

2010 NSCAA Convention Clinic Outline Book

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The Relevance of Screening Youth Footballers

There is great debate in sport from amateur to the professional ranks regarding the role of screening and profiling young athletes. The practice of screening and profiling athletes in sport has been well represented in the literature. Screening is usually said to be carried out for the purpose of identifying a potential problem which may prevent or hinder performance whereas profiling can be used as a means of talent identification or for the assessment of the current status of an athletes' performance level. This information can then be used to implement strategies in the training programme, to set goals and evaluate future performances but often these titles are interchangeable.

Growth, development and maturation are all vital factors in the process of identifying talent in young sportsmen and women and for practitioners involved with youth sports it is essential to understand the influences that growth, maturation and development have on performance to enable them to support the athlete through the difficulties that might arise as they progress through to full maturity.

Screening fundamental movement skills in the growing footballer gives both the coaches and medical staff important information regarding the physical competence of each young player. Fundamental movement skills form the building blocks on which the more complex sports specific skills are developed but the reduction of physical activity has resulted in the fact that many children do not master these skills which can lead to a break down in performance in later years and could be a precursor to injury.

The assessment of skeletal maturity can give the coaches and medical staff vital information on the stage of maturity reached by each player. There can be as much as five years difference in skeletal maturity of players within each age band. These differences make it very difficult for coaches to pitch a training session which will benefit all players in the group. Knowledge of skeletal age will also allow a closer monitoring of training loads to certain individuals particularly late developers which may prevent over-training for an athlete who is behind in development to others in the same age-band and may ultimately prevent injuries.