

1

2 **An individualized longitudinal approach to monitoring the dynamics of growth**

3 **and fitness development in adolescent athletes**

4

5 Running Head: Monitoring the dynamics of growth and fitness

6

7

8 Kevin Till¹, Steve Copley², John O'Hara¹, Chris Chapman³ & Carlton Cooke¹

9

10 ¹Carnegie Research Institute, Leeds Metropolitan University, Leeds, West Yorkshire,
11 United Kingdom

12 ²Faculty of Health Sciences, The University of Sydney, New South Wales, Australia

13 ³Rugby Football League, Red Hall, Leeds, United Kingdom

14

15

16 Corresponding Author:

17 Dr. Kevin Till

18 Room 111, Fairfax Hall

19 Research Institute for Sport, Physical Activity and Leisure

20 Centre for Sports Performance

21 Headingley Campus, Leeds Metropolitan University

22 W. Yorkshire, LS6 3QS

23 Phone: (044-11) 01132-832600 Ext: 25182

24 Email: k.till@leedsmet.ac.uk

25

26

1 **An individualized longitudinal approach to monitoring the dynamics of growth**
2 **and fitness development in adolescent athletes**

3

ABSTRACT

This study evaluated the development of anthropometric and fitness characteristics of three individual adolescent junior rugby league players, and compared their characteristics with a cross-sectional population matched by age and skill level. Cross-sectional anthropometric and fitness assessments were conducted on 1,172 players selected to the Rugby Football League's (RFL's) talent development programme (i.e., the Player Performance Pathway) between 2005 and 2008. Three players of differing relative age, maturational status and playing position were measured and tracked once per year on three occasions (Under 13s, 14s, 15s age categories) and compared against the cross-sectional population. Results demonstrated that the later maturing players increased height (Player 1 = 9.2 %; Player 2 = 7.8 %) and a number of fitness characteristics (e.g., 60m speed – Player 1 = -14.9 %; Player 2 = -9.9 %) more than the earlier maturing player (Player 3 – Height = 2.0 %, 60m sprint = -0.7 %) over the two year period. The variation in the development of anthropometric and fitness characteristics between the three players highlights the importance of longitudinally monitoring individual characteristics during adolescence to assess dynamic changes in growth, maturation and fitness. Findings showcase the limitations of short-term performance assessments at one-off time points within annual-age categories; instead advocating individual development and progression tracking without de-selection. Coaches should consider using an individual approach, comparing data with population averages, to assist in the prescription of appropriate training and lifestyle interventions to aid the development of junior athletes.

Keywords: Anthropometry, Coaching, Maturation, Rugby League, Talent Identification.

INTRODUCTION

To identify potential talent for developmental programs in sport, many current systems often use cross-sectional analyses of annual-age cohorts during early or mid-adolescence. Adjusted to suit the specific demands of respective sports (e.g., soccer; 11, 20), these analyses are also often comprised of anthropometric and fitness based assessments (21). But on these premises, a number of key assumptions and limitations can be highlighted (6) including the lack of due consideration to the potential impact of key growth and maturation processes that occur during adolescence (36).

Maturation is defined as the timing and tempo of progress towards the mature adult state (17), and during adolescence maturation can vary considerably between individuals (18). Advanced chronological age and maturation within similar chronological annual-age groups can create size and fitness (e.g., strength and endurance) advantages. These are hypothesized to confound the relationship between anthropometric and fitness characteristics with sporting performance (24). In the context of male youth sport, this has led to the over representative selection of relatively older (5) and earlier maturing (27) boys. Thus, individuals may be (dis)advantaged on performance measures when compared within chronological annual-age groups (3) using cross-sectional assessments.

Set against the above tendencies, it is also evident that physical advantages presented by advanced maturation during adolescence are also largely transient and can reduce as individual's progress into young adulthood (14, 35). For instance, physically dominant junior athletes may not maintain their initial advantages and attributes throughout maturation and into young adulthood; and in fact many late maturing individuals may appear to 'catch-up'. This therefore potentially questions the validity of talent identification practices, at the adolescent stage (2); and likewise

1 emphasises how inter-individual differences may generate unstable non-linear
2 development of fitness and performance (25). If such growth and development is
3 dynamic, then the ability to identify and predict ‘future talent’ using one-off
4 anthropometric and fitness assessments also rests on uneasy foundations. Instead it
5 would appear more logical to longitudinally monitor and track individual progression,
6 providing more valid information to better identify and develop youth athletes (36).

7 To date, longitudinal data within talent identification and development
8 research is limited (7, 8, 35). Few studies take into account inter-individual variation
9 that may occur during adolescence, and no study yet emphasizes an individualized
10 approach to illustrate the argument and problem of non-linear development.
11 Therefore, using longitudinal data, the purpose of the current study was to evaluate
12 the variation in the development of anthropometric and fitness characteristics of three
13 individual junior rugby league players selected within a talent development
14 programme and compare their characteristics against a traditional cross-sectional
15 population, matched by age and skill level. A secondary purpose was then to illustrate
16 the different developmental trajectories that occurred during adolescence, with intent
17 to highlight the practical implications of individual long-term monitoring and
18 assessment within junior athletes. It was hypothesized that the individual development
19 of the three players would be dynamic, with each player demonstrating a different
20 developmental trajectory that could influence subsequent performance and selection
21 within junior rugby league.

