

## Child and youth training in the North American, Central American and Caribbean area

by David Lahoz

“*The author addresses the dichotomy between modern training theory for child and youth athletics and actual training practice in the North American, Central American and Caribbean area. He claims that this presents a problem in the programming of youth athletics, and so is by implication an issue of coaches education. After outlining the socio-historical background to the development of modern training theory in the area, he discusses the measures currently being undertaken there to improve the formal, progressive education of coaches. He concludes with some ideas for further development.*”

### 1 Introduction

In almost every country in the North American, Central American and Caribbean (NACAC) area there is an apparent dichotomy between modern training theory for child and youth athletics and actual training practice. Scholastic and federation-sponsored competitions call repeatedly for the inclusion of the 200 metres, the 400 metres and the 300 metres Hurdles for youngsters of 12-14 years, and youth training incorporates unsuitable levels of anaerobic-lactic work.

In this article I will examine the current state of youth athletics in the NACAC region, and outline the ways in which its component countries have addressed the attendant problems.

### 2 Theory versus practice in youth training

Modern professional coaching literature includes the following guidelines for child and youth training. This should:

- Develop an appropriate energy distribution;
- emphasize broad-based, multi-lateral conditioning with an accent on co-ordinative abilities;
- incorporate precise methods of strength development, always remembering the importance of play and successful performance as a sound pedagogical principle (Bondarchuk, 1988; Sanderson, 1988; Thumm, 1987).

In many countries in the NACAC area, however, there is little apparent difference

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between adult and youth training. Where training is modified, adaptations are often insufficient to meet the particular needs of the younger athlete. This fact poses a problem in programming the development of youth athletics; it is therefore by implication an issue of coaches education. The area technical organizations, including the NACAC Track and Field Coaches Association (NACACTFCA) and the various physical education and coaches associations, have made attempts to confront this situation.

### **3 The development of modern training theory**

The problem can perhaps be better understood by considering briefly some relevant socio-historical factors. Modern training theory arrived in America via Europe, by means of: (a) a few highly rated immigrant coaches and sports scientists educated to an advanced level in their native lands; (b) an elite of coaches on site with the intellectual vigour to incorporate developments from abroad and thus update the profession; and (c) the monumental contribution of the Republic of Cuba, which adapted the European experiences into its successful sport development programme. Canada developed an extensive coaches education, certification and sport science documentation system (Burrrows, 1988; NAAC, 1983).

However, as a general rule – and with the exception of Cuba and Canada – countries in the NACAC region do not offer courses on or including sports training methodology, even as a part of university physical education curricula. Basic concepts like perspective training, periodization, load distribution and the relationship of volume and intensity in the conditioning process are foreign to many coaches. Although NACAC-IAAF coach certification courses take place each year throughout the countries of the region, coaches often have no access to these, nor to publications for self-directed study.

Therefore the duty of providing a continuous, progressive, formal athletic educa-

tion lies almost exclusively with the United States, Canada and the coaches certification programme designated for the Central American and Caribbean regions. These educational programmes include a series of intensive courses at three different levels, encompassing sport sciences, training methodology and technique appropriate to each level. The courses are conducted by qualified instructors.

The regional certification courses have been very successful in Honduras, the Bahamas, Monserrat, Grenada, St Vincent and Belize. Warfare in El Salvador, Nicaragua and Panama has not prevented those countries from enjoying the positive effects of the Central American and Caribbean programme.

### **4 The future – areas for improvement**

The general instruction programmes in the NACAC area have been very successful. However, the education of coaches in the relevant pedagogical principles for child and youth training is equally important. A coach of young athletes should understand the cognitive, affective, physical and motor development processes of the child, as well as the training implications relevant to each stage of the child's development. The Canadian instruction manuals are particularly good at pin-pointing the many different aspects of the growth sequence from childhood to adulthood, with accompanying conditioning implications. Physical educators and youth coaching organizations in the United States now offer training for volunteers in children's athletics, and sponsor track events which include disciplines appropriate to the age of the competitors (Martins, 1981).

Moreover, the Technical Committee of the Central American and Caribbean Track and Field Confederation has established a youth competition programme in tune with the characteristics of each individual developmental stage of the child, which has been adopted by some countries of the region (see Tables 1 and 2).

