

Canadian Lacrosse Association

Long Term Athlete Development Committee



Canadian Lacrosse Association
Association canadienne de crosse

LTD AGE CATEGORY RECOMMENDATIONS

DRAFT – FEBRUARY 2021

Canadian Lacrosse Association

Long-Term Development Committee

Recommendation around Box Lacrosse Age Categories

January 2021

Appendices

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Background

Coach Sarcasm

“Although USA Baseball spent nearly 8 years developing this information (LTAD for Baseball), I clearly know more about the game and the development of the youth athlete. I’ll disregard the Long - Term Development Model and the Zone of Proximal Development because I am the League President, and I was the clean - up hitter in High School. Of course, I know better.”

Reference: <https://www.coachmorgansullivan.com/ltad>

The above sarcastic comment from a coach shows the challenges that exist in implementing Long-Term Development (LTD). Even though lacrosse approved its initial LTD over a decade ago, its implementation has been inconsistent in general and across the country. Obviously more work needs to be done in communicating and implementing LTD. This second attempt at LTD can take these prior efforts, not just in lacrosse, but across all sports, into account in its re-design.

Long-Term Development (LTD) in Sport and Physical Activity is a framework for the development of every child, youth, and adult to enable optimal participation in sport and physical activity. It considers growth, maturation and development, trainability, and sport system alignment.

The art of coaching and program design also plays a significant role in our framework - and for coaches who must make multiple day-to-day coaching decisions the framework extrapolates from currently available scientific literature (when no specific research has been undertaken or is available). In doing so, we recognize the risk of being wrong—but also recognize that to be world leading, we must “push the envelope.” Evidence-based conclusions can only be drawn from analyzing published research that takes years to accumulate. Athlete development cannot be both fully evidence based and cutting edge.¹

¹ Greater detail on this is found in the Sport for Life publication Athlete Development Matrix, which, because of the advantage that it provides to coaches, is available only to Canadian National Sport Organizations

A key LTD concept is the difference between chronological age and developmental age. Chronological age is “the number of years and days elapsed since birth.” Children of the same chronological age can differ by several years in their level of growth and maturation. In contrast, developmental age is the age in years and months of the average youth with the same development as the individual in question. If a 15-year-old has the same development as the average 13-year-old, their developmental age is 13. Developmental age can be based on different body systems, including skeletal maturity or sexual maturity and different systems may give slightly different developmental ages, and therefore should be treated as an approximation unless measured by skilled evaluators with specialized equipment. In sport, developmental age should be used as an indicator.

The issue of chronological vs developmental age is not unique to sport. In education, Vygotsky’s *Zone of Proximal Development* is the typical model used to locate a student’s “sweet spot” for learning. In layman’s terms, some children are reading at a 5th grade level in 1st grade and others may be reading right on grade level. The educator is to place children in these zones where they find the best opportunity for development – the Zone of Proximal Development (ZPD). They are challenged, but not overwhelmed. They are also not bored with material they find easy. This is really what most youth sports organizations dance around but do not understand. Each child should be placed in his own ZPD. This might also be what we refer to in our coach education as “The Challenge Zone.”

The framework recognizes that the cognitive, emotional, moral, and psycho-social development of children are important components of maturation, and significantly contribute to progress in sport from introductory play all the way up to and including world-leading performances. Ultimately, both sporting excellence and an active, healthy population are outcomes of a sport and physical activity development process that is top quality, well-designed, inclusive for all, and properly implemented. Long-Term Development in Sport and Physical Activity is a uniquely Canadian, world-leading design - NOW is the time to fully implement it.

Based on clearly defined developmental stages, LTD provides recommendations for ratios of training-to-competition hours, points of emphasis in skills training, formats for competition, and more. When adapted to a specific sport such as lacrosse, it provides coaches and administrators with clear guidelines for designing training and competition programs at every developmental stage to optimize long-term skills acquisition and performance.

Reflecting the principle of continuous learning, in 2019, Canadian Sport for Life released its third edition of Long-Term Development in Sport and Physical Activity. The objective of this new and improved framework is to promote both life-long engagement in health-enhancing physical activity and sporting excellence at the highest international level.