22

23

METHODS

24 **Experimental Approach to the Problem**

1 This study investigated the inter-individual variation in the development of
2 anthropometric and fitness characteristics of three junior rugby league players using
3 an individual and longitudinal case study approach. The UK Rugby league's national
4 governing body the Rugby Football League (RFL) used a talent identification and
5 development model, named the Player Performance Pathway, from 2001 to 2008 (see
6 34 for more details). Each year Regional representative selection occurred at the
7 Under 13s, 14s and 15s annual-age categories with anthropometric and fitness testing
8 undertaken on all players. Between 2005 and 2008, 1,172 anthropometric and fitness
9 assessments were conducted in which 81 players were selected to the Player
10 Performance Pathway on three consecutive occasions (i.e., Under 13s in 2005, Under
11 14s in 2006 and Under 15s in 2007). Therefore, longitudinal data became available for
12 these players, in which this data set was used for the case study subjects and cross-
13 sectional population to evaluate and compare the differing development trajectories of
14 the case study players.

15 **Subjects**

16 Case study players were identified according to their maturational status,
17 relative age and playing position as previously used in research by the authors (31).
18 Maturation was classified by Years from Peak Height Velocity (YPHV) in accordance
19 with Mirwald et al. (22). For relative age, player's birth-dates were categorised to
20 reflect their birth quartile (Q), with reference to the 1st September date used for
21 creating annual-age groups. Quartile 1 (Q1) = birth-dates between September-
22 November; Q2 = December-February; Q3 = March-May; and Q4 = June-August.
23 Playing position was classified into four sub-groups (i.e., 'Outside-Backs', 'Pivots',
24 'Props' and 'Backrow'), as used in previous rugby league research (29).

1 Three individual players were used for the case study analysis. Player 1 was a
2 Q4, 'Outside-Back' with an YPHV of -0.95 years (at the Under 13s age category).
3 Player 2 was a Q2, 'Pivot' with an YPHV of -0.18 years (Under 13s). Player 3 was a
4 Q1, 'Prop' with an YPHV of 0.52 years (Under 13s). A deliberate bias was introduced
5 in the selection of these subjects for the case study analysis such that they covered a
6 range of maturation, relative age and playing positions. This selection process was
7 intentionally undertaken to allow illustration of the different developmental
8 trajectories, with reference to variability in the changes in growth and fitness that
9 occur during adolescence. All experimental procedures were approved by the Leeds
10 Metropolitan University Ethics Committee and all subjects and parents provided
11 written informed consent before participating in any of the testing.

12 **Procedures**

13 Anthropometric and fitness assessments were conducted once per year at the
14 same time of day (i.e., early evening) and year (i.e., July) on each occasion.
15 Assessments were conducted on three consecutive years (i.e., Under 13s, 14s and 15s)
16 for the case study players with the procedures for each measure detailed below. Prior
17 to testing all participants were instructed to refrain from strenuous activity 48 hours
18 prior to testing and to consume their normal pre-training diet.

19 ***Anthropometry***

20 Height and sitting height were measured to the nearest 0.1cm using a Seca
21 Alpha stand. Body mass, wearing only shorts, was measured to the nearest 0.1kg
22 using calibrated Seca alpha (model 770) scales. The sum of skinfold thickness was
23 determined by measuring four skinfold sites (biceps, triceps, subscapular, suprailiac)
24 using calibrated Harpenden skinfold callipers (British Indicators, UK) in accordance
25 with the recommendations by Hawes and Martin (12). Intraclass correlation

1 coefficients (ICCs) and typical error measurements (TEM) for reliability of skinfold
2 measurements were $r = 0.954$ ($p < 0.001$) and 3.2% respectively, indicating acceptable
3 reliability based on established criteria (i.e., $> .80$; 13).

4 ***Maturation (Age at PHV)***

5 To measure maturity status, an age at peak height velocity (PHV) prediction
6 equation was used (22). This prediction method used a gender specific multiple
7 regression equation including stature, sitting height, leg length, body mass,
8 chronological age and their interactions. YPHV was calculated by subtracting age at
9 PHV from chronological age.

10 ***Fitness Characteristics***

11 Prior to fitness testing a standardised warm up was conducted and all players
12 received full instructions of the tests. For each assessment the highest value of three
13 trials was used. Lower body power was assessed using the vertical jump test
14 (centimetres) measured using a Takei vertical jump metre (Takei Scientific
15 Instruments Co. Ltd, Japan). A countermovement jump with hands positioned on the
16 hips was used, which measured jump height to the nearest cm. The ICC and TEM for
17 the vertical jump was $r = 0.903$ ($p < 0.001$) and 2.9%, respectively. A 2kg medicine
18 ball (Max Grip, China) chest throw was used to measure upper body power (28).
19 Participants were instructed to throw the ball horizontally as far as possible while
20 seated with their back against a wall with distance measured to the nearest 0.1cm. The
21 ICC and TEM for the medicine ball chest throw was $r = 0.965$ ($p < 0.001$) and 0.6%,
22 respectively. Running speed was assessed over 10m, 20m, 30m and 60m using timing
23 gates (Brower Timing Systems, IR Emit, USA). Participants were positioned from a
24 standing start 0.5m behind the initial timing gate and were instructed to start in their
25 own time. Times were recorded to the nearest 0.01s. The ICC and TEM for the 10m,