Significant progress in that respect is also taking place in the Caribbean. The island of Curacao offers a multilateral youth athletic development programme which has been capturing the attention of youth sport coaches all around the region. Cuba, which already boasts a tradition of excellence demonstrated by the consistent production of world-class athletes, complements its existing programme with a renovated training programme for the development of talent. This has already had remarkable results (Sanchez Godoy, 1988). Puerto Rico is making firm advances in the foundation stages of a massive government-sponsored youth sport programme. This was

inspired by the experiences of Cuba, and pays particular attention to the developmental approach to athletic conditioning and programming (Lopez, 1991). Jamaica, while pursuing its own athletic renovation, continues its prolific production of elite sprinters.

It would now be productive to stage an encounter of NACAC students, coaches and federation officials in order to explore the current status of youth athletics in the area. This might reveal new ways in which to assist the various countries of the region in their development of scientific and pedagogically sound youth programmes.

**Table 1: \* CACAC Youth Championships, ages 10-13**

<b>FEMALES</b>			
<b>Day</b>	<b>10-11 Years</b>	<b>Day</b>	<b>12-13 Years</b>
1	60m Dash High Jump	1	80m Dash Long Jump Shot Put (3 kg)
2	Long Jump Baseball Throw 800m 4 x 60m Relay	2	60m Hurdles (76.5 cm) High Jump 1000m 4 x 80m Relay
<b>MALES</b>			
<b>Day</b>	<b>10-11 Years</b>	<b>Day</b>	<b>12-13 Years</b>
1	60m Dash High Jump	1	80m Dash Long Jump Shot Put (3 kg)
2	Long Jump Baseball Throw 1000m 4 x 60m Relay	2	60m Hurdles (84 cm) High Jump 1200m 4 x 80m Relay

It is strongly recommended that every child participate in each one of these events in local, regional and national championships whenever possible. The events might even be distributed over more than two days. Also advisable is to the holding of special events, cross-country and walking meets, as well as a variety of co-operative, pre-sport and collective sports games. These should be accompanied to suit the particular stage in the training process in the light of precise conditioning and pedagogical objectives.

\*Central American and Caribbean Athletics Confederation, International Amateur Athletic Federation, North American, Central American and Caribbean Coaches Association

**Table 2: Junior Championship events for the under-17 division**

<b>FEMALES</b>		
<b>Running Events</b>	<b>Throwing Events</b>	<b>Jumping Events</b>
100m, 200m, 400m 800m, 1200m, 100mH (.762m), 300mH (.762m)	Shot Put (4 kg) Discus Throw (1 kg) Javelin Throw (600g)	High Jump Long Jump Triple Jump
<b>Relays</b>	<b>Pentathlon</b>	
4 x 100m 4 x 400m	Day 1: 100mH, Shot Put, High Jump Day 2: Long Jump, 800m	
<b>MALES</b>		
<b>Running Events</b>	<b>Throwing Events</b>	<b>Jumping Events</b>
100m, 200m, 400m 800m, 1500m, 3000m 110mH, (.914m) 400mH (.762m) 2000m Steeplechase 5000m Walk	Shot Put (12 lb) Discus Throw (3 kg) Javelin Throw (700g) Hammer Throw (12 lb)	High Jump Long Jump Triple Jump Pole Vault
<b>Relays</b>	<b>Heptathlon</b>	
4 x 100m 4 x 100m	Day 1: 200m, Long Jump, Javelin, High Jump Day 2: 110mH, Discus, 1200m	

Events requiring anaerobic lactacid efforts appear for the first time in this age category. Lactacid energy stimuli should not exceed 10% of the training programme in its initial stage. Only a gradual buildup in this area can safely prepare the developing athlete for the growing performance demands. This type of energy expenditure during training must be followed by the recovery and regeneration criteria documented in our professional literature.

**Table 3**

**BILL OF RIGHTS  
FOR YOUNG ATHLETES**

- Right to participate in sports
- Right to participate at a level commensurable with each child's maturity and ability
- Right to have qualified adult leadership
- Right to play as a child and not as an adult
- Right of children to share in the leadership and decision making of their sport participation
- Right to participate in safe and healthy environments
- Right to proper preparation for participation in sports
- Right to an equal opportunity to strive for success
- Right to be treated with dignity
- Right to have fun in sports

MARTINS, R.; CHRISTINA, R.W.; HARVEY, J.S.Jr.; SHARKEY, B.J. (1981): *Coaching Young Athletes*, p. 7. A product of the American Coaches Effectiveness Programme. Champaign, IL., Human Kinetics. Copyright 1981 by the authors, reprinted by permission.

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