**Parents, Coaches and Teachers.**

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| A close up of a sign  Description automatically generated | This booklet provides advice that will help you to give your young athlete the best opportunity to maximise their learning and performance.  |

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| A close up of a sign  Description automatically generated**COACHES BOOKLET** | This section provides advice and guidance for coaches to support athletes to maximise their learning to perform.   |

**CLUB COACHES**

Firstly, congratulations on having one (or more) of your athletes selected into a Talent Pathway. This is a great achievement for the athlete and you and your club!

As a coach you probably find yourself fulfilling multiple roles for your Talent Pathway athletes that aren’t in the job description of a club coach, mentor, physio, parent, friend, counsellor etc.

These guidelines are not designed to ask you to do more than you already do, but to give you some tips and guidance on how to best manage your high performing athlete/s and help you to do it in line with ‘best practice’.

**INDEPENDENCE**

It is important that Performance Athletes learn to manage their busy lives as young as possible. Lifestyle management works best when it is driven by the athlete, when they are talking through their options and challenges, but ultimately making their own decisions; the athlete should always be the one ‘doing’.

For example: if an athlete comes to you and tells you on a Friday that they have an issue with transport arrangements for a tournament the next day. It might seem easier to call around other parents and players to try to arrange a lift for them – or even pick them up yourself! This will certainly help the athlete’s immediate issue, but what have they learnt? And what will they do next time? Probably come back to you for help!

Instead, ask the player how they can resolve this and encourage them to do this as soon as possible. Now you are giving the athlete far more than a ‘one-off quick fix’.

The athlete will have understood what needs to be done, they will have communicated with relevant parties, they will have negotiated a solution, they will have had ownership over the entire process and will hopefully feel a sense of achievement and independence through doing this.

**ASKING FOR HELP**

There will be times when an athlete will need to seek some help and asking for help is a key skill that athletes need to have. They will struggle at many points in their lacrosse careers for many different reasons. If they are afraid to ask for help, these things may build up and get progressively worse and you will probably notice a dip in performance. If the athlete is comfortable to speak up before they stop coping, it may be possible to ‘nip in the bud’ any issues before they worsen.

Try to encourage open, honest communication at all times. Even if an athlete’s communication or manner isn’t ideal in the first instance, try to reward their addressing of an issue and openness before challenging their behaviour. The key is to make an attempt to share a problem a pleasant experience that they will repeat.

**SOCIAL MEDIA**

This section may seem irrelevant to younger athletes but we are now living in a generation of social media addicts! Information put on the Internet can sometimes stay there forever – even if you think it has been deleted.

Encourage responsible use of sites such as Twitter and Facebook. The whole world can see everything an athlete says on Twitter and it can have incredibly damaging and long lasting results. Athletes have lost sponsors, been sent home from Olympic Games and even arrested for things they have posted online via social media sites.

Everything an athlete does or says online is representing themselves, their sport, their club, their school and England Lacrosse. They should take this seriously and prepare for the future when their profile could be much bigger!

**INJURIES AND RETURNING TO TRAINING**

Lacrosse is a sport with a high risk of injury. The most common injuries we see are to the knee and the ankle and usually involve ligament damage.

As coaches, it can be challenging to support athletes to return to training and match play as you are often reliant on what the athlete tells you. In order to provide athletes and coaches with feedback about when it is safe to return to training, some form of testing should be completed in conjunction with a coaching review of the athlete’s technical and tactical skills.

**RETURN TO TRAINING TESTING**

This should be considered when the athlete has:

* No pain or swelling;
* Full movement;
* Full strength (able to complete normal activities without restrictions, is able to jump and land on the spot with no hesitancy on one or two legs).

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| **A return to training test: Hop Test** |
| **Equipment** | * Floor space preferably court
* Tape measure (10m)
* Partner to measure
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| **Protocol** | * Place the tape measure from a line and pull it out to 6 metres.
* The athlete starts with their toe level with the tape measure.
* Hop forwards once and land as far as they can, but keeping their balance and hold for 3 seconds.
* Measure the distance to the back of the heel.
* Repeat 4 times on each leg
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| If an athlete **cannot do this for each leg, they are not ready to return** to training or match play. Be firm with your athletes; **returning from injury too early can lead to far greater, longer term issues and injuries.**  |

**ACADEMY AND CLUB**

As we know, the England Lacrosse Talent Pathway does not produce squads or teams within and for itself but are for individual athlete development. It is important that Academy athletes access competition outside of the Talent Pathway through club and school, in order to gain everything that athletes require for complete development. This should be seen as a partnership and should there be a clash of events, it is important that planning has occurred and there is communication between Club Coaches and Academy staff to consider what is best for each individual athlete, at that moment in time.

This type of communication is not only important at times of ‘schedule clashes’ but is vital all year round. Everyone inputting into the development of an athlete needs to be saying the same thing and reinforcing the same messages to avoid pulling in different directions and confusing the athlete. If you haven’t already, please drop an email or phone call to the Academy Coach to arrange a convenient method of communicating... perhaps a monthly email update?

**THREE LEVELS OF COMPETITION**

Ideally, all athletes should be accessing three levels of competition, each offering them a different standard of play.

The **first level** should be a relatively easy standard of play. The athlete will most likely be the best in the group and will probably hold a position of leadership, such as captain. This level of competition is usually accessed through school lacrosse.

The **second level** is the right level for the athlete’s current abilities, where they should be at a similar standard to their peers. This is likely to be some form of club or representative lacrosse, possibly **County or Regional** standard.

The **third level** should be higher than that of the athlete’s current playing standard. Usually they will be one of the younger members of the squad and spend a fair amount of time on the bench. This level of play offers athletes the opportunity to challenge themselves and learn from the more experienced players around them. This could be accessed via the **Senior Club Lacrosse.**

**PROGRESSION vs. POSSESSION**

Athletes may not be able to access all of these opportunities at your club and it is crucial for their development that athletes are not seen as the property of an individual team or club. If it could be beneficial for them, Academy athletes should be encouraged to play for more than one club in order to progress, or there may even come a time when they will need to move to a different club.

Recognise the role that you and your club has played in their development and, if the time is right, support them with their options and their decision to move on. All Athletes will reach this point in their career at some point, but very few forget where it all started!

**PARTNERSHIP DEVELOPMENT**

**ATTENDING ACADEMY SESSIONS**

Why not drop in on one of your local Regional Academy sessions and watch some of the coaches in action with Talent Pathway Athletes. You could also use the opportunity to build a relationship with the Academy Coach for the benefit of your players too. Please contact the coaches before you drop in.

**IDENTIFYING POTENTIAL**

If you have other athletes at your club who you believe have the potential to be a part of the Talent Pathway, please get in contact with Head Office, who will be able to advise you of the next available time for assessment.