

TALENT IDENTIFICATION AND DEVELOPMENT IN SPORT

INTERNATIONAL PERSPECTIVES

ROUTLEDGE



EDITED BY JOSEPH BAKER,
STEVE COBLEY AND JÖRG SCHORER

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International perspectives

*Edited by Joseph Baker,
Steve Cobley and Jörg Schuster*



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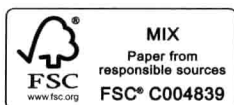
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TALENT IDENTIFICATION AND DEVELOPMENT IN SPORT

Identifying talent in athletes and developing that ability to its fullest potential is a central concern of sport scientists, sports coaches and sports policy makers. This book offers a comprehensive synthesis of current knowledge in talent identification and development in sport, from the biological basis of ability to the systems and processes within sport through which that ability is nurtured.

Written by a team of leading international experts, the book explores key factors and issues in contemporary sport, including:

- genetics;
- secondary factors such as birth date, cultural context and population size;
- perceptual motor skill acquisition and expertise;
- sports development policy;
- in-depth case studies, including European soccer, East African running and US gymnastics.

With an emphasis throughout on practical implications and processes for those working in sport, the book offers an authoritative evaluation of the strengths and weaknesses of contemporary systems for identifying and developing talent in sport. This is important reading for any student, researcher or practitioner with an interest in skill acquisition, youth sport, elite sport, sports coaching or sports development.

Joseph Baker is with the Lifespan Health and Performance Laboratory in the School of Kinesiology and Health Science, York University, Canada and a visiting research fellow at Leeds Metropolitan University, UK. His research focuses on optimal human development, particularly issues affecting the acquisition of sport expertise.

Steve Coble is a senior lecturer in skill acquisition and sport psychology within the Carnegie Faculty at Leeds Metropolitan University, UK. His specific research interests focus upon developmental factors that constrain learning, attainment and performance.

Jörg Schorer is a research associate at the Institute of Sport Science at the Westfälische Wilhelms-University Münster, Germany. His research interests are not only within the field of talent identification and development, but also in expertise in sport, perceptual-motor skills and sport psychology.

DEDICATION

Joseph Baker

For dad – David William Baker (1943–2010)

Steve Cobby

To my grandparents (lives passed) and Natalie (a life begun)

Jörg Schorer

For my parents

CONTRIBUTORS

Joseph Baker, PhD, is with the Lifespan Health and Performance Laboratory in the School of Kinesiology and Health Science, York University, Canada and a visiting research fellow in the Carnegie Research Institute at Leeds Metropolitan University in the United Kingdom. His research focuses on optimal human development, particularly issues affecting the acquisition of sport expertise. He is past president of the Canadian Society for Psychomotor Learning and Sport Psychology and the author/editor of four books and more than 100 peer-reviewed articles and book chapters.

Dirk Büsch, PhD, is Vice-Director of the Institute for Applied Training Science and Head of the Department of Game and Combat Sports as well as Youth Elite Sport in Leipzig, Germany. His research focuses on movement and training science in youth and elite sports, with a preference for game sports as well as methodological aspects of research.

Chris Chapman is a National Player Development Manager for the Rugby Football League (RFL). Chris joined the RFL in 2005 as the Performance Youth Coach overseeing the Player Performance Pathway and coaching within the England youth structure, before moving to the national player development role in 2009. During this time, Chris has combined research and player development models to create, develop and evolve the RFL player development system.

Steve Cobley, PhD, is a senior lecturer in skill acquisition and sport psychology within the Carnegie Faculty at Leeds Metropolitan University, UK. Here he teaches across both undergraduate and post-graduate provision associated with sports science and physical education. His specific research interests focus upon

developmental factors that constrain learning, attainment and performance. An interest shared with local and international colleagues.

Dave Collins, PhD, is Professor and Director for the Institute of Coaching and Performance at UCLan. He also runs a performance psychology consultancy, 'Grey Matters', providing support and management services across a variety of domains.

Carlton Cooke, PhD, is the Carnegie Professor of Sport and Exercise Science, head of the Carnegie Research Centre for Sports Performance and Director of Research for Leeds Metropolitan University. Carlton gained all his HE qualifications from the University of Birmingham, the last of which was his PhD in 1990. Carlton joined Leeds Metropolitan University in 1990 and has specialized in Exercise Physiology and Biomechanics. Carlton has researched, presented and published extensively on aspects of sports performance and physical activity, exercise and health, as well as providing sports science support to high performance athletes, teams and national governing bodies throughout the UK.

