Start at the Beginning

"Let's start at the very beginning. It's a very good place to start. When you read you begin with ABC When you sing you begin with Do Re Mi....."

We all have the opportunity, many times in life, to start and finish a journey to improvement. When teaching our children to comprehend and use numbers (numeracy) we usually start with the simplest form of teaching – the use of the fingers for counting. When we are sure that the child has embraced this early knowledge (usually after days, weeks and months of simple repetition) we usually start to relate these numbers (one to ten to start with) to each other by some form of addition. We move forward to things like subtraction, multiplication and division once these foundations or 'keystone' skills are permanently learned. Following the permanent adaptation to these fundamentals, we can look forward to the complexity and sophistication of calculators and equations that allow us to approach algebra, geometry with tools like Pythagoras and 'sohcahtoa'.

This appears to be quite a simple and sensible journey to numeracy where each stage builds on the successes of the previous one.

What about physical development? Although we have many known processes surrounding the 'building of the athlete from the ground up' journey and an understanding of the ever-changing physical, emotional and cognitive stages a young person passes through on the journey to adulthood, we seem to fall into the many traps along the way.

Premature outcome-based competitions, ranking lists, assessment tests for talent identification, qualification standards for squad selection, peer and parental pressure, coaching egos, all play a part in this 'trap' mechanism that too many adults fall into. Just when a developing athlete needs time and patience to allow them to develop at their unique rate (determined by their own unique maturation rhythm) we, as adults, succumb to many of these pressures. The 'keystone' skills, that approximate what we saw in the illustration of the numeracy journey, are the foundation movements – the ability to Squat, Lunge, Push, Pull, Brace, Hinge, Land and Rotate.

These movements need to be permanently adapted to in this journey to physical literacy. They form the groundwork for the development of a movement vocabulary from which sports-specific actions and postures will grow. They should be carefully learned at all speeds, amplitudes, directions and planes as part of the foundation period. They should be learned by the use of a variety of teaching methodologies and not turned into the 'Times-Table' of robotic learning.

A curriculum created from these foundation movements is as demanding as the most complex and sophisticated 'end-stage' skill environment. Imagine the thought needed to negotiate this equation:

Squat	X implicit	X explicit	X amplitude		_
Squat	X implicit	X explicit	X amplitude	X speed	
Squat	X implicit	X explicit	X amplitude	X speed	X direction
Squat	Multi-planar versions				

Here we see the Squat movement starting to be taught implicitly and explicitly at varying amplitudes. Once amplitudes are mastered the element of speed can be introduced using implicit and explicit means of teaching and the differing amplitudes.....and so on. Multiply this by all the movements in the vocabulary and the seriousness of the project is seen.

If all the stated components are utilised and presented as a puzzle to solve then the process is a lengthy one – not a 'quick-fix' opportunity but a process that demands thought, commitment and very

good teaching / coaching skills. The process also demands commitment and perseverance from the young person on the journey.

'Start at the very beginning' is not a period that we dash through on the fast-track to the trinkets of competition or test results. It is a period that never really disappears even at the super-elite stages of performance. Elite athletes should ensure that they never move too far away from keeping these 'keystone' movements at the highest degree of precision as their sports-specific actions and postures become more and more sophisticated.

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