

Long Term Athlete Development & Coaching Series #1/3: Understanding Ages & Stages to Inform Developmentally Appropriate Youth Sports

Guest: Rick Howard, DSc, CSCS,*D, FNCSA

Published: November 8, 2023

00:00:16 Eric Utterback

Hello and welcome to Healthy Youth Sports presented by the National Youth Sports Health and Safety Institute, a partnership between the American College of Sports Medicine and Sanford Health. I'm Eric Utterback, director of the Institute. This is a podcast where we'll talk about youth and adolescent sports, injury prevention, physical activity and health with some of the world's leading subject matter experts. If you're an athlete, parent, coach or administrator, thank you for joining us today. You can follow us online at www.nyshsi.org on Facebook and Twitter @YouthSportInst.

00:00:54 Eric Utterback

With me today is Doctor Rick Howard, who is an assistant professor, coaching minor advisor and sports performance coordinator at Westchester University. Rick comes to us today from the youth sports landscape of including muscle strength and motor skills along the developmental continuum. We have an outstanding show for you today, shining a spotlight on a very important topic of developmentally appropriate youth sports. Informed by long term athletic development. So let's jump right in.

Dr. Howard, how are you? Glad to have you with us.

00:01:26 Rick Howard, DSc, CSCS,*D, FNCSA

I'm doing great, Eric, and thank you so much for having me on to have this important discussion. Thank you.

00:01:31 Eric Utterback

Absolutely, absolutely. So for those that are listening in today on this, I just wanted to give everybody a heads up: on the NYSHSI website, under the resources section, we've worked with Dr. Howard and he has helped draft 3 resources in a long-term athlete development and coaching series.

00:01:53 Eric Utterback

Today we're going to talk a little bit about that first one. So number one in the series of three podcasts as well as written resources. This one is going to be understanding ages and stages to inform developmentally appropriate use sports as we kind of mentioned earlier. So we're going to dive right in.

Dr. Howard, what do you mean by ages and stages?

00:02:15 Rick Howard, DSc, CSCS,*D, FNCSA

Ages and stages is a catch phrase that we use in the coaching world to let people know that not all 8-year-olds are the same. They grow and develop differently. Not all 10-year-olds are the same either. So when we look at working with kids, there's been a lot of conversation about, do we really need to group 8-year-olds together, 10-year-olds together, 12-year-olds together. Because their maturation is so

different. So it might be physical. Some kids are growing, you know, you'll see a group of kids out on the field and some of them are taller. Some of them are not tall yet. Some of them are a little bit more mature emotionally than others. And so when we talk about ages and stages, we're meaning that kids are going to come to us in all different places along that continuum.

So it really becomes our job developmentally to meet the kids where they are at their particular age and stage, rather than thinking that, OK, you must be here, here and here because you are 10 for example. So that's probably the easiest way to explain it.

00:03:18 Eric Utterback

Got you. It's kind of funny. I think we've all seen that right. Well, we've been a part of it with our own kids. People are talking behind the scenes on the sidelines or parents wanting to know, or let's see that kids birth certificate.

00:03:34 Rick Howard, DSc, CSCS,*D, FNCSA

Yeah, yeah, they're shaving in seventh grade.

00:03:37 Eric Utterback

Yeah, it's. Well, it's funny. OK, this takes a step further. You just mentioned 7th grade. Just yesterday I kind of talked about this, just yesterday a friend of mine I went to high school with lives out on the east coast and he's got a 7th grade son that plays lacrosse. He's 6 foot 2 (inches), 230 lbs. and he posted some video of him running around. You know, he's just and he's just he's just one of the boys, right. And there's some others that came up to maybe his chest.

And it was it was pretty funny, but yeah, so definitely ages and stages. It's important to know what you meant by that. What are a few examples? Oh, go ahead.

00:04:17 Rick Howard, DSc, CSCS,*D, FNCSA

No, no, cause your question, I think it is where I was going next.

00:04:21 Eric Utterback

Yeah. Yeah. So so, like, what are what are a few examples of how ages and stages should be considered in the youth sports participation realm?

00:04:31 Rick Howard, DSc, CSCS,*D, FNCSA

Well, you had a good example with the 7th grader, and there's an example in a school near where I am, where there are twins. They're both in 10th grade, 14-15 years old, you know, just growing, developing, just entering the 10th grade but like you had said, they are 6 foot 4, a little over 200 lbs. each, but they have not reached physical maturity yet. So there's an assumption that because they're in high school they're 15-years-old and they're that tall and that big, they must have already hit puberty. All of these other changes have occurred. So here's where they must be according to ages and stages. But it's not. So neither of these boys hit puberty. Yet even though they're 15-years-old, so there's that wide range for when kids hit puberty that we need to look at to be able to figure out what can they be doing at that particular time.

