LONG TERM ATHLETE DEVELOPMENT

Time Required for Developing Expertise - 10 Year Rule

Many experts believe that it takes a minimum of 10 years and at least 10,000 hours of training for an athlete to reach elite levels. In Tim Gibbons and Tamme Forster's landmark study for the United States Olympic Center's Athletic Development Program, "The Path to Excellence," they provided an in-depth look at the development of U.S. Olympians who competed between 1984 and 1998.

- U.S. Olympians begin their sport-specific participation at the average age of 12.0 for males and 11.5 for females.
- Most Olympians reported a 12- to 13-year period of talent development from their sport introduction to making an Olympic team.
- Olympic medallists were younger — 1.3 to 3.6 years — during the first 5 stages of development than non-medallists, suggesting that medallists were receiving motor skill development and training at an earlier age. However, caution must be taken not to fall into the trap of early specialization in late specialization sports.

Herbert A. Simon - Nobel Prize (1976)
Simon was interested in the role of knowledge in expertise. He said that to become an expert required about 10 years of experience and he and colleagues estimated that expertise was the result of learning roughly 60,000 chunks of information.

The 10-year rule has been shown to also apply to the development of expertise in other domains including music (Ericsson, Krampe, & Tesch-Römer, 1993; Hayes, 1981; Sosniak, 1985), mathematics (Gustin, 1985), swimming (Kalinowski, 1985), distance running (Wallingford, 1975), tennis (Monsaas, 1985), soccer and field hockey (Helsen, Starkes, & Hodges, 1998).

Most data suggest that golf is a 20-year developmental sport.

On the other hand, the 10,000-hour rule is still highly debatable in the research (some show 4,000 hours — some show 6,000 hours), but all studies suggest a significant investment in time is required. Much of the debate about how many hours is required is due to the lack of agreement between experts on what they consider practice. Let's talk about the different forms of practice versus play.

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