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Citation:

Darrall-Jones, J and Jones, B and Till, K (2018) Is Bigger Always Better? The Effect of Body Mass on Physical Characteristics of English Academy Rugby Union Players. In: 2018 ASCA International Conference on Applied Strength and Conditioning, 09 November 2018 - 11 November 2018, ANZ Stadium, Sydney, Australia. (Unpublished)

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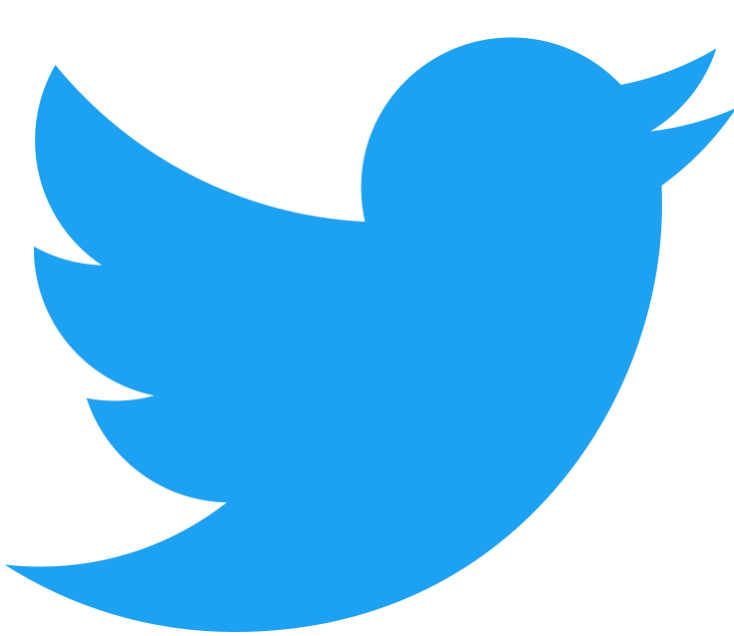
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Is Bigger Always Better?

The Effect of Body Mass on Physical Characteristics of English Academy Rugby Union Players

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Introduction

- Physical characteristics are important for performance and progression in rugby union (Duthie, 2006).
- Practitioners are required to increase body mass, strength, power, sprint acceleration, maximal sprint velocity, and aerobic fitness.
- Increased body mass may augment or attenuate these physical characteristics.
- Within a rugby union academy body size increases with increased age (Darrall-Jones et al. 2015).
- Therefore, the purpose of the study was to determine if between-age category differences in strength, power, sprint acceleration, maximal sprint velocity, and aerobic fitness could be explained by differences in body mass in English Academy rugby union players.

Methods

- Data were collected for isometric mid-thigh pull peak force (IMTP_{pf}), countermovement jump height (CMJ_h) and peak power (CMJ_{pp}), 10 m velocity (10mV), maximal velocity (Vmax) and 30-15 Intermittent Fitness Test (30-15_{IFT}) for under 16 (U16), under 18 (U18) and under 21 (U21) age categories; **Table 1**.
- Between-age category differences in physical characteristics were compared with and without covariate adjustment for body mass, using magnitude-based inferences.

Table 1. Anthropometric Characteristics of English Academy Rugby Union players.

	U16 n = 61	U18 n = 50	U21 n = 25
Age (years)	15.6 ± 0.3	16.9 ± 0.6	19.1 ± 1.1
Height (cm)	178.8 ± 7.2	183.1 ± 6.6	185.3 ± 6.5
Body Mass (kg)	78.9 ± 11.4	86.1 ± 11.4	96.3 ± 12.6

Data presented as mean (±SD).

Results

Table 2. Countermovement jump height and peak power, isometric mid-thigh pull peak force, 10 m and maximal sprint velocity and 30-15 Intermittent Fitness Test speed data; including data adjusted for body mass.

	U16	U18	U21
CMJ _h (cm)	34.8 ± 4.8	39.3 ± 5.0	45.8 ± 4.3
CMJ _h (cm) adjusted for Body Mass	33.5 ± 13.8	39.1 ± 12.5	47.5 ± 8.7
CMJ _{pp} (W)	3997.5 ± 588.6	4512.8 ± 624.9	5074.5 ± 630.4
CMJ _{pp} (W) adjusted for Body Mass	4176.3 ± 11.6	4432.0 ± 12.2	4679.8 ± 9.4
IMTP _{pf} (N)	2585.5 ± 412.6	2868.8 ± 433.1	3286.1 ± 493.0
IMTP _{pf} (N) adjusted for Body Mass	2640.9 ± 15.2	2825.0 ± 13.9	2996.9 ± 13.9
10mV (m·s ⁻¹)	5.55 ± 0.26	5.52 ± 0.21	5.64 ± 0.26
10mV (m·s ⁻¹) adjusted for Body Mass	5.51 ± 4.6	5.52 ± 3.7	5.74 ± 4.4
Vmax (m·s ⁻¹)	8.10 ± 0.51	8.33 ± 0.43	8.56 ± 0.38
Vmax (m·s ⁻¹) adjusted for Body Mass	8.05 ± 6.5	8.36 ± 4.3	8.85 ± 3.0
30-15 _{IFT} (km·hr ⁻¹)	18.6 ± 1.1	18.7 ± 1.2	18.7 ± 1.3
30-15 _{IFT} (km·hr ⁻¹) adjusted for Body Mass	18.22 ± 5.1	18.74 ± 5.5	19.29 ± 5.9

Data presented as mean (±SD) for unadjusted measures; adjusted data are back-transformed log data (±SD as CV%).