The other end that we more often see, I think, is that the the lower end where you have kids that are 9 or 10 who are not developing at the same rate as some of the other kids, yet parents, coaches, administrators might have an expectation that they could live up to because of the size or the maturity of the rest of the group.

So as coaches, we really do need to be able to make sure that we're looking at this from the perspective of, "how do I meet every kid wherever he or she is on this continuum within play?" And there are different ways of doing that. So those are probably two of the easiest examples to look at.

00:05:58 Eric Utterback

OK, so coaching. How do physical, psychological and social maturity, influence coaching decisions?

00:06:10 Rick Howard, DSc, CSCS,*D, FNCSA

Absolutely. And you know, it's because a lot of times, especially in in the sports world, we often, you know, we always focus on that physical aspect. What does the kid look like, you talked about that 7th grade lacrosse player and everybody else like, wow, kid must be great. But a lot of times parents will have different things, like we'll say, gosh, you know what, you're really playing well. We should have you play up, right, like get to the next category. So you could climb the ladder of excellence as quickly as possible.

Well, it's not always the best decision, because even though physically they might be mature enough, if they're not socially mature enough to be all of a sudden with a different group of athletes, you know they're not their peers anymore. So and now all of a sudden they're in a different place and they might not feel as comfortable and then they might not play as well. And the parents can't figure it out. Like, what happened? You know, you're so talented with your age group. But then you play up and then you don't play as well as we thought you could have. So those are some of the things. So sometimes you look at the psychological demands. You know how well kids actually understand things. How well they move through it.

00:07:12 Rick Howard, DSc, CSCS,*D, FNCSA

Whether they can think more in the abstract level than being concrete, how well they can listen to more than one set of directions. You know, things that sometimes we don't think about it. We always kind of joke about it. You know, you work with elementary school kids and you say run to the wall, the kids won't stop until they hit the wall. You talked to a bunch of kids who in 9th 10th, 11th grade, you say run to the wall and they're seeing how many steps before they get to the wall they can stop without getting caught, right? So a lot of times it is different based on their maturity level and we have to understand that with kids all the way through this ages and stages growth and maturation rate.

00:07:50 Eric Utterback

Very interesting insight on that. Long-term athletic development (LTAD). It's a term that people hear a lot, but how does how does LTAD frame the youth sports? How does how does it frame youth sports participation?

00:08:06 Rick Howard, DSc, CSCS,*D, FNCSA

Well, that's a great question too. You know, we think about like what do we mean by all of those words, right, like, what do we mean about long-term? How long is that? We used to always joke about, you know peak by Friday like you had to be as best as you could be by this week's game. And that was as long as we would think ahead of time. But that's not really so. And if we talk about ages and stages and the developmental appropriateness.

00:08:06 Eric Utterback

Like, what do you mean?

00:08:27 Rick Howard, DSc, CSCS,*D, FNCSA

For kids, the important part is that they're having fun, that they're learning some new skills, that they're making friends that they're enjoying and adhering to some type of a routine that helps to build them the lifestyle habits that they could take with them all the way through their life journey. They may end up playing the sport that you're coaching. They may end up playing another sport, but we really want them to be active and involved, so the long-term part really is cradle to grave. A lot of people don't like that term because you know you're saying well to the grave, but we're trying to extend that as long as possible, which we know that sports can certainly help kids do so we really don't want to turn kids off from sports.

You know, we always look at that data that says over 70% of kids will drop out of sports by the time they're age 13. That number is trending down. There's been some research that's come out of Australia, the UK and even here in the U.S. that is indicating that now that number is trending now towards 11. So before, when we came up, before you and I even played an organized sport, these kids are dropping out of organized sports, so they're missing that great opportunity to be physically active across the life sport because oftentimes it's because of some of these age and stage coaching decisions that we've talked about, we'll say. All right, so you know, maybe you weren't at the maturational level you needed to be, but Coach was giving you all these things to do, he couldn't quite do. You got discouraged. You stop playing now, you don't play anymore. You're not even physically active. You got so turned off by the whole process. So that makes it a really difficult thing to look at.

00:10:02 Eric Utterback

OK.