For example, there is an enhanced section on quality sport. Not all sport and physical activity experiences are good. This resource supports leaders to improve the quality of sport and physical activity delivery. We want **“good programs, delivered by good people, in good places.”**

Good programs are developmentally appropriate, based on the physical, cognitive, emotional, and moral stages of development of participants. Quality sport and physical activity ensures that safe sport is an essential element for all people involved. This means that well run programs are developmentally appropriate, safe and inclusive, foster individual excellence, and optimum health, leading to quality sport.

Importantly, LTD allows athletes the flexibility to move between the recreational and competitive arenas of their sport at almost any time of life. Following early athlete development in the first stages of training (12U and below), athletes may choose to join a recreational stream for fun and wellness or more competitive stream. In this way, LTD supports lifelong wellness for the greatest number of participants, while at the same time promoting medal-winning performances.

Ideally, players should be grouped based on their stage of development. However, for organizational purposes, team sports (including lacrosse) use chronological age as the principal way of separating players. This does not mean that stages of development cannot be embedded into chronological age categories. In fact, the original CLA LTD overview, stages, and competition review documents provided an athlete development pathway within the sport's chronological age categories.

However, there has been discussion within the lacrosse community about whether its chronological age categories remain appropriate. Following the CLA Semi-Annual General Meeting in May 2020, the CLA's LTD Committee was re-constituted and tasked with examining the existing age categories for box lacrosse. Should these age categories (which focus exclusively on chronological age not development age) be adjusted? If so, how could/should they be adjusted? Should the age categories be the same for male and female lacrosse? If age categories are changed, how would the rest of the lacrosse system be impacted? For example, national championships and the coaching program might also need to be revised if the age categories were adjusted.

The Committee used the following timeline:

- Summer 2020 formation of committee including Canada Sport for Life and other external advisors.
- Fall 2020 a series of meetings with the LTD Committee.
- December 2020 – January 2021 draft report finalized.
- February – March 2021 consultation with members of the Canadian lacrosse community
- March – April 2021 revision of draft report based upon the consultations and finalize the recommendations.
- May 2021 present recommendations to the CLA box sector and Board of Directors at the CLA Semi-Annual General Meeting.

Recommendations / Rationale / Implementation

| | Recommendations | Rationale | Implementation |
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| 1 | Keep two-year minor age categories (16U, 14U, 12U, 10U, 8U, 6U), but encourage member associations, zones, local governing bodies, and clubs with sufficient players to run single year age categories (i.e., 16U for 16-year-olds and 16U for 15-year-olds). | LTD emphasizes the concept of development age. Although growth and development are natural processes, the tempo of the maturation process can vary greatly: "A child with a chronological age of 12 years may possess a biological age between nine and fifteen years" (Borms, 1986, p. 5). The biological differences between a 9-year-old and a 15-year-old are huge, and yet despite these biological differences, athletes of the same chronological age are often trained the same way at every age and participate in age group competitions. However, sport systems, for organizational reasons, use chronological age to separate players. Unfortunately, chronological age can magnify the birth effect where January birthdays have a much greater advantage over those born in December. A two-year age category makes things even worse (i.e., a January born 12-year-old is almost three years older than a December born 11-year-old). Therefore, if possible, local lacrosse associations should adopt single year age categories. | Local associations will have to determine if they have sufficient numbers to properly implement single age categories in their divisions. This will likely affect male and female divisions differently because all-female divisions typically have fewer players. |
| 2 | Maintain the existing CLA policy that junior is 17-21. | 17-year-olds are typically at the end of their growth spurt period. Therefore, most 17-year-olds are developmentally ready for the increase in competition that occurs with junior lacrosse. They have the physical, mental, cognitive, emotional, technical, and tactical skills. Junior lacrosse has an elaborate tiering process - JrA, JrB Tier 1, JrB Tier 2, JrB Tier 3, JrC - that can accommodate a range of development stages of players. There will be players that leap quickly to JrA, others may take a few seasons of JrB or JrC, and others will never advance to that level (either because they lack the required lacrosse skills or by choice). | |
| 3 | Remove the 17U category and revert back to 16U. | A three-year age category is too wide (see recommendation #1). Especially for players that are going through their growth spurt. We believe that the concerns that were raised to have 17-year-olds stay in minor lacrosse are addressed in creating/ maintaining an active for life stream for junior (see recommendation #3). | Revise the CLA's Operating Policy. |

