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## OUR PERSPECTIVE



### Indigenous Long-Term Athlete & Participant Development Model

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#### Abstract

**Objectives:** The primary objective of this paper is to discuss the Indigenous Long-Term Athlete and Participant Development model (LTAPD) the implications for sport and lifelong active living. **Discussion:** The Indigenous LTAPD was created by the Aboriginal Physical Activity & Cultural Circle building upon Canada's general LTAPD. The Indigenous LTAPD includes nine stages for the development of physical activity for life. This model is designed to reflect the shared values of Indigenous peoples providing a positive environment for ALL (regardless of ability or sex). **Conclusions:** The Indigenous LTAPD model has great potential incorporating the traditional values and ways of Aboriginal peoples so that ALL can achieve the benefits of sport, recreation, and physical activity participation. **Health & Fitness Journal of Canada 2015;8(2):22-28.**

**Keywords:** Long-term athlete development, Indigenous, physical activity

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#### Introduction

The Aboriginal Physical Activity & Cultural Circle (APACC) Long-Term Athlete and Participant Development (LTAPD) model identifies nine stages for cultivation of physical activity for life. Physical activity for Aboriginal people can be sport, recreation, fitness and traditional activities. Physical activity is a valuable community asset, and one that impacts the entire community.

When physical activity is performed with cultural ties and recognition, these impacts have the potential to extend well beyond the commonly recognized health and wellness benefits associated with

sport, recreation, fitness and traditional activities.

The benefits may also impact social determinants of health within a community and may include putting children and youth on a positive life course, and building stronger and more engaged communities. These benefits are realized when physical activity includes traditional values and is accessible for all community members regardless of stage in the journey of life.

If APACC wants sports, recreation, fitness and traditional activities to live up to its potential, we need to be *intentional* about ensuring that it reflects Aboriginal shared values and that there is a positive environment for all abilities and sexes. APACC must be deliberate to ensure that physical activity is accessible, affordable, culturally sensitive, safe, inclusive, fun and fair for Aboriginal people.

An athlete can be competitive in fitness competitions and traditional activities as in the long-term athlete development stages presented by Canada's LTAD model.

Typically the athlete is someone involved in sports, and the participant is involved in recreation, fitness, and traditional activities. The LTAPD model is applicable to Aboriginal people in physical activities such as recreation, fitness, and traditional activities for these areas lead to an area of high specialization in skills, tactics, and

training. These areas can also be competitive and have long-term developmental phases that contribute to an Active Life.

The APACC Long-Term Athlete and Participant Development model provide the opportunity to exercise this intention – to transform our lifelong dreams in to action of having active Aboriginal communities for all stages of life. We have combined and culturally adapted the Canadian Sport for Life LTAD model and the True Sport LTAD Matrix to create the APACC LTAPD model.

### **Long-Term Athlete & Participant Development Model Stages**

The APACC has developed the Long-Term Athlete and Participant Development Model with 9 stages that include: 6 Age Stages, 2 Stages reflecting people with a disability, and 1 Stage for retiring athletes:

1. **Awareness Stage** – Any age for a person with a disablement
2. **First Contact Stage** – Any Age for person with disability to ensure positive introduction
3. **Active Start Stage** - Girls 0 to 6 yr and Boys 0 to 6 yr
4. **Fundamentals Stage** - Girls 6 to 8 yr and Boys 6 to 9 yr
5. **Learn to Train Stage** - Girls 8 to 11 yr and Boys 9 to 12 yr
6. **Train to Train Stage** - Girls 11 to 15 yr and Boys 12 to 16 yr
7. **Train to Compete Stage** - Girls 15 to 21 yr and Boys 16 to 23 yr
8. **Deceleration/Transition Stage** – After competing ensuring preparation for later activities.
9. **Active for Life Stage** – Start at any age

The Active for Life stage of LTAPD model is the final destination for every

person. In this stage, athletes and participants enjoy lifelong participation in a variety of competitive and recreational opportunities in sport and physical activity. A cultural and family support needs to be included in all stages.

Also, as noted APACC is including the following Canada Sport for Life Awareness and First Contact Stages (2011) with a few adaptations:

### ***Awareness Stage***

This stage is included to cultivate physical activity for life for Aboriginal people with a disability. The Awareness stage informs the general public and prospective Aboriginal athletes or participants with disabilities of the available opportunities. Sport, recreation, or fitness organizations or places where people gather to practice traditional activities need to make their offerings and resources known for Aboriginal people with disabilities and their families.

The Awareness Stage occurs at the stage the disability is acquired. Those who acquire a disability at any of the following stages generally experience great change and transition. Some of their previous physical activities may no longer be as they were. These individuals or their families may not be aware of the many sporting or physical activities that are available to them.