00:10:03 Rick Howard, DSc, CSCS,*D, FNCSA

The athletic or athlete. You know, you look at some of the LTAD models and they usually either use the word athletic or athlete. I prefer athletic because if you go back and you look at the definitions of athleticism, that's much more well-rounded for everybody. Everybody's an athlete in one way, shape or form. Tom Ferry with the Aspen Institute's Project Play talks about that if you even go all the way back to Dan Bauermann's original definition of an athlete with Nike. So everybody's an athlete, right? Like you don't necessarily have to be a competitor in a sport at that particular point in time. For me, I think of athleticism, more of a mindset.

You know, if you look along the wellness continuum, are you on the performance end or are you on the sickness end of that continuum? So if we get people to always be thinking like, how can I be better rather than how do I always be ill? I think that helps in some regard. How we think of the athleticism

part, we can always get better on it. A lot of times we say, you're not athletic, you can't do that. You know, we don't say to kids in school. Well, you're not really, you're not mathematically inclined, so you shouldn't do your checking account. You shouldn't go that account change in the store. Like, these are the things we know you're going to have to do anyway. So we try to help you get better at them. So I think the same thing should apply.

00:11:19 Rick Howard, DSc, CSCS,*D, FNCSA

When we talk about LTAD it's long term, it's throughout the entire life course and it's factoring on the athletic part of every person to be the best they can be. If you go back to Margaret Whitehead's definition of physical literacy within your own personal constraints, right? However, you might not be the best, but that's OK. You're out there doing something and you're getting better.

The development part of it is kind of what we're talking about here. How do you recognize ages and stages and give kids the opportunity to get better at their current level to get to that next stage, recognizing that not every kid is at the same level at the same time? And we talked about some of those kids that developed.

They might burn out because those are the ones that coaches always say, hey, well, these are our five best kids, let's put them out on the court. Now. I know we're going to, we're going to go far, but the other kids don't get to play if they get a chance long enough. Right now they can get in and play and the data tends to indicate that those kids will be better in the long run.

00:12:20 Eric Utterback

You know, one thought that comes to my mind just about different stages in the child's development, too, is, you know, with all of the volunteer coaches that are out here working with kids that may not have gone through a lot of coaching education or coaching education programs. A lot of times volunteer. I mean, we'll all volunteer coaches, I think mean well, right, they all do.

00:12:42 Rick Howard, DSc, CSCS,*D, FNCSA

Oh, sure, yeah.

00:12:43 Eric Utterback

We've both been involved in this, but a lot of times they coach to the level they were last coached. So if you get, and and I'm sort of guilty of this myself, I have three daughters and when they were younger, when my when my oldest was getting involved. Well, you know the last level that I was coached in was in college football. So I sort of came into coaching younger girls with a very hard, militaristic kind of calloused, really hard, disciplined approach.

00:13:17 Rick Howard, DSc, CSCS,*D, FNCSA

Well, how does that work for you?

00:13:19 Eric Utterback

It didn't work. Yeah, it didn't start off great. You know, the lucky thing for me, we had a great group of parents and we got all of our daughters to play together. So we were allowed to sort of make some mistakes. And I think it was forgiveness there, you know, if I'm being honest, right. But we learned, we

learned really quick that there's a completely different way that you coach and talk to and and teach young kids and things like that. So anyways, I just think that's a big, big thing to understand too, and why I think there probably needs to be a stronger push for youth volunteer coaches to participate in coach education programs and stuff like that. So what are your thoughts on that?

00:14:06 Rick Howard, DSc, CSCS,*D, FNCSA

Yeah, I think it's interesting that you're saying that too, because of course I completely agree. This is part of the project we're working on with the United States Coaching Education Group, trying to get coaching education out for everybody to recognize how important this actually is and when I have to have these conversations, we always think about it on the same level as in school. Like you wouldn't send your kids to school without a person in the classroom that you know is certified and it's going to be hopefully doing the best by your child in the classroom because they have the knowledge and information to best serve the students at that particular age and stage at that grade. Yet in sports it has such a huge influence on kids not just with their kids, but even as they're growing and maturing.

00:14:51 Rick Howard, DSc, CSCS,*D, FNCSA

There really are no regulations in the U.S. It's really interesting when you look at it, sometimes you go through a safety training, which is very important and everybody should do that. But just to learn some of the basic fundamentals and and like you said, coaches will come in and they really do have the best intentions of stepping in. But a lot of times it's like, wow, if you don't step up and coach your daughter's not gonna have a team like, there's nobody else that's going to do it if you don't say yeah. So you're like, OK. And then you go to the Internet and you say, alright, so I need practice for soccer. What am I going to do? And you know, a lot of times just, ohh wow gosh, here's what the leading college team does for their training program. It works for them. It'll work for us. But you know, if they're eight or nine years old, it's way too much work.