1 20m, 30m and 60m sprints were $r = 0.788$ ($p < 0.001$), $r = 0.852$ ($p < 0.001$), $r = 0.899$
2 ($p < 0.001$) and $r = 0.924$ ($p < 0.001$), and 8.4%, 4.5%, 3.3% and 2.3% respectively.
3 Change of direction speed was assessed using the agility 505 test. Participants were
4 positioned 15m from a turning point with timing gates positioned 10m from the start
5 point. Players accelerated from the starting point, through the gates, turned on the
6 15m line and ran as quickly as possible back through the gates (9). Three alternate
7 attempts on left and right turns were used, with times recorded to the nearest 0.01s.
8 The ICC and TEM for the agility 505 left and right were $r = 0.823$ and $r = 0.844$
9 ($p < 0.001$), and 3.5% and 3.1% respectively. Estimated $\dot{V}O_{2\max}$ was assessed using the
10 multistage fitness test (26). Players were required to run 20m shuttles keeping in time
11 with a series of beeps in which running speed progressively increased until they
12 reached volitional exhaustion. Regression equations were used to estimate $\dot{V}O_{2\max}$ from
13 the level reached during the test (26). The ICC and TEM for the multistage fitness test
14 were 0.90 and 3.1% (10).

15 **Data Analysis**

16 Anthropometric and fitness characteristics of the population (1,172 players
17 selected to the Player Performance Pathway) are shown in Table 1.

18 ****Insert Table 1 here****

19 The three individual case-study players were firstly compared against the
20 population. For this comparison, anthropometric and fitness profiles were created for
21 each player using radar graphs and z-scores¹. Z-scores were calculated by the formula
22 $(x - \mu / \sigma)$ where x is the raw score, μ is the mean of the population and σ is the
23 standard deviation of the population. This approach allowed the tracking of changes in
24 anthropometric and fitness characteristics over time with relative comparisons to the

¹ Z scores are a basic standard score and convert raw scores to units of standard deviation in which the mean is zero and standard deviation is 1.0 (30).

1 population. Z-scores of -3, -2, -1, 0, 1 and 2 were used to represent the mean and
2 standard deviations of the population. For example, values for Height were -3
3 (151.7cm), -2 (159.0cm), -1 (166.7cm), 0 (174.4cm), 1 (182.1cm) and 2 (189.8cm).
4 Characteristics between these z-scores were classified by decimal place. Following
5 comparisons with the population, characteristics of players in terms of z-scores and
6 change in performance were then descriptively compared and analysed between each
7 case study player.

8

9

RESULTS

10 Table 2 shows the anthropometric and fitness characteristics of the three
11 individual players at the three annual-age groups (i.e., Under 13s, 14s and 15s). Table
12 3 presents the percentage change in characteristics between the annual-age categories
13 (i.e., Under 13s-14s; Under 14s-15s; Under 13s-15s) for each player. Figure 1 (Player
14 1), 2 (Player 2) and 3 (Player 3) illustrate the anthropometric and fitness profiles of
15 the three individual players compared against the z-scores for the population.

16

Insert Table 2 here

17

Insert Table 3 here

18

Insert Figures 1, 2 and 3 here

19

Cases Compared to Population

20

Player 1: Player 1 was later maturing, shorter and lighter than the whole

21

sample at the Under 13s age category. Between the Under 13s and 15s annual-age

22

categories, z-scores for height (-2.0 to 0), sitting height (-2.0 to 0) and body mass (-

23

1.4 to 0.3) all improved, however, sum of four skinfold scores decreased (0.5 to -0.6).

24

Fitness characteristics were slightly above (vertical jump, agility 505, estimated

25

$\dot{V}O_{2\max}$) or below (med ball chest throw, 10m – 60m sprint) the z-score of -1 at the

1 Under 13s age category. All fitness characteristics improved to z-scores of
2 approximately 1 (Figure 1) by the Under 15s. These results represent Player 1 as a
3 later maturing player with lower anthropometric characteristics than the population,
4 but who performed at an average level on fitness tests relative to the population
5 throughout the two year period.

6 *Player 2:* Player 2 was also later maturing, shorter and lighter than the
7 population at the Under 13s age category. Between the Under 13s and 15s age
8 categories z-scores for height (-1.0 to 0.7), sitting height (-1.0 to 0.8) and body mass
9 (-1.0 to 0.4) improved, whilst sum of four skinfolds remained constant. Fitness
10 characteristics were approximately 0 at the Under 13s age category with improvement
11 evident to z-scores of approximately 1 (Figure 2) at Under 15s. These results
12 represent Player 2 as an average maturer, with average anthropometric characteristics
13 compared to the population, but who performed above average on fitness
14 characteristics throughout the two year period.