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| 4 | Create/maintain two pathways for Junior aged players: Competition Stream and Active for Life Stream | The original Stages Documents explicitly discusses Active for Life at the Masters division (35+). But at the junior level we should make the split between the Competition and Active for Life streams. Competition stream is JrA and JrB Tier 1. Active for Life already exists and goes by many different names: JrB Tier 2, Intermediate, Recreational lacrosse. However, these leagues should all be 17-21. It is up to member associations to determine the name and whether they should play major or minor rules. | Update and Revise the <i>Lacrosse for Life Stages Documents</i> in 2023. Adjust the CLA's operating policy the category 17-18 to 17-21 as a recreational (Active for Life) stream. |
| 5 | Create/maintain two pathways for Senior aged players: Competition Stream and Active for Life Stream | The original Stages Documents explicitly discusses Active for Life at the Masters division (35+). But at the senior level we should make the split between the Competition and Active for Life streams. Competition stream is SrA and SrB (most teams). Active for Life is SrB (some teams) and SrC. Although these players are Active for Life, they should still play major rules. | Revise the <i>Lacrosse for Life Stages Documents</i> in 2023 |
| 6 | The Committee has considered the issue of extending the junior age category to include 22-year-olds. It has determined that there is little development argument that can justify making this extension. | From a development component, there is typically little difference between a 20-, 21-, 22-, or 23-year-olds. This is why other team sports use different age cuts for the junior category. Hockey limits it to 20-year-olds, whereas football limits it to 23-year-olds. Clearly, these are more arbitrary restrictions than tied directly into player development. Therefore, the Committee recommends that junior remain at 21-year-olds. It is the Committee's view that the 22-year-old proposal stemmed from two events: 1) the issue of 17-year-olds (which has been addressed in Recommendations #2-3); and 2) losing the 2020 season which prevented the 1999 birth year from playing their final Junior lacrosse season. | |
| 7 | Using the concept of development age, players should have the opportunity of playing in a higher age category. | The existing lacrosse system, through the process of calling up, is good at moving players to older age categories. For example, a 12-year-old who has matured quicker than their peers, can have the opportunity of more appropriate competition at the 14U level. | Member associations will design regulations around registering in a higher age category or calling up. |

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| 8 | Using the concept of development age, players should have the opportunity of playing in a lower age category. | The existing lacrosse system is not very good at moving players to younger age categories. Typically, there may only be a handful of players that are permitted to play “down” each season. In addition, there are usually restrictions (i.e., bans on provincials and/or tournaments). Notwithstanding their chronological age, late developing athletes should be permitted to play at their appropriate developmental level without restrictions. The only exception is that “overage” players should not be on an “A” team unless there is no junior team in their geographical area. | Criteria for playing “down” should include PhV, birthdate, school year, lacrosse experience, assessment of mental, technical, and tactical development. In coaching materials, include how to measure PhV. |
| 9 | There should be a no distinction between male and female age categories. | Other than the growth spurt window in the development of girls, when growth starts earlier than most boys, where the focus on training may differ, where quality skill acquisition may need to be top notch before the touch point of growth spurt, there is little evidence that the age, past growth spurt differ from the boys/men. | |
| 10 | Investigate the advantages and disadvantages of different types of male/female playing environments. | Three playing environments exist: separate male and female playing divisions; females playing on male teams; an all-female team playing in a male division. It is the availability of female players that govern the choice of playing environments. | Research into when/if/how to separate male and female players. |
| 11 | Men’s Field and Women’s Field recommendations are forthcoming. | | |

Appendix A

LTD Committee Membership

Chair: Duane Bratt, CLA National Resource Person

Members: Bryan Baxter, CLA Director of Domestic Development
Sylvie Beliveau, Canada Sport for Life and Former LTAD Soccer Canada Lead
James Buhlman, CLA Program Director
Andre LaChance, Canada Sport for Life and Baseball Canada
Dorothy Paul, Canada Sport for Life specializing in Indigenous athletes.
Ron Yeung, Basketball Canada