So there really does need to be a solid coaching education program in the U.S. I know several groups have really tried to put something out there. And it's hard to take hold in the U.S. because there are really no guidelines or regulations that stipulate that it must be done, you know, it's voluntary. You're often volunteering as a coach and like, that's another thing that boggles the mind. You know, the youth sports industry is a 29 billion with a "B," billion dollar industry. But you know parents, money isn't going to coaches. Coaches are volunteering. The money's going to travel hotels, airfare. You know, you're going 6000 miles away to play a team that's three towns over.

00:16:06 Eric Utterback

Yeah, yeah.

00:16:15 Rick Howard, DSc, CSCS,*D, FNCSA

You know, we keep talking about this like there's money, but the money is being spent on other things that aren't really specific to the sport itself or for the youth development aspect of the sport to help them to play better, whereas it really, and people are coming up with all these different ways of how we might subsidize, use sports to be able to have the money in place to be able to make sure coaches get the training they need. That used to be what we thought of in the recreation model, right? A lot of times in the rec leagues, that was happening more so than you see in some of these for-profit leagues that

come out that you know, if they don't keep the kid playing year-round, they don't keep the revenue source coming in. So the way they get that is to have all these bells and whistles that attracts the parents, really. Like, you know, you use phrases like "elite."

00:17:00 Rick Howard, DSc, CSCS,*D, FNCSA

Like, you know, ages and stages and kids. Until kids have really developed and fully matured. "Elite" is just a relative phrase based on ability at that point in time, not necessarily the skill level for the long haul, but it sounds really good to parents. Hey, you know what? My kids on the U-12 Travel Elite team and they're going all over the country and playing, but you know, we don't know a whole lot about the coaches who are helping the kids along that pathway. It might just be that they happen to have gotten the best kids in in town or in the community that have signed up and that's great. But are they really helping to develop the whole child for every child? And and that's I think a piece that gets missed.

00:17:39 Eric Utterback

Yeah, it's a huge task, no doubt.

So what is a key take-home message for any of our youth sports stakeholders? Whether it be coach, parent, young athlete, aspiring athlete or administrator. Is there a key take home message that you have that you'd like to share when you when you're out speaking on this topic?

00:18:04 Rick Howard, DSc, CSCS,*D, FNCSA

Yeah, my key message is always that the health and well-being of every child is the central tenant of long-term athletic development. So if it might be that, you know, I really need you to get in there and play because we need to win this game, we need to win this tournament or whatever. Is that really reflective of the health and well-being of that child at that time?

Is what I've put together for my practice today, is that gonna help every kid on my team to improve? Is there a way that I can put that together? And when we talk about the psychological and social aspect, how am I helping to create all of these values that we always say that sports instill in kids?

You always talk about cooperation and teamwork and fairness, the National Federation of High Schools actually had a video a number of years ago about the four athletes who are getting suspended from school and from the team because they got caught cheating on a test. Don't know if you ever saw that, but the the coach comes flying into the office wondering how the kids could possibly do that.

00:19:02 Eric Utterback

No, no.

00:19:08 Rick Howard, DSc, CSCS,*D, FNCSA

To him and the team, because they had such a huge game on Friday. And like, Coach, you taught us that. Remember when the ball was out of bounds and you said "Ohh don't say anything" or remember when this happened, he said "well, don't pay any attention to that." So you know when we're thinking about the values we're instilling in our kids, and we think about what we're really teaching them, especially the developmental level. When you see parents arguing and arguing with officials...

And it's interesting—I did a talk not too long ago. I thought just for fun, I Googled “parents and youth sports.” Do you know what came up? All the fights.

00:19:39 Eric Utterback

Oh, let me guess. Let me guess a fight, right? A video of a fight I bet.

00:19:43 Rick Howard, DSc, CSCS,*D, FNCSA

Yeah, all the fights. Yes. And like that's like if you look up parents and youth sports now, that's what comes up. You're not showing how parents who support their kids and youth sports are creating better kids that are more suitable socially, they get along better with others. Like all the things that we think youth sports teach. So when you reflect back on the health and well-being of all kids, and then you see what's happening? Some of the, not all the parents, of course, but some parents just get so caught up in it that, you know, you can't get officials anymore. Nobody wants to officiate, because they don't want to take that torment either. And it's hard. It's even getting hard to find coaches in a lot of instances just because every parent out there is coaching at the same time.