Awareness plans and effective communication can help to ease this transition and foster awareness among communities, families, and people who work with Aboriginal persons with disabilities, impairments, or handicaps. It is important to note that disabilities include psychological impairments such as post-traumatic stress disorders or intergenerational trauma connected to residential school traumas.

### ***First Contact Stage***

The First Contact stage ensures Aboriginal persons with disabilities have a positive first experience with an activity and remain engaged. Organizations need to train coaches and develop programs that provide suitable orientation for prospective Aboriginal athletes or participants with disabilities to feel confident, comfortable, and culturally safe in their surroundings.

If you acquire a disability you may go from training to compete back to the Awareness Stage and First Contact Stage, for example, Paralympics Sport context.

### ***Active Start Stage – Girls and Boys 0 to 6 yr***

Children should participate in interesting cultural activities and traditional games that develop basic movement skills in a fun atmosphere.

Create participation opportunities for children in sports, recreation, fitness and traditional activities to explore. Create opportunities and encourage children to be active daily for a minimum of 60 minutes.

Encourage parents to be involved and to also lead activities. Enhance emotional development and build social skills.

Ensure your program is open and accessible to everyone. Embrace diversity in children and their interests. Provide caring and knowledgeable community youth and adults as role models and program leaders.

Share team or program responsibilities among all families (e.g., bringing snacks, co-coaching/leading, setting up or taking down equipment).

Teach fundamental movements through play, traditional games or movement to music.

### ***Fundamentals Stage - Girls 6 to 8 yr and Boys 6 to 9 yr***

Cultural activities and traditional games need to be included as a physical activity to develop cultural awareness, pride and confidence.

During the fundamentals stage, children should develop movement skills, including the ABCs of Agility, Balance, Coordination, and running, jumping, and throwing. Early elementary school age children need to participate in a variety of well-structured activities that develop fundamental skills. However, activities and programs need to maintain a focus on fun, and formal competition should only be minimally introduced.

Children should participate in a fun and challenging physical activity or multi-sport setting to explore interests throughout the seasons. Activities and programs need to maintain a focus on fun, and formal competition should only be minimally introduced to avoid the danger of burnout through premature specialization.

Pair up athletes and participants with others of varying skills sets to create opportunities to learn from each other and/or to learn new skills. Ensure that athletes have the opportunity to try various positions, techniques or skills. Create ways to welcome new participants and families to the program or team.

Introduce simple rules and fair play. Introduce sportspersonship, teamwork and cooperation. Develop observation and communication skills. Ensure everyone participates equally at play, practice and competition. Appreciate that not everyone learns the same way or at the same pace.

Ensure that athletes and participants understand the importance of respecting

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their surroundings such as facilities, fields, and trails.

### ***Learn to Train Stage - Girls 8 to 11 yr and Boys 9 to 12 yr***

During the Learn to Train stage, children should be converting their fundamental movement skills into fundamental skills. This stage is "The Golden Age of Learning" for specific sport or motor skills.

A greater amount of time should be spent training and practicing general skills suitable for a number of activities than competing. Ensure to maintain a high level of fun while learning new skills and introducing competitive elements

Avoid specializing at this age through excessive training or specialization in a sport or individual competition however foster work ethics. Premature specialization promotes one-sided development and increases the likelihood of injury and burnout. Introduce setting health and wellness goals, and tracking daily physical activity.

Encourage participation in seasonal activities that are land-based, water-based and snow/ice-based activities.

Accentuate the importance of friendships in the context of the team or group work. Highlight healthy role models to ensure continued participation. Introduce the notion that drug use in sport or physical activities is neither healthy nor fair.

Recognize that different genders learn differently, have fun doing different things, and mature and grow differently. Recognize holistic approach to sport and activities, and recognize changes in emotions and moods at this stage. Create self-identity through practice of visualization.

Include support and implementation of cultural practices. Enhance personal and

cultural development through being physically active. Character development through participation in physical activity translates well into life skills.

### ***Train to Train Stage - Girls 11 to 15 yr and Boys 12 to 16 yr***

Ensure the enjoyment of being active is central to counter increasing social pressures to drop out.

During the Train to Train stage, young athletes or participants should focus on building up their fitness level. They are ready to combine their sport-specific and physical activity training skills and tactics. More time is still needed to refine their skills and capacities even if they seem talented. Winning should be secondary to skill development, and ensure there is correct training to competition ratio, and that there is a training plan that incorporates recovery.

The ages that define the Train to Train stage are based on the approximate onset and end of the adolescent growth spurt. Towards the end of this stage, they need to focus on strength, power, and speed output. Increased training hours are needed at this stage to develop long-term potential in their chosen physical activity.

Recognize that as athletes and participants master skills, self-confidence will increase. Recognize that sport can sports and physical activity can reduce stress, anxiety and be an important aspect of holistic health. Provide Indigenous specific and sports-related nutritional information.

