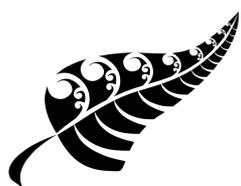




ATHLETE CHARACTERISTICS & NEEDS

TAMARIKI & RANGATAHI



wakaama

Outrigger / Va'a / New Zealand

The following information has been adapted from the Sport NZ Ihi Aotearoa document;

✦ [Coach Development Framework](#)

6 - 8 yrs

Athlete Characteristics

Physical

1. Are developing and mastering fundamental gross motor skills.
2. Are beginning to develop motor coordination.
3. Have slow, steady musculoskeletal growth.
4. Mainly use large muscles – have better control of large than small muscles.
5. Have high energy levels but tire easily and recover quickly.
6. Girls and boys have similar abilities.
7. Learn best if physically active.
8. Have low anaerobic and aerobic capacity.

Social

1. Are dependent on adults, especially parents for support.
2. Self and family orientated but begin to experience empathy for others and start to become independent.
3. Are learning how to be friends and may have several 'best friends' at a time.
4. Opinions of peers are becoming more important. Often care more about being successful in front of peers than parents.
5. Boys and girls enjoy playing together.
6. Diversity is embraced, with positive acceptance of others.
7. Cooperation is being learned.
8. Motives to participate are to be with friends and have fun.

Emotional

1. See fairness as 'the golden rule'.
2. Need and seek parental or coach approval.
3. Success is important but relevant to goals set rather than winning races.
4. Are sensitive to criticism and become frustrated quickly.
5. Like to play games with simple rules.
6. Need adult help in learning to cope with failures and problems.
7. Are easily distracted.

Cognitive (thought processes)

1. Learn best by doing/exploring.
2. Are more interested in the process than the outcome. Will continue working on a project rather than completing it.
3. Concept of competition is difficult to understand.
4. Have a limited and inconsistent attention span – interests are short and changing.
6. Are easily motivated – like trying something new.
7. Ask lots of 'why' questions.
8. Handle well only one mental operation at a time.
9. Respond to external feedback or praise.
10. Lack spatial awareness and understanding of time.

Athlete Needs

- A safe environment.
- No fitness testing.
- Skill learning immersed in fun.
- Activities designed for both boys and girls.
- Frequent rest periods.
- Activities that are progressive in intensity without the necessity of a warm-up.
- Focus on general skills and fitness development.
- Activities that are demonstrated with simple, limited verbal instructions.
- Modification of rules, race distances and equipment that are used for older age groups.
- Rotation of roles – no specialisation in positions.
- On task' involvement of everyone.
- Emphasis on success and cooperative games where everyone can win.
- A coach who understands individual needs.
- Positive support, a caring coaching approach, praise, affection and attention, to build confidence.
- Talking about losing and winning.
- An environment where everyone can experience success.
- Parents/caregivers who reinforce the coach.

9 -12 yrs

Athlete Characteristics

Physical

1. Growth is slow until puberty.
2. Many females and some males reach puberty and experience growth spurts.
3. In puberty, the skeletal system grows faster than the muscular system, thus increasing injury risk.
4. Lack coordination whilst going through puberty.
5. Have steady increases in motor skills, strength, balance and coordination – fine motor skills are developing.
6. Hand-eye coordination is relatively mature.
7. Are maturing at differing rates (individual, gender and ethnicity).

Social

1. Are becoming more independent.
2. Begin to identify with peers, although they still need and want guidance and support from parents and coaches.
3. Like an environment with consistent standards and fair consequences.
4. Enjoy organised group activities.
5. Like a sense of belonging to a group, team and club and enjoy working in cooperative activities.
6. Begin to sense differences.
7. Start to identify/prefer being with same-sex groups.
8. Enjoy taking responsibility and assuming simple leadership roles.
9. Girls are more socially mature than boys.

Emotional

1. Accept parent/family beliefs but are beginning to question parental authority.
2. Admire and imitate older people (role models) – look for the similarities between self and friends.
3. Success should be emphasised and failures minimised.
4. Like challenges, but dislike public failure.
5. Finding comparisons with the success of others is difficult and this erodes self-confidence.
6. Need to feel accepted and worthwhile (self-worth).
7. Are easily motivated to be involved and prepared to take risks.
8. With puberty, changes in hormones and thinking patterns contribute to mood swings.
9. Early maturing can be stressful – rapid physical change can be embarrassing.

Cognitive (thought processes)

1. Are capable of developing leadership skills.
2. Vary greatly in academic abilities, interests and reasoning skills.
3. Begin to think logically and symbolically; new ideas are best understood when related to previous experiences.
4. Have increased attention span, but have many interests which change rapidly.
5. Are learning to absorb new ideas, but tend to judge in terms of right/wrong or black/white.
6. Often reject solutions offered by adults in favour of finding their own solutions.
7. Like to share thoughts and reactions.
8. Developing individual identity – intrinsic motivation is important (doing it for yourself).

Athlete Needs

- Skill development that becomes more sport specific.
- A high level of activity (lots of time on task) with rotations of roles and equal involvement.
- Consistent, organised sessions Introduction to the notion of competition, with emphasis on improvement to win.
- Provision of a safe emotional, physical, cultural and social environment.
- Proactive promotion of fair play and moral decision making.
- Use of role models as a teaching tool.
- Lots of positive reinforcement, variety, enjoyment.
- Learning through mistakes and creation of challenges.
- Encouragement to take risks.
- Positive input from parents/caregivers.
- Cooperative activities that reinforce the enjoyment of playing with friends.
- An empathetic environment (understand and listen to individual athletes' needs).
- Leadership and responsibility opportunities (independence).
- Identification with current childhood trends.
- Understanding of hormonal mood swings (e.g. do not embarrass).