Keith Davids, PhD, is Professor and Head of Human Movement Studies at Queensland University of Technology, Australia. His research interests include the theoretical frameworks of ecological psychology and dynamical systems theory applied to the study of neurobiological cognition and action. A particular interest concerns the role of constraints in motor learning and the implications for the acquisition of movement coordination.

Marije T. Elferink-Gemser, PhD, is assistant professor at the Center for Human Movement Sciences, University Medical Center Groningen, University of Groningen in the Netherlands. Her main interest lies in the field of performance development towards expertise in children. Her studies are characterized by their longitudinal design, focusing on multidimensional performance characteristics of both the youth athletes and their environment.

Damian Farrow, PhD, holds a joint appointment as a Professor of Sports Science within the School of Sport and Exercise Science/ISEAL at Victoria University and the Australian Institute of Sport (AIS). Damian was appointed the inaugural Skill Acquisition Specialist at the AIS in 2002 where he has been responsible for the provision of evidence-based support to Australian coaches seeking to measure and improve the design of the skill-learning environment. He has worked with a wide range of sub/elite sports programmes at the AIS as well as professional sports teams. His research interests centre on understanding the factors critical to sport expertise and talent/skill development, with a particular interest in the role of perceptual-cognitive skill and practice methodology.

Lennart Fischer is a student at the Institute for Sport Science (University of Münster, Germany). In addition to his studies he works as a research assistant at the

Department of Sport Psychology and supports the GHF in realising its talent selection. His main research interests are talent development, perceptual expertise, attention and motor learning.

Jason Gulbin, PhD, is the General Manager for the Australian Sports Commission's National Talent Identification and Development (NTID) program. He holds a BEd in Post Primary Physical Education (1990) and was awarded his PhD in the field of exercise physiology at Griffith University (Gold Coast) in 1999. His research interests focuses on multidisciplinary, applied talent identification and development themes with a particular interest in maximising the efficiency of the talent development pathway for athletes, coaches and sports.

Sean Horton, PhD, is an assistant professor in the Department of Kinesiology at the University of Windsor. His research interests lie primarily in the area of skill acquisition and expert performance, both in young athletes and as individuals age. Recent projects have focused on various environmental factors that influence talent development.

Hugo Kerhervé is a PhD Scholar in Talent Transfer at the Australian Institute of Sport and is currently enrolled as a PhD candidate at the Queensland University of Technology in Brisbane. His main research interests include Talent Development and Sports Performance. Hugo previously completed a Masters degree at Université Jean Monnet, Saint-Etienne, France focusing on Exercise and Handicap Physiology.

Áine MacNamara, PhD, is a Senior Lecturer in Elite Performance in the Institute of Coaching and Performance at the University of Central Lancashire. The Institute for Coaching and Performance is focused on developing providers of, and the systems employed in, the enhancement of performance. Áine is currently researching talent development processes across different performance domain, with a particular interest in the role that psychological characteristics play in the realization of potential.

John O'Hara, PhD, has worked at Leeds Metropolitan University since June 2000. He is currently a Senior Lecturer in Sport and Exercise Science, within the Carnegie Faculty. John is a British Association of Sport and Exercise Sciences accredited Sport and Exercise Physiologist. He has a vast amount of experience working with amateur and high performance athletes and teams across a range of sporting disciplines throughout the UK. John gained his PhD in 2009, which focused on carbohydrate metabolism and endurance performance. John's research also focuses on different aspects of elite sports performance.

Jan Pabst, PhD, is currently employed as the Head of the Research Group Handball at the Institute for Applied Training Science in Leipzig, Germany. He supports the German handball national teams with its work scientifically.

Elissa Phillips is a Cricket Australia PhD Scholar in Biomechanics and Performance Analysis at the Australian Institute of Sport and is currently enrolled as a PhD candidate at the Queensland University of Technology in Brisbane. Alongside her PhD studies Elissa contributes to the Cricket Australia Fast Bowling Programme. Her main research interests include talent development and coordination dynamics in fast bowling.