15 *Player 3:* Player 3 was earlier maturing who scored approximately 0 for
16 anthropometric characteristics at the Under 13s age category. Between the Under 13s
17 and 15s age categories z-scores for height (-0.4 to 0) and sitting height (0 to 0.5)
18 slightly improved while body mass (0.3 to 1.7) and sum of four skinfolds (-1 to -2.5)
19 increased. Sum of four skinfolds at the Under 15s age category represented values
20 significantly greater than the population. Fitness characteristics z-scores were between
21 0 and -1 at the Under 13s age category. Improvements in some fitness characteristics
22 occurred between Under 13s and 15s (e.g., vertical jump -0.1 to 0.8), however,
23 performance in speed, agility and estimated $\dot{V}O_{2\max}$ did not change across the two year
24 period (Figure 3). These results represent Player 3 as being above average for

1 anthropometric and some fitness characteristics at the Under 13s age category with
2 little change apparent across the two year period.

3 *Case Comparisons*

4 *Age and Maturation:* Table 2 shows Player 1 was a younger and later maturing
5 player than Player 2 who was younger and later maturing than Player 3. The
6 difference in maturation between Player 1 and 3 at the Under 13s annual-age category
7 was 1.47 years as a result of differing birth dates (i.e., chronological ages) and
8 maturation timing (i.e., age at PHV).

9 *Anthropometric Characteristics:* For height and sitting height at the Under 13s
10 age category Player 3 was taller than Player 2 who was taller than Player 1. Variation
11 was apparent in the change in height and sitting height between the three players with
12 Player 1 (9.2%) and Player 2 (7.8%) growing significantly more than Player 3 (2.0%).
13 Therefore, the advantages Player 3 would have experienced at the Under 13s age
14 category were no longer applicable at Under 15s, as Player 3 was now the same height
15 as Player 1. For body mass and sum of four skinfolds, Player 3 was heavier with a
16 greater sum of four skinfolds than Player 2 who was heavier with a lower sum of four
17 skinfolds to Player 1 across the age categories. Consistent increases in body mass
18 were evident across all three players between the Under 13s and 15s age categories.

19 *Fitness Characteristics:* Vertical jump performance was consistent across the
20 two years for the three players with similar improvements evident (Player 1 = 18.9%,
21 Player 2 = 18.4% and Player 3 = 12.5%) resulting in all three players having a similar
22 vertical jump at the Under 15s age category (Player 1 = 44cm, Player 2 & 3 = 45cm).
23 For medicine ball chest throw, both Player 2 and 3 outperformed Player 1 at the
24 Under 13s age category, and although Player 1 demonstrated the greatest
25 improvement (38.3%), gains were also evident in Player 2 (21.1%) and 3 (20.0%). For

1 speed, specifically 20m, 30m and 60m sprint, Player 2 was faster than Player 3 who
2 was faster than Player 1 at the Under 13s age category. However, significant changes
3 in sprint performance occurred across the two years with Player 1 improving sprint
4 performance the most (20m = -10.8%, 30m = -11.0%, 60m = -14.9%) followed by
5 Player 2 (20m = -5.2%, 30m = -8.4%, 60m = -9.9) with Player 3 showing very little
6 change in sprint performance over the two year period (20m = -1.5%, 30m = -0.2%,
7 60m = -0.7%). This resulted in Player 2 being slightly faster than Player 1 with both
8 demonstrating greater speed than Player 3 at Under 15s. Agility 505 results identified
9 similar findings to speed, with a greater improvement in Player 1 (Left = 11.0%,
10 Right = 8.9%). Player 1 and 2 outperformed Player 3 at the Under 15s age category.
11 For estimated $\dot{V}O_{2max}$ Player 1 and 2 had similar values at Under 13s and 15s age
12 categories with Player 1 (11.3%) and 2 (15.3%) improving performance across the
13 two years. However, Player 3 had a lower estimated $\dot{V}O_{2max}$ than both Player 1 and 2
14 with no change in performance found across the three measurement occasions.

15

16

DISCUSSION

17

18

19

20

21

22

23

24

25

Using longitudinal data collected from the RFL's Player Performance Pathway, the purpose of this study was to (i) evaluate the individual development of anthropometric and fitness characteristics of three case study players compared to a cross-sectional population, matched by age and skill level; and (ii) illustrate and compare the different development trajectories that occur during adolescence to highlight the practical implications of individual long-term monitoring and assessment within junior athletes. This is the first study to emphasize an individual and longitudinal case study approach within talent identification and development research. As hypothesized, the results demonstrate the highly dynamic development

1 of anthropometric and fitness characteristics and illustrate the differing developmental
2 trajectories within adolescent athletes. Importantly, the variability in both
3 anthropometric and fitness performance and change in characteristics over time,
4 highlight the potential flaws in cross-sectional assessment and early differentiation of
5 players.