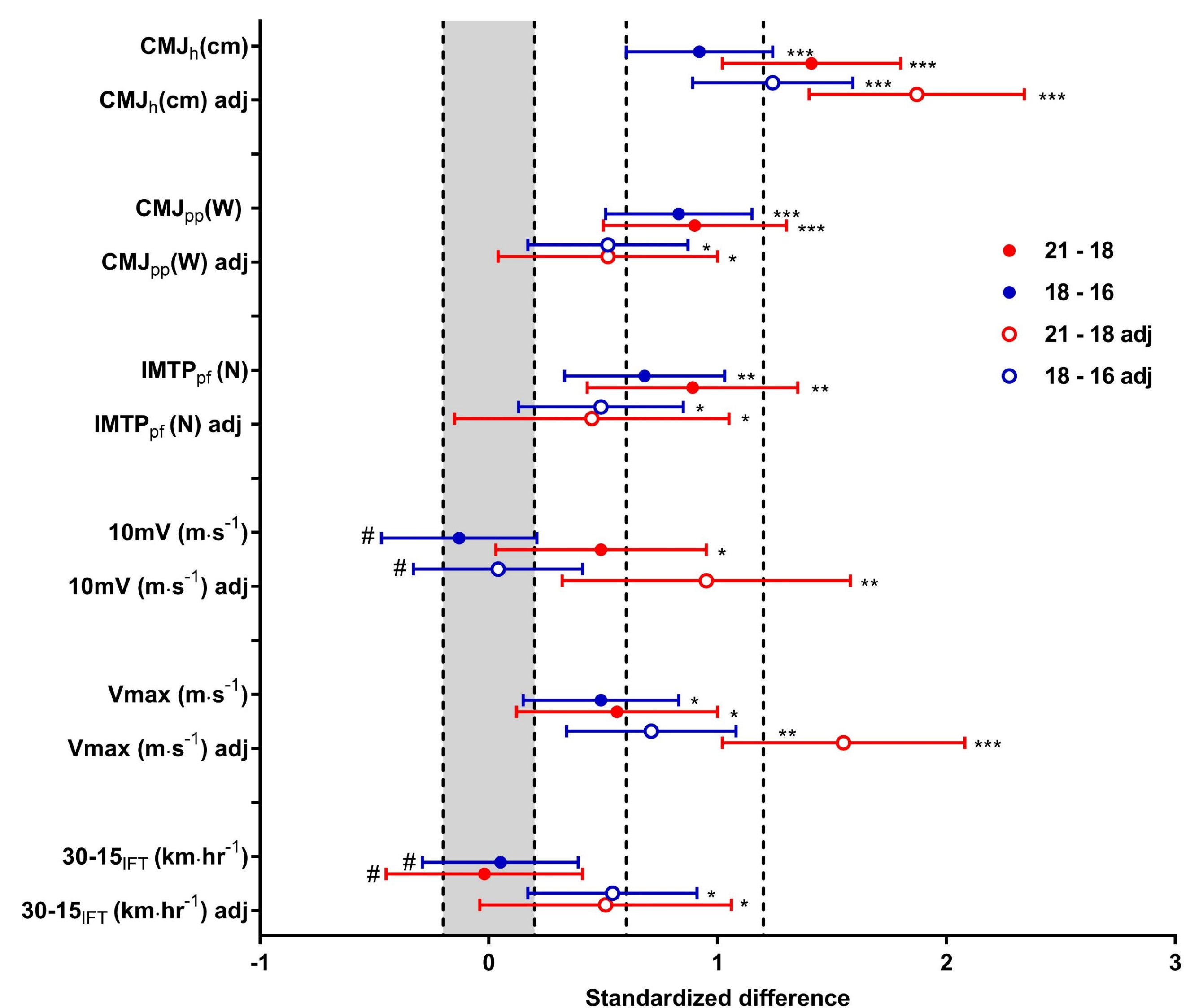


Figure 1. Standardized mean differences in physical characteristics prior to, and following adjustment for body mass. # = unclear, * = likely, ** = very likely, *** = almost certainly greater than the smallest worthwhile change (grey shaded area)

Discussion

- Body mass did not explain differences in physical characteristics between age categories.
- 30-15_{IFT} demonstrated *likely* differences following adjustment.
- It is likely that between-age category differences are training induced.
- Therefore practitioners should concurrently develop strength, power, speed and aerobic fitness concurrently within rugby union academies.

This work is supported by the Carnegie School of Sport

2018 ASCA INTERNATIONAL CONFERENCE
ON APPLIED STRENGTH & CONDITIONING
9 - 11 NOVEMBER | ANZ STADIUM, SYDNEY, AUSTRALIA