Appendix B

LTAD Committee Terms of Reference

| Name | LTAD Committee |
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| Mandate | The LTAD Committee is an operating committee of the Canadian Lacrosse Association (CLA). It is responsible for leading and advising the CLA and its partners in the development of a Long Term Athlete Development Plan for Lacrosse and for the development of new programs, events and/or projects that will foster developmentally appropriate opportunities in the sport of Lacrosse. |
| Key Duties | <p>The Committee will perform the following key duties:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Prepare plans for LTAD integration and implementation for lacrosse in Canada, with the intent to support the optimal preparation of athletes in all LTAD stages. • Determine annually whether any proposed policy, program or rule revisions that are technical in nature and required for alignment with LTAD will be submitted to the appropriate sector and to submit proposed program and rule revisions to the appropriate sector in writing. • Provide input as requested to the Board of Directors in furtherance of policies on LTAD. • Align the CLA's NCCP materials with the CLA's LTAD plan. • Liaise with the Members on all issues relating to LTAD. • Liaise with other Committees on issues of mutual concern. • Report on progress on a regular basis through its Meeting Minutes or communications to the CLA Board. • Prepare an LTAD plan for athletes with a disability. • Prepare a Long Term Officials Development Plan. • Perform such additional tasks as may be delegated to the Committee by the Board from time-to-time. |
| Authority | The Committee is an advisor to the CLA Board, Sectors and other committees on matters related to the CLA's LTAD program and initiatives. The Committee, with approval from the Board, may establish sub-committees or task forces to deal with specific issues in relation to the mandate of the Committee. |
| Composition | <p>The Committee will be composed of 4-5 persons. The Board will designate the Chairperson of the committee. The CLA Director Domestic Development and CLA Program Coordinator will members of the Committee.</p> <p>The Board appoints members to the Committee at the Annual Meeting. Should a vacancy occur on the Committee, for whatever reason, the Board may appoint a qualified person to fill that vacancy for the remainder of the vacant position's term. The Board may remove any member of the Committee.</p> |
| Meetings | The Committee will meet by telephone or in person, as required. Meetings will be at the call of the Chair. Minutes shall be kept and provided to the CLA Executive Director within 30 days of the meeting, who then shall distribute them as appropriate. |

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| Resources | The Committee will receive the necessary resources from the CLA to fulfill its mandate. The Committee may, from time to time, receive administrative support from the CLA National Office. |
| Reporting | The Committee will report at every meeting of the Board and will submit a written report at every meeting of the Members. |
| Approval and Review | These Terms of Reference were prepared by the Planning and Governance Committee and were approved by the CLA Board on November 14, 2014. The Board will review these Terms of Reference on a regular basis, with input from the Committee as required. |
| Other | The provisions of the CLA's Bylaws and Regulations as they relate to the LTAD Committee will also apply. |