6 Individual case study players were compared against an age and skill matched
7 population using radar graphs (Figure 1, 2 and 3) to uniquely present and give clear
8 understanding of the development of anthropometric and fitness characteristics for the
9 respective players. This method of comparing cases longitudinally against a
10 population supports limitations of previous cross-sectional designs common in talent
11 identification and development research (36). Adolescents who demonstrate advanced
12 anthropometric and fitness characteristics (i.e., Player 3 at Under 13s) may not
13 necessarily improve these attributes throughout adolescence (i.e., limited change in
14 characteristics of Player 3 between Under 13-15) and therefore may not maintain
15 initial advantages experienced (2). A number of factors such as maturation,
16 developmental variation or training effects may impact upon this process (1).
17 Therefore, assessing characteristics longitudinally, allows changes in an individual's
18 characteristics to be assessed over time, instead of at one-off time points within
19 annual-age categories as is commonly used within current cross-sectional
20 methodologies.

21 A further limitation of cross-sectional designs, until recently (23, 33), is that
22 they fail to consider maturational status (or relative age) of the respective samples.
23 However, the current anthropometric and fitness profiles not only compare individual
24 characteristics with a population, but also consider relative age and maturational
25 status of the individual players. For example, Player 1 was a relatively younger and

1 later maturing player who had lower anthropometric characteristics than the
2 population but performed on average for fitness throughout the two year period. In a
3 context (i.e., talent development programme) where relatively younger and later
4 maturing players have previously been demonstrated to lack selection opportunities
5 (19, 27, 32) this supports previous research (31) suggesting that later maturing players
6 can perform on a par with earlier maturing players within a high performance sample.

7 The added element of comparing individual cases – relative to the population -
8 over a number of years is another unique aspect of the current research design. The
9 current data identifies significant changes in anthropometric and fitness characteristics
10 across the two year period for Players 1 and 2 with little change apparent for Player 3,
11 illustrating the variability in the changes of anthropometric and fitness characteristics
12 during the adolescent period. Findings at the Under 13s age category support previous
13 research (14, 25) that fitness performance is related to biological maturation with a
14 gradient of performance in adolescent males for early > average > later maturers.
15 However, changes between the Under 13s and 15s supports previous research (14, 15,
16 35) that later maturers (i.e., Players 1 and 2) can catch up in anthropometric (e.g.,
17 height) and fitness (e.g., speed) performance during adolescence as earlier maturers
18 (i.e., Player 3) have less potential for growth and fitness improvement and therefore
19 have a reduced margin for progression.

20 Monitoring longitudinal change in growth and fitness performance (in
21 comparison to a population and between individual cases) during adolescence can
22 therefore inform the potential for future development and progression relative to
23 normative or specific sample comparisons (e.g., talented junior rugby league players).
24 Based on the current data, it seems appropriate to consider that Players 1 and 2 have
25 greater potential to be successful at a later age (and maybe skill level) due to their

1 recent improvement in anthropometric and fitness characteristics during adolescence.
2 While Player 3 may have been considered talented at the Under 13s age category
3 based on characteristics assessed at that time, and the notable correlations of these
4 characteristics with sporting performance, it is worthwhile to note that this individual
5 did not change in terms of fitness characteristics over the two year period into the
6 Under 15s age category. Thus, as an underperforming player compared to the
7 population, even though earlier maturing, without appropriate training, conditioning
8 and lifestyle intervention (e.g., nutrition) it would be questionable whether this player
9 would continue to improve beyond adolescence to meet the demands of rugby league
10 at more advanced levels (e.g., academy).

11 Although this research has used a unique individualized and longitudinal case
12 study design limitations still exist. Firstly, the sample size of three players is an
13 obvious limitation but is required to explore this individualized approach. Second, the
14 bias in selection of the three case study participants to provide data across differing
15 relative age, maturation and playing position is a potential limitation. However, this
16 selection process was used to illustrate the different developmental trajectories and
17 variability in changes in growth and fitness during the adolescent period. If three
18 different players would have been used differing results would have been evident,
19 however this only strengthens the argument for an individualized longitudinal
20 approach, especially during adolescence. The ceasing of data collection at the Under
21 15s age category is another limitation. Data collected beyond adolescence and into
22 young adulthood would be more relevant and informative to follow and compare
23 measures through the later development years (16), as many physical qualities that
24 distinguish between players may not be apparent until late adolescence or beyond
25 (37). Unfortunately, the Player Performance Pathway ceased at the Under 15s age

1 category and therefore data was unavailable. Finally, the lack of multi-disciplinary
2 assessments (i.e., technical, tactical and psychological) is a further limitation, which
3 may have provided additional insight into the longitudinal development of junior
4 rugby league players.

5 In conclusion, the present study evidences the dynamic changes in
6 anthropometric and fitness characteristics between three junior rugby league players
7 during adolescence compared to an age and skilled match population. The data
8 supports recent recommendations (36) that longitudinal assessments, specifically on
9 an individual basis, should be conducted within the research and practical application
10 of talent identification and development within youth sport. These findings should
11 better encourage individual player assessment and development, and reduce early
12 (de)selection policies that are currently common within youth sport contexts. That
13 said, the lack of data beyond the Under 15s age category is a limitation of the current
14 study, and continued monitoring of characteristics into young adulthood is required to
15 fully understand the dynamics of growth and development and its impact upon
16 performance. To address these concerns, individual, multidisciplinary, longitudinal
17 approaches that monitor player development from junior age categories into senior
18 and elite levels of performance should be the focus of both empirical research and
19 applied practice.