Yannis Pitsiladis, PhD, is a Reader in Exercise Physiology at the Institute of Cardiovascular and Medical Sciences in the College of Medicine, Veterinary and Life Sciences at the University of Glasgow, and founding member of the International Centre for East African Running Science (ICEARS), set up to investigate the determinants of the phenomenal success of east African distance runners in international athletics. Recent projects also include the study of elite sprinters from Jamaica and the US, and the study of world class swimmers. He is a Visiting Professor in Medical Physiology at Moi University (Eldoret, Kenya) and Addis Ababa University (Addis Ababa, Ethiopia). He is a member of the Scientific Commission of the International Sports Medicine Federation (FIMS), and a member of the List Committee of the World Anti-Doping Agency (WADA). He is also a Fellow of the American College of Sports Medicine (ACSM).

Ian Renshaw, PhD, is a Senior Lecturer in the School of Human Movement Studies at Queensland University of Technology, Australia. His research interests include an ecological dynamics approach to perception and action in sport, sports coaching and the development of a nonlinear pedagogy for talent development, teaching and coaching of sport. Ian currently acts an advisor on skill acquisition for the Cricket Australia/AIS Centre of Excellence.

Rebecca Rienhoff, MEd, is a PhD Student at the Department of Sportpsychology of the Institute for Sport Science (University of Münster, Germany). During her studies she worked as a research assistant in different talent selection and development projects in cooperation with the GHF. Her specific research interests during the PhD focus on the field of expertise, especially perceptual expertise, attention and motor learning.

William (Bill) Sands, PhD, is the Director of the Monfort Family Human Performance Research Laboratory at Mesa State College. He is the former Recovery Center Leader, Head of Sport Biomechanics and Engineering and Senior Physiologist for the US Olympic Committee in Colorado Springs, Colorado. He has over 35 years of experience in Olympic sports. Dr Sands has served as an associate professor at the University of Utah, Co-Director of the Motor Behavior Research Laboratory with adjunct appointments in Bioengineering and Physical Therapy, Director of Research and Development for USA Gymnastics, and the Scientific Commission of the International Gymnastics Federation.

Jörg Schorer, PhD, is a research associate at the Institute of Sport Science at the Westfälische Wilhelms-University Münster. After being ‘unfairly’ not selected as a youth handball player and preparing other real talents as a regional coach, he is now working as a researcher in this field. His other research interests include sensory-motor expertise, maintenance of skills with age, and focus of attention in motor control situations.

Peter Sichelschmidt is the Sports Director at the German Handball Federation and worked prior as University Lecturer for Handball and Training Sciences at the German Sports University in Cologne. He acted many years as a coach in first and second German Men’s Handball League as well as a National Coach for Men’s Youth and Junior teams. He holds the German A-License and the European Master Coach Diploma, is Lecturer and Delegate of the International and European Handball Federations, Member of the IHF-Commission of Organizing and Competition for more than ten years and participated in three Olympic Games, six European Championships and 16 World Championships.

Bernd Strauß, PhD, is full professor in Sport Psychology and dean of the faculty of Psychology and Sport Sciences at the Westfälische Wilhelms-University Münster. He is former president of the German Society of Sport Sciences (2003–09). Currently he is Associate editor of *Psychology of Sport and Exercise* (Elsevier) as well as of the *German Journal of Sport Science* (Springer). Here he teaches across both undergraduate and post-graduate provision associated with sports science and physical education. His specific research interests focus upon Expertise in Sports, social processes as well as methodological issues such as multivariate analyses of tests.

Kevin Till is currently a centenary PhD student within the Carnegie Faculty at Leeds Metropolitan University (UK). Kevin’s research interests focus upon talent identification, selection and development within UK junior Rugby League. Throughout his studies, Kevin has worked with the UK Rugby League’s national governing body the Rugby Football League (RFL). Kevin is also a strength and conditioning coach working with the Super League club, Castleford Tigers RLFC.

Chris Visscher, PhD, is professor of youth sports and head of the Center for Human Movement Sciences at the University of Groningen and the University Medical Center Groningen in the Netherlands. His current interests include motor development, cognition and performance in sports.