Empower athletes using positive imagery and foster positive self-esteem. Teach positive body image and educate athletes, participants, parents, and coaches about normal body changes.

Provide current anti-doping and substance abuse information.

### ***Train to Compete - Girls 15 to 21 yr and Boys 16 to 23 yr***

In the Train to Compete stage, athletes or competitors should choose one pursuit to train and excel in. Competitors will train to solidify their specific skills and all of their physical capacities. These competitors are aiming to compete in national and international events.

Community program participants at this point continue onto the Active Life Stage and skip this stage.

Athletes in sports and high achieving competitors in recreation, fitness, and traditional activities need to commit to high-volume and high-intensity training throughout the year. Train to Compete athletes are not the average community program participant. They are committed athletes with recognized talent who have chosen an elite pathway that few others pursue. Community program participants at this point continue onto the Active Life Stage and skip this stage.

At the Train to Compete stage of LTAPD model, this is where competition becomes "serious." Competitors enter this stage if they have chosen to specialize in one sport/event/position and excel at the highest level of competition possible.

Work with athletes to help them master the emotional and spiritual elements of sport. Provide opportunities that maximize athletes' mental, emotional, and spiritual readiness. Stress the importance of social networks both in and out of competition and the importance of being a positive role model for the Aboriginal community.

Set the stage to remain healthy for life and to incorporate cultural protocols. Give back to your community by setting up a program or a workshop to teach skills. Recognize the relationship between

intrinsic motivation and participation at a higher level of competition.

Instruction in topics such as nutrition, sport psychology, recovery and regeneration, injury prevention, and injury management are also very important.

Formal competition becomes more prominent in annual periodized training, competition and recovery plans, and includes major national and international events. Apply rules consistently and advocate for sportspersonship. Advocate drug-free sport, equity, fair play, safety and non-violence.

### ***Deceleration/Transition Stage***

In the Deceleration/Transition Stage, Aboriginal athletes or competitors start to detrain in their major sport and transition to Active Life Stage. These past athletes or competitors may shift to Active Life from competition due to injury, not able to qualify for competition, loss of competitive physical or mental edge, loss of support to be able to compete, and/or aging.

Athletes in sports and high achieving competitors in recreation, fitness, and traditional activities need to be prepared with an exit plan when they are ready or forced to retire. Prior to this stage competitive athletes were accustomed to scheduling a majority of their time to training and competing therefore when competition ends there will be an adjustment for the participant physically, mentally, emotionally, and spiritually.

A retired athlete could start to focus on coaching or officiating the sport or competitive physical activity, or working as a positive role model in the community. It is valuable to recognize the "deflated" or "has been" emotions once

the athlete has retired and is no longer "in the game". It is important for the retired athlete to vocalize the loss and develop new interests to stay Active for Life. This is very important for athletes who were forced in to retirement due to an injury.

### ***Active for Life***

The Active for Life stage of LTAPD model is the final destination for every person. In this stage, athletes and participants enjoy lifelong participation in a variety of competitive and recreational opportunities in sport and physical activity. This stage can be entered at any age, beginning with developing physical literacy in youth and evolves to being Competitive for Life and/or Fit for Life through all phases of adulthood.

Try new sports and activities to keep the joy alive. Move from one sport to another. Participate in sports, recreation, fitness and traditional activities for the enjoyment of it. Continue to create social connections in these areas to enhance your life. Find the joy that comes from maintaining a healthy active lifestyle and sharing your physical activity with family.

Seek new/additional ways to enhance your active life experiences by leading physical activity programs for your community. Find ways to encourage your community to be active. Find a positive work-life-play balance. Maintain healthy eating habits. Participate for the health and wellness benefits of an active lifestyle.

Active for Life, along with physical literacy and sport excellence, is one of three key outcomes within Canadian Sport for Life (CS4L) in which Canadians remain active in sport and physical activity for life by developing physical literacy.

Under ideal circumstances, athletes and participants enter the Active for Life stage of LTAPD model at one of two times:

1. After they have developed physical literacy by the end of the Learn to Train stage and chosen to pursue sport and physical activity according to the goals of the Active for Life stage.
2. After they have exited the LTAPD model high-performance training and competition stream (Train to Train, and Train to Compete).

Many participants in the Active for Life stage are not physically literate, due to the fact that the Canadian sport system does not consistently develop physical literacy for all participants especially in the Aboriginal community.

### **Conclusion**

In conclusion, the APACC LTAPD model includes nine stages for cultivation of physical activity for life. It builds upon Canada's LTAPD model incorporating the traditional values and ways of Aboriginal peoples. The participation in sport and physical activity has important implications for Aboriginal peoples from both performance- and health-related perspectives.

### **Author's Qualifications**

The author's qualifications are as follows: Rosalin Miles EdD. Dr. Miles is Nlha7káp̄mx and an active community member of Lytton First Nation.



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