learn movement in a fun and safe environment
- Rookie Rugby Program is the flagship
- Coaches Training: Introduction to the Game
- Flag rugby and modified games to learn basic skills
- Maximize participation to ensure a positive experience
- Coach guides, ensures a supportive environment
- Self-confidence, sharing, self-esteem
- Partners: School PE, community recreation
- Participation in other fun games, physical activities and sports strongly encouraged

**Develop**
- Ages: 10 – 16
- Training windows for: aerobic capacity, aerobic power, speed and skills (and strength for females)
- Key variable is the physical maturation of the athlete (can vary by 4 years)
- Ratio of 70 % training to 30% competition
- Learn the game by playing, trying new approaches, experimenting
- Coach teaches skills, tactics, physical and mental development basics, nutrition provides structure and direction for training
- Club and high school development is the focus, partner with NFHS/state associations
- Encourage and challenge players to develop skills knowledge of the game, and individual performance as part of a team
- Introduction of contact and movement on the field as a unit
- Stress ethical behavior, communication
- Pay attention to proper nutrition and hydration
- Participation in other sports encouraged
- Level 1 and 2 coach education, sport science and team management basics

**Compete**
- Ages: 17 +
- Rugby is now primary sport
- Training windows for: strength in males
- Starting ratio of 40% training/60% competition moving to 25% training/75% competition
- Significant investment of time, effort, resources
- College, senior and national team development is the focus
- Highly competitive, results oriented and driven
- Coach teaches keys to high performance training and performance
- Coach Training: Level 3 and 4 HP skills, advanced sport science and management
• Coach to bring out the best in the player as a team member
• Mental preparation includes development of value system, dealing with competitive pressure, and attaining a balanced lifestyle
• Adaptation and recovery are keys to development
• Participation in other athletic activities is a benefit
• Key Partners: NCAA, USOC

**Lead**

• Ages: “Anytime”
• At the highest level of sport, players and coaches change the game, they lead not follow
• Giving back to grow the game:
  • Coaching
  • Refereeing
  • Organizing/Administrating
  • Volunteering/Supporting
• Keep involved in the sport
• Role model a healthy, balanced, active lifestyle
• Support the next generation(s)
• Partner with NIAAA/college sports management programs to train administrators, USAR Referee Training

**The Internal/External Support**

For the layer focused American Rugby Model to be successful it will require the internal effort and support of the USA Rugby departments that focus on Recruitment, Membership, Finance and Governance. The programs and activities of USA Rugby will need to be communicated to the external environment via several methods in order to provide financial support, event participation and media exposure.