American Development Model - Irrefutable Laws of Lifelong Development

As a parent, you want the best sport experience for your child. You want them to learn

the lessons of teamwork, sportsmanship, doing their best, overcoming obstacles,

dedication along with developing strength and fitness. You want to provide the right

opportunities and a pathway to take them to the highest levels of excellence, enjoyment

and the competitive success your child wants to achieve. You also want them to enjoy

the experience and have fun.

The American Development Model, or ADM, provides guidance and answers questions

about this process from the time your child is introduced to sports and continues

through a lifetime of activity. This journey is a slow and gradual process that starts very

early in life and continues for a rich life of movement and play.

Each stage in the model has a purpose and follows the development examples provide

by nature. For our example, we will use an oak tree. Giant oaks do not develop in a

few years. These trees go through seasons of growth and dormancy and years of ideal

growth conditions with ample sunlight and water along with adverse conditions wind and

drought. For these trees to continue to grow strong, they must avoid fire and disease,

much like an athlete must avoid illness and injuries.

Let’s take our example of the development of a giant oak as an analogy of a youngster

beginning his or her journey into youth sports. Many acorns fall to the ground but only a

few survive and have a long life. Some acorns fall on rocky ground and fail in a short

amount of time because there is no soil to provide nourishment, much like a child who

tries a sport but there is no support or interest.

Some acorns fall on shallow soil, prosper for a while, but they wither and die because the tree

did not have a strong root system to sustain growth above ground. This is like the

young athlete who thought the sport would be fun, but had a narrow focus and poor

athletic development and didn’t have the love of the game to stay motivated and

prepare to compete. The children who develop a strong athletic base are the ones who

are most successful as they got bigger and stronger and were capable of learning more

advanced skills and stay injury free.

Other acorns fell into the weeds. They may have taken root but the young trees were

choked out by surrounding weeds, much like a young player who has too many

commitments or distractions.

Still other acorns fell on fertile soil. These seedlings established a deep and wide root

system. If they received ample sunshine and water, they grew and were strong enough

to get through seasons of wind, snow and ice. They developed strength to withstand

years of pests and drought. These trees are like the young players who develop a

strong athletic base and acquire a wide range of skills by participating in multiple sports

and activities. These are the ones who have developed a love of the sport and

persevered through slumps and losses.

Young athletes who develop in a non-threatening and supportive environment continue

to learn advanced skills and a deeper understanding of the game. Good coaches

provide opportunities for growth (fertilizer) and realize that everyone develops at

different rates. Coaches are necessary to build strong athletes with solid technical ability

and the ability to execute tactics.

Coaches realize that there are seasons of learning and plateaus, and that long term

development needs motivation and inspiration, a focus on effort and peak performance

periods along with time for rest and recovery. Ultimately these athletes are in the best

position to excel as they become mature, and able to produce at the highest level and

for the longest periods of time.

The American Development Model is a story of sport sampling, building a strong athletic

base, preventing injury, developing sport specific skills and staying motivated. It

involves practicing with intent and competing with enthusiasm and grit in a safe,

supporting, yet challenging environment. This provides a foundation for each individual

athlete to overcome obstacles, plateaus and disappointment and achieve the highest

level of success. That is the ADM, in a nutshell.