20

21

PRACTICAL APPLICATIONS

22 The dynamic changes in characteristics over a two year period highlighted in
23 the current investigation demonstrate the variability in development of anthropometric
24 and fitness characteristics during adolescence. Coaches should understand that cross-
25 sectional approaches during this key developmental period only provide a snapshot of

1 current performance, failing to consider factors such as age, maturation, development
2 and training. Instead, coaches should monitor the change and progression of
3 anthropometric and fitness characteristics (alongside other multidisciplinary
4 characteristics) using an individualized and longitudinal approach. As players
5 progress through adolescence, using repeated and periodic assessment would be a
6 more appropriate method in the identification, selection and development of junior
7 players. Compared to cross-sectional assessments this approach may lead to changing
8 perceptions of capability, future potential and potential decision of (de)selection
9 within such developmental programmes. Likewise, coaches could use this approach to
10 evaluate an individual's strengths and weaknesses, in comparisons with population
11 data, to prescribe appropriate training, conditioning and lifestyle interventions that are
12 essential for optimal player development in youth rugby league and other youth sport
13 contexts.

14

15

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

16

17

18

19

This research was supported by the Rugby Football League (RFL) and the authors would like to thank the RFL for providing the data. The results of the present study do not constitute endorsement of the product by the authors or the NSCA.

REFERENCES

- 1 1. Abbott, A, and Collins, D. A theoretical and empirical analysis of a ‘state of the
2 art’ talent identification model. *High Ability Studies* 13: 157-178, 2002.
- 3 2. Ackland, TR, and Bloomfield, J. Stability of human proportions through
4 adolescent growth. *Australian J Sci Med Sport* 28: 57-60, 1996.
- 5 3. Armstrong, N, Welsby, JR, and Kirby, BJ. Peak oxygen uptake and maturation in
6 12 year olds. *Med Sci Sport Exerc* 30: 165-169, 1998.
- 7 4. Carling, C, le Gall, F, Reilly, T, and Williams, AM. Do anthropometric and
8 fitness characteristics vary according to birth date distribution in elite youth
9 academy soccer players. *Scand J Med Sci Sports* 19: 3-9, 2009.
- 10 5. Cogley, S, Baker, J, Wattie, N, and McKenna, J. Annual age-grouping and athlete
11 development: A meta-analytical review of relative age effects in sport. *Sports*
12 *Med* 39: 235-256, 2009.
- 13 6. Cogley, S, Schorer, J, and Baker, J. Identification and development of sport
14 talent In: Baker, J, Cogley, S, and Schorer J. *Talent Identification and*
15 *Development in Sport: International Perspectives*. Routledge. 2012.
- 16 7. Elferink-Gemser, MT, Visscher, C, Lemmink, KAPM, and Mulder, TW.
17 Multidimensional performance characteristics and standard of performance in
18 talented youth field hockey players: A longitudinal study. *J Sports Sci* 25: 481-
19 489, 2007.
- 20 8. Falk, B, Lidor, R, Lander, Y, and Lang, B. Talent identification and early
21 development of elite water polo players: a 2 year follow up. *J Sports Sci* 22: 347-
22 355, 2004.
- 23 9. Gabbett, TJ, and Herzig, PJ. Physiological characteristics of junior elite and sub-
24 elite rugby league players. *Strength Cond Coach* 12: 19–24, 2004.
- 25

