



Athletic Intelligence

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Athletes' Training Center offers several specialized services including physical therapy, adult fitness, and athletic enhancement for athletes of all ages. In my experience, youth athletic enhancement is the least understood aspect of the services we offer. This misunderstanding is not unique to our facility but something I have encountered in a variety of settings throughout the country. I have discussed athletic enhancement training for kids with many parents who have often fallen into one of two extreme categories. They either want their young athlete to develop significant increases in speed and power immediately or they don't feel it is necessary to become involved in such a program at a young age. I feel that people at either end of that spectrum are missing the point and do not truly understand the concept of Athletic Intelligence.

Athletic Intelligence is a term developed by the International Youth Conditioning Association (IYCA), an organization I consider to be the authority when it comes to programming training for young athletes. They define Athletic Intelligence as "Increasing the capacity for learning and understanding various physical skills and how they relate." In an era of early specialization, youth athletic development has focused far too much on structured training and practices designed to enhance a specific skill or sport at the expense of overall athletic development. In essence, planning training in this manner is limiting the natural development of athleticism via guided discovery. The main problem with youth sports today is rushing or ignoring the critical process of athletic development while over coaching and specializing too early. This in turn leaves young athletes lacking the foundational aptitude to learn more and reach elite levels. This is precisely the reason many young athletes never amount to much in terms of optimal sporting success.



The concept of Athletic Intelligence is what our programs for young athletes are all about. I am certainly not against young athletes participating in organized sports and highly recommend becoming involved in several sports. However, too much early specialization can have far reaching negative consequences related to athletic development and can ultimately prevent an athlete from reaching his or her true potential in their chosen sport. Our athletic enhancement programs offer a great solution to improving Athletic Intelligence while preventing the negative outcomes of early specialization. Our programs are designed to develop a large base of biomotor abilities while balancing out many of the repetitive movement patterns encountered in sport. I have seen many young athletes go through this integrated process of athletic development and reach high levels of achievement later on. One example I can give of a well known athlete comes from the sport of tennis. At one point in my career I spent some time as a performance coach at IMG Academies in Bradenton, FL where a young tennis player by the name of Maria Sharapova was going through an integrated training program. Her program included tennis specific training along with regular athletic enhancement training designed to develop a wide range of movement skills. She had been following this integrated training program since the age of nine. By the time she reached her late teens she had been ranked as high as #1 in the world along with claiming a Wimbledon championship. Sport specific skills being developed along with overall athleticism will ultimately provide a young athlete with the opportunity to reach his or her potential.