13 - 16 yrs

Athlete Characteristics

Physical

1. Growth spurts occur and are likely to cause clumsiness.
2. Complex motor skills become more refined.
3. Hormones affect body composition.
4. Are capable of handling appropriate physical training/workload (otherwise susceptible to injury risk).
5. Are capable of developing energy systems (e.g. anaerobic, aerobic).
6. Have maturity differences within and between genders.

Social

1. Are searching for personal (including athlete) identity – acceptance vs. isolation.
2. Friendships (both same and opposite gender) formed are often sincere and long-lasting.
3. Peer groups are very important.
4. Move away from family reliance.
5. May begin sexual relationships.
6. Increased costs, wider range of opportunities and time constraints can be barriers to sporting involvement.
7. Emphasis is on balancing career goals and roles in life – are starting to forward plan.
8. Role models are influential.
9. Are learning to cooperate with each other.
10. Have increasing awareness, and possible use, of alcohol and drugs.

Emotional

1. Have increased awareness of body image (notice differences) – e.g. disability, weight changes.
2. Are seeking to understand and accept sexuality.
3. Seek emotional autonomy from parents.
4. Hormones cause mood swings.
5. Want responsibility and to be treated as an adult.
6. Internally desire success, but are influenced by external pressures to conform (cool to be average).
7. Are vulnerable to negative criticism, but respond to constructive feedback.
8. Teens who develop differently physically from their peers may become uneasy about physical changes.

Cognitive (thought processes)

1. Like to find their own solutions and present their own ideas.
2. Have a longer concentration span – are ready for more in-depth learning.
3. Are capable of complex problem solving.
4. Develop their own language. Use teen slang.
5. Have a sense of invincibility.
6. Begin to value setting goals
7. Tend to be self-focused.
8. May lack understanding of their abilities and talents.
9. Begin to demonstrate moral thinking and appreciate values.
10. Are capable of informed decision making and appreciate leadership roles.

Athlete Needs

- Opportunity for sport-specific skill development.
- Training programmes that recognise their physiological stage of development, physical fitness/strength, skill development and injury prevention/ burnout.
- Coaches who plan, with goal setting based on needs.
- Simple tactics.
- Mental and physical challenges.
- Structure and firm but fair discipline.
- Empathy – understanding the paddler as a person as well as an athlete.
- Setting realistic expectations of success.
- Learning to make decisions and learning from mistakes.
- Inclusion in decision making.
- Drills/games that reinforce understanding and skills.
- Two-way interactions/effective communications:
 - coach/athlete
 - coach/family
- Encouragement.
- Ownership and responsibility, but consequences if they are irresponsible.
- Understanding of why they are doing things.
- A safe, secure, non-threatening environment.
- Support for continued participation (costs, travel).
- Coaching that recognises their lifestyle.
- Being taught to be self-reflective and to self-analyse.
- Experiences within a variety of different sport specific situations.

17 - 19 yrs

Athlete Characteristics

Physical

1. Most reach skeletal physical maturity.
2. Males continue to gain muscle strength and mass. Both sexes continue to develop bone mass.
3. Have better posture and coordination.
4. Can achieve advanced levels in complex skill and movements.
5. Are reaching physiological maturity.

Social

1. Have strong, independent social needs and desires.
2. Status in the peer group is important.
3. Want to belong to groups but be recognised as individuals within the team/groups.
4. Are likely to be sexually active.
5. Are in transition stage – change in home, locations, sport involvement.
6. Can assume major responsibilities and leadership roles.
7. Are engaged in making lifestyle and career decisions.
8. Are socially aware of their own and others' needs.
9. Likely to be involved in alcohol use and risk taking adventures.

Emotional

1. Self-identification becomes more stable.
2. Feel they have reached the stage of full maturity and expect to be treated as adults.
3. Have more stable emotional responses but feelings of inferiority and inadequacy are not uncommon.
4. Tend to assume more responsibilities, with the associated stress.
5. Feel the pressure of other priorities, e.g. work, study, church, flats.
6. Are less preoccupied with body changes and body image (still an issue though).

Cognitive (thought processes)

1. Are able to learn new skills/concepts, and can relate to past experience.
2. Have a higher level of abstract thinking.
3. Personal philosophy begins to emerge.
4. Make choices/solve problems/accept responsibility.
5. Self-evaluation, self-correction and motivation become strong tools.
6. Can determine their own plans, schedules and goals.
7. Are capable of complex analysis and associated decision making.

Athlete Needs

- Sport/event/position-specific training.
- Specific strength training as appropriate.
- Increased precision in prescription of programmes and performance assessment.
- Practising strategic approaches within their sport:
 - taking ownership and responsibility
 - decision making
 - Teaching Games for Understanding (TGfU)
- Opportunities for individual challenge and to be intuitive in their approach.
- Being understood:
 - lifestyle situation
 - school/university
 - employment/unemployment
 - family
- Having clear expectations.
- Being stimulated, challenged and excited.
- Positive role models.
- Leadership and the opportunity to be a leader.
- Encouragement and support to remain involved (especially if there is a shift in location).
- Consideration of both long and short-term development.