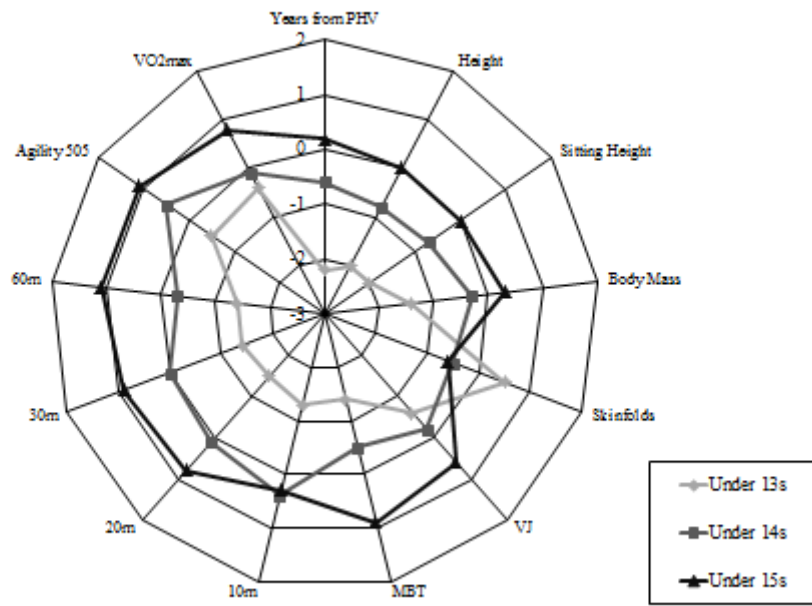
- 1 10. Gabbett, TJ, Kelly, J, Ralph, S, and Driscoll, D. Physiological and anthropometric
2 characteristics of junior elite and sub-elite rugby league players, with special
3 reference to starters and non starters. *J Sci Med Sport* 21: 1126-1133, 2009.
- 4 11. Gil, S, Ruiz, F, Irazusta, A, Gil, J, and Irazuta, J. Selection of young soccer
5 players in terms of anthropometric and physiological factors. *J Sports Med Phys*
6 *Fit* 47: 25-32, 2007.
- 7 12. Hawes, MR, and Martin, AD. Human Body Composition. In: Eston R. and Reilly
8 T. eds. *Kinanthropometry and exercise physiology laboratory manual: Tests,*
9 *procedures and data second edition. Volume 1: Anthropometry.* London,
10 Routledge, 7–43, 2001.
- 11 13. Hopkins, WG. Measures of reliability in sports medicine and science. *Sports Med*
12 30: 1–15, 2000.
- 13 14. Lefevre, J, Beunen, G, Steens, G, Claessens, A, and Renson, R. Motor
14 performance during adolescence and age thirty as related to peak height velocity.
15 *Ann Hum Biol* 17: 423-435, 1990
- 16 15. Le Gall, F, Beillot, J, and Rochcongar, P. The improvement in maximal aerobic
17 power of soccer players during growth. *Sci Sports* 17: 177-188, 2002.
- 18 16. Le Gall, F, Carling, C, Williams, M, and Reilly, T. Anthropometric and fitness
19 characteristics of international, professional and amateur male graduate soccer
20 players from an elite youth academy. *J Sci Med Sport* 13: 90-95, 2010.
- 21 17. Malina, RM. Physical Growth and Biological Maturation of Young Athletes.
22 *Exerc Sport Sci Reviews* 22: 389-433, 1994
- 23 18. Malina, RM, Bouchard, C, and Bar-Or, O. *Growth, Maturation, and Physical*
24 *Activity.* (2nd ed.). United States of America; Human Kinetics, 2004

- 1 19. Malina, RM, Eisenmann, JC, Cumming, SP, Ribeiro, B, and Aroso, J. Maturity-
2 associated variation in the growth and functional capacities of youth football
3 (soccer) players 13-15 years. *Eur J App Physiol* 91: 555-562, 2004.
- 4 20. Malina, RM, Ribeiro, B, Aroso, J, and Cumming, PC. Characteristics of youth
5 soccer players aged 13-15 classified by skill level. *Br J Sports Med* 4: 290-295,
6 2007.
- 7 21. Meylan, C, Cronin, J, Oliver, J, and Hughes, M. Talent identification in soccer:
8 The role of maturity status on physical, physiological and technical
9 characteristics. *Int J Sports Sci Coaching* 5: 571-592, 2010.
- 10 22. Mirwald, RL, Baxter-Jones, ADG, Bailey, DA, and Beunen, GP. An assessment
11 of maturity from anthropometric measurements. *Med Sci Sport Exerc* 34: 689-
12 694, 2002.
- 13 23. Mohamed, H, Vaeyens, R, Matthys, S, Multael, M, Lefevre, J, Lenoir, M, and
14 Philippaerts, RM. Anthropometric and performance measures for the
15 development of a talent detection and identification model in youth handball. *J*
16 *Sports Sci* 27: 257-266, 2009.
- 17 24. Pearson, DT, Naughton, GA, and Torode, M. Predictability of physiological
18 testing and the role of maturation in talent identification for adolescent team
19 sports. *J Sci Med Sport* 9: 277-287, 2006
- 20 25. Philippaerts, RM, Vaeyens, R, Janssens, M, Van Renterghem, B, Matthys, D,
21 Craen, R, et al. The relationship between peak height velocity and physical
22 performance in youth soccer players. *J Sports Sci* 24: 221-230, 2006.
- 23 26. Ramsbottom, R, Brewer, J, and Williams, C. A progressive shuttle run test to
24 estimate maximal oxygen uptake. *Br J Sports Med* 22: 141-144, 1988.

- 1 27. Sherar, LB, Baxter-Jones, ADG, Faulkner, RA, and Russell, KW. Do physical
2 maturity and birth date predict talent in male youth ice hockey players? *J Sports*
3 *Sci* 25: 879-886, 2007.
- 4 28. Stockbrugger, BA, and Haennel, RG. Contributing factors to performance of a
5 medicine ball explosive power test: a comparison between jump and non jump
6 athletes. *J Strength Cond Res* 17: 768-774, 2003.
- 7 29. Sykes, D, Twist, C, Hall, S, Nicholas, C, and Lamb, K. Semi automated time-
8 motion analysis of senior rugby league. *Int J Perform Anal Sport* 9: 47-59, 2009.
- 9 30. Thomas, JR, and Nelson, JK. *Research Methods in Physical Activity*. 4th ed.
10 Human Kinetics, USA, 2001.
- 11 31. Till, K, Cobley, S, O'Hara, J, Chapman, C, and Cooke, C. Anthropometric,
12 physiological and selection characteristics in high performance UK junior Rugby
13 League players. *Talent Development Excellence*, 2: 193-207, 2010
- 14 32. Till, K, Cobley, S, Wattie, N, O'Hara, J, Cooke, C, and Chapman, C. The
15 prevalence, influential factors and mechanisms of relative age effects in UK
16 Rugby League. *Scand J Med Sci Sports*, 20: 320-329, 2010.
- 17 33. Till, K, Cobley, S, O'Hara, J, Brightmore, A, Chapman, C, and Cooke, C. Using
18 Anthropometric and Performance Characteristics to Predict Selection in Junior
19 UK Rugby League Players. *J Sci Med Sport* 14: 264-269, 2011.
- 20 34. Till, K, Cobley, S, O'Hara, J, Chapman, C, and Cooke, C. Talent Identification,
21 Selection and Development in UK Junior Rugby League: An Evolving Process.
22 In: Baker, J, Cobley, S, and Schorer J. *Talent Identification and Development in*
23 *Sport: International Perspectives*. Routledge. 2012.