Appendix C LTAD Activation Plan

| Strategic Outcome | Output and Impact | 2021 Focus | 2022 Focus | 2023 Focus | Strategic Plan Link |
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| A. Evaluate current athlete pathway to ensure various entry and exits points are considered | Output: A revised male and female pathways are created Impact: Clear pathways are communicated, understood, and implemented including appropriate tiering and specialization principles | Through data, validate actual pathways are reflecting the reality of male and female athletes (Is the pathway actually happening ?) | Build a strategy for the late entry for both male and female athletes so ALL athletes find appropriate training & competition environment to fit their needs | Position the role of the private lacrosse organizations in the national landscape and determine inclusion or not. | Strategic Plan 2021 -24 currently being developed by the Strategic Planning Committee |
| B. Ensure LTD principles and concepts are aligned with all coach education material and resources produced by Canada Lacrosse | Output: Create an education platform for LTD to assist coaches in understanding the growth and development concepts. Impact: With a better understanding of child development, coaches can ensure that their sessions are aligned with the LTD model of development | Through existing documents, identify clear coaches' roles and responsibilities at each stage of development while position the role of winning at each stage of development | Enhance current coaching legislation to encourage for more coach certification or more coaching requirements for various trained and certified status of the NCCP. Implement a robust recruitment and retention strategy for evaluators. | Identify key elements of coach education that could be transformed into digestible digital resources for coaches at the various stages of development | Strategic Plan 2021 -24 currently being developed by the Strategic Planning Committee |
| C. National Championships | Output: Clear minor National Championships with their LTAD emphasis in training Impact: National championships offered are aligned with LTD guiding principles | Complete and communicate key competition guiding principles for each stage of development and compare/analyze principles against nationals currently being offered. Define meaningful competition for lacrosse. | Using data, propose a series of recommendations to better rationalize and position national championships across the various stages of development with an emphasis on the 12U and 14U age group | Implement recommendations with solid pilot projects to evaluate impact on changes at the various stages of development. | Strategic Plan 2021 -24 currently being developed by the Strategic Planning Committee |
| D. Develop an Introduction to Lacrosse aligned with LTAD including programs and delivery standards | Output: Develop metrics for coaches to align with the stages of LTAD. Provide tools for coaches to reach these development objectives. Impact: Athletes will be properly assessed at each stage of their development | | | | Strategic Plan 2021 -24 currently being developed by the Strategic Planning Committee |

Appendix D

Resources

Canadian Lacrosse Association, *Lacrosse for Life: Overview* (2010).

http://cla.pointstreaksites.com/files/uploaded_documents/2253/Overview-EN.pdf

Canadian Lacrosse Association, *Lacrosse for Life: Stages* (2010).

http://cla.pointstreaksites.com/files/uploaded_documents/2253/Stages-EN.pdf

Canadian Lacrosse Association, *Lacrosse for Life: Competition Review 3.0* (2015).

Canada Sport for Life, *Athlete Development Matrix*. Version 1.1 (2016).

Canada Sport for Life, *Physical Literacy Assessment for Youth* (2016).

http://physicalliteracy.ca/wp-content/uploads/2016/08/PLAYself_Workbook.pdf

Canada Sport for Life, *Long-Term Development in Sport and Physical Activity 3.0* (2019)

<https://sportforlife.ca/wp-content/uploads/2019/06/Long-Term-Development-in-Sport-and-Physical-Activity-3.0.pdf>

Appendix E

List of Meetings

2020

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| August 17 | Preliminary CLA LTAD Committee Meeting (Duane, Bryan, James) |
| August 26 | Preliminary CLA LTAD Committee Meeting |
| September 10 | Preliminary CLA LTAD Committee Meeting |
| September 21 | 1 st Full LTAD Committee Meeting (Duane, Bryan, James, Andre, Ron, Dorothy) |
| October 5 | 2 nd Full LTAD Committee Meeting |
| October 19 | 3 rd Full LTAD Committee Meeting |
| November 2 | 4 th Full LTAD Committee Meeting |
| November 24 | CLA LTAD Committee Meeting |
| November 25 | Consultation with Box Sector Chair |
| December 7 | CLA LTAD Committee Meeting |

2021

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| January 11 | Consultation with Sylvie Beliveau |
| January 18 | Consultation with Sylvie Beliveau |
| January 20 | Consultation with Sylvie Beliveau |
| January 22 | Consultation with Sylvie Beliveau |
| January 25 | Consultation with Sylvie Beliveau |
| January 27 | Consultation with Sylvie Beliveau |
| February 1 | Consultation with Sylvie Beliveau |
| February 3 | Consultation with Sylvie Beliveau and Ron McQuarrie |
| February 5 | Consultation with Sylvie Beliveau |
| February 8 | Consultation with Sylvie Beliveau |
| February 10 | Consultation with Sylvie Beliveau |
| February 12 | Consultation with Sylvie Beliveau |
| February 17 | Consultation with Sylvie Beliveau |
| February 19 | Consultation with Sylvie Beliveau |
| February 22 | Consultation with Sylvie Beliveau |
| February 24 | Consultation with Sylvie Beliveau |
| February 26 | Consultation with Sylvie Beliveau |