PREFACE

The practice of identifying and nurturing talented youth so that they can excel in the future has long been evident in varying domains and in various guises. Perhaps no domain has embraced the potential of talent identification and development to the extent of sport. Success in sport has become increasingly valuable politically, socially and economically, and in parallel with this occurrence, there has been increased funding and resources (e.g., human capital) devoted to this effort. This book is in recognition of these broad events, and the emerging scientific field of research examining talent identification and development.

The overarching purpose of this book is to provide a 'state of the science' overview of empirical and practical information for sport administrators, coaches, parents, athletes, applied sport scientists and students about current issues in the identification and development of sport talent. To achieve this purpose, we have divided the book into two main sections bookended between introductory and concluding chapters. In the first section, leading researchers from the field of athlete development explain their research and how this work informs our understanding of the process of sport skill acquisition. A general framework we have used to organize this section is Baker and Horton's (2004) notion of primary and secondary influences on sport development (see Cobley *et al.*, Chapter 1). The chapters by Baker (Chapter 2) as well as MacNamara and Collins (Chapter 3) focus on the primary influences of genetics and psychological factors on athlete development. Then, Horton (Chapter 4) focuses largely on secondary environmental influences such as culture, birthplace and birthdate. The chapters by Farrow (Chapter 5), Renshaw, Davids, Phillips and Kerhervé (Chapter 6) examine and explain athlete development more globally, from the perspectives of cognitive psychology and dynamical systems theory respectively.

Our intent is that Section 1 provides the necessary theoretical background for readers to understand the various processes at work in Section 2, which provides a

series of case studies examining international success stories from the ‘trenches’ of talent identification and development. Here, specialist contributors working with a range of individual (e.g., gymnastics, Chapter 7 by Sands; running, Chapter 11 by Pitsiladis) and team sports (e.g., soccer, Chapter 8 by Elferink-Gemser & Visscher; rugby league, Chapter 9 by Till *et al.*; and handball, Chapter 10 by Schorer *et al.*) describe the unique constraints inherent with their sport contexts. Further, and more specifically, they highlight how athletic talent is being identified and developed, as well as how systems themselves are presently evolving. The culmination of Section 2 is Chapter 12 by Gulbin, which overviews and reflects upon Australia’s national approach to talent identification and development programme.

To guide chapter content in Section 2, authors were asked to consider the following questions (where possible):

- How does your sport context go about identifying talent or selecting athletes for further development?
- How does your sport context nurture talent across stages/phases of development?
- What are the key issues that presently affect talent identification and development in your sport?
- What further research and understanding is required in this area?
- What advice can you provide to administrators, coaches, parents, or athletes involved in talent identification practices in your sport context?

Our hope is that these particular questions are relevant to readers interested in sport talent identification and development, regardless of whether it’s through personal involvement as an athlete, coach, trainer, sport administrator or as a parent hoping to help their child navigate sport’s sometimes daunting talent systems. Whether through their role as researcher, practitioner or both, contributors to this text have ensured that readers will be well informed of good practices as well as areas where improvements are necessary to address current limitations. To aid in achieving these outcomes, the concluding chapter of the book draws upon the information presented in Sections 1 and 2. Optimistically, we hope that this final chapter (a) underscores the similarities between work being conducted by researchers and put into action by practitioners, (b) highlights ‘best practices’ in talent identification and development, and (c) identifies the limits of our knowledge, while providing ways they can be resolved. Collectively, this discussion will inform the next generation of research in this emerging field.

While we have tried to organize chapters sequentially when it was appropriate to do so, it is not necessary that readers approach the book in this way. Readers can dip in and out of sections as necessary. The sections and chapters stand alone in their focus and content, yet remain closely aligned to our overarching purpose of informing a ‘better’ system for talent identification and development in sport. Perhaps the most significant opportunity from this book is the potential for cross-fertilization of ideas between researchers and practitioners from different domains.

The text includes contributors from sport psychology, motor learning and skill acquisition, exercise physiology, and coaching. Through incorporating multi-disciplinary perspectives it is our hope that together we can find answers to questions that have thus far been elusive, such as: how do elite athletes develop? When is the most appropriate time for talent identification and development interventions? And, why do certain athletes succeed while others fail?

Joe Baker, Steve Cobley and Jörg Schorer
December 2010

Reference

Baker, J. & Horton, S. (2004). A review of primary and secondary influences on sport expertise. *High Ability Studies*, 15, 211–28.

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