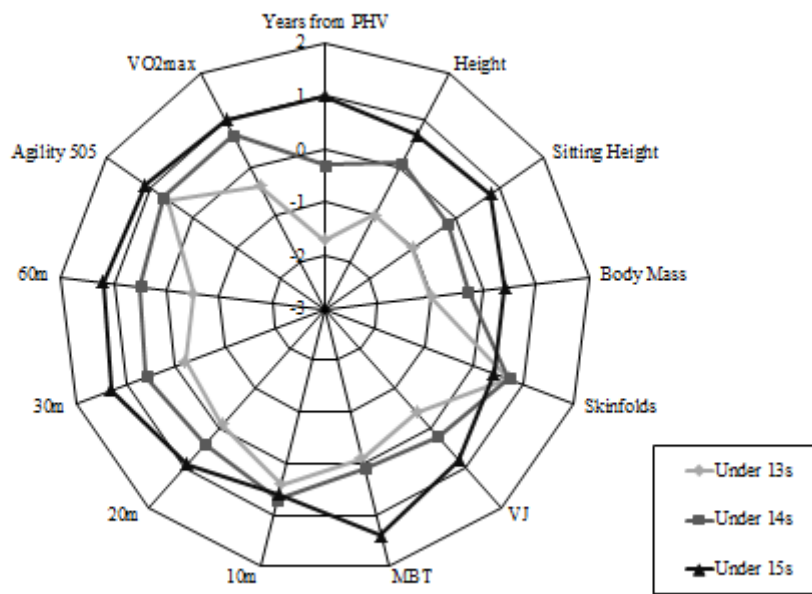
- 1 35. Till, K, Cogley, S, O'Hara, J, Chapman, C, and Cooke, C. Considering maturation
2 status and relative age in the longitudinal evaluation of junior rugby league
3 players. *Scand J Sci Med Sports*, in press.
- 4 36. Vaeyens, R, Lenoir, M, Williams, AM, and Philippaerts, RM. Talent
5 identification and development programmes in sport: Current models and future
6 directions. *Sports Med* 38: 703-714, 2008.
- 7 37. Williams, AM, and Reilly, T. Talent identification and development in soccer. *J*
8 *Sports Sci* 18: 657-667, 2000.
- 9
10
11

Figure 1. Anthropometric and Fitness Profile for Player 1



1

Figure 2. Anthropometric and Fitness Profile for Player 2

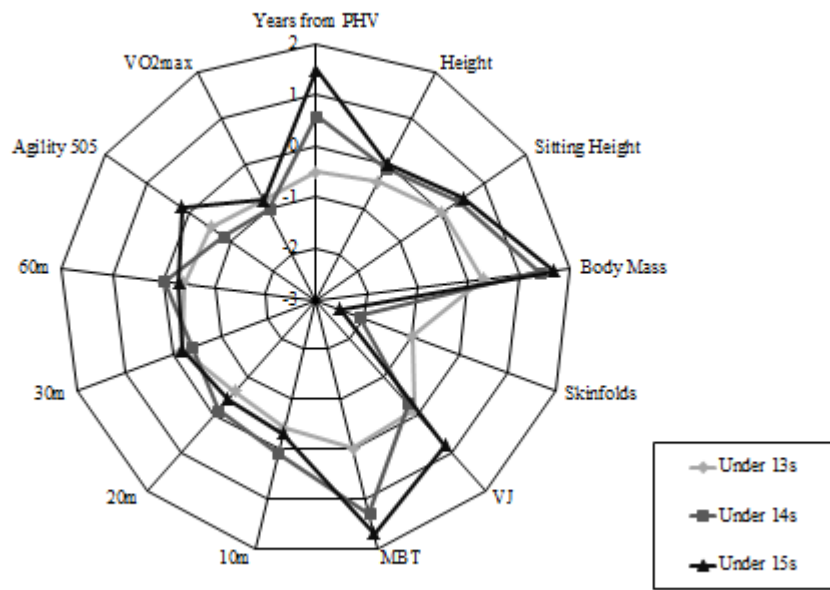


2

3

4

Figure 3. Anthropometric and Fitness Profile for Player 3



1

FIGURE