00:20:23 Rick Howard, DSc, CSCS,*D, FNCSA

You talked about the development, the health and well-being of kids too. You know, how many things can a kid listen to at one time? So you're out on the field, you're 10. You're just learning some of these skills, you know, soccer, for example, if you're gonna kick the ball, it's a combination of running and kicking. So you're starting to combine a couple of different motor skills. You have to think of the strategy, where it's going to go. Now all of a sudden you have the coach telling you what to do; four parents, each of them telling you something different from that. And like, well, who do I listen to? What do I do? You know, it's overwhelming for the kids and it's no wonder that so many kids are burning out of sports so quickly. And the data also is indicating that kids are playing sports less and less overall. And our four popular sports are losing kids a lot of because of this. We always say that video games are the enemy, but I think it's something like 94-95% of all kids play video games, but we have 25% of all kids who never played a sport, ever, and missed that great opportunity. So there's a real disparity and I think we could learn a lot.

Canadian support for Life did a cool webinar one time, like how can we learn from video games, what do they teach us? What are they doing right. Like they asked the kids, right. They say, well, what helped you get to that next level? What do you like? What what's exciting?

00:21:45 Rick Howard, DSc, CSCS,*D, FNCSA

We kind of we always say that kids are not miniature adults. But if you think about youth sports...

You know I'm in Pennsylvania. And so we talked about Little League baseball started in Pennsylvania. What a great opportunity. So you say it started in Pennsylvania and then I'll ask everybody like, how do you think it started? Do you think we said all right, here are the skills that are really important in baseball. Let's see if you could do these with a variety of implements, a variety of surfaces different speeds. Walking, moving, stationary, target moving target build up to be able to play the game...no. We say they're not miniature adults, but what happened? They made the base path smaller. The ball smaller, the bat smaller. The gloves smaller, field smaller, ending shorter. Basically, they just made an

adult version of the game, but smaller. So they did exactly what we always say not to do. So the kids didn't really learn a lot of those lessons. And most of our sports have done the same thing.

00:22:38 Rick Howard, DSc, CSCS,*D, FNCSA

You know, it wasn't until, I guess, like the last 10 or 15 years when we stumbled upon this great idea of short-sighted games. So, hey, you know what? Rather than playing the whole entire length of the field, and...I don't know if you've ever seen the video that USA Hockey put out where it shows how big the ice looks to an 8-year-old kid or a nine-year-old, and they have these adults out on the ice and like, Oh my God, this is huge! So they show that the kids can't really learn the skills. So you think because it's just an enormous amount of space to try to cover and grow, and even to listen to and follow directions on such a huge surface. So I think listening to some of the the tips that some of the experts have on what we could do to help kids learn, how we could help them to have a more successful sports experience for all kids.

Every kid should have that opportunity. And I think that's what really helps the health and well-being of all kids. Not making it such an ultra-competitive model that only the top of the top kids at that particular age, right. So that doesn't even mean those are going to be the ones who will continue on to always be good, but we try to cherry pick those best kids a little bit too early, burn them out and then not give the other kids the opportunity to grow and mature into their bodies, to be able, to play their sport.

00:23:53 Eric Utterback

So, well, that's very interesting. Do you, when you when you mentioned earlier about the the decrease in sport participation, I think you said it was 13% to 11% or something like that, it's the the the most recent data that you're seeing and your colleagues are seeing.

Is that data reflective pre-COVID or are these numbers post-COVID? And has there been a big hit after COVID if kids deciding, you know what, I really don't want those pressures or I don't want to be as involved in sports. I'm going to go do something else. I mean, is there any data out there?

00:24:31 Rick Howard, DSc, CSCS,*D, FNCSA

Yeah, great. Great question. Yeah, the data I've seen so far has shown that, yeah, the most of the data showed a a trending decline pre-COVID. COVID just solidified it.

A lot of kids are like, "I've had that year or two off from playing. I'm not going back." So sports have suffered even more. I think after COVID to get the kids to go back out and play the latest data and I don't remember who wrote the paper, I have to go back and look it up, but did show that the trends are starting to come back almost to pre-COVID levels of kids participating in sport.

00:25:01 Eric Utterback

OK.

00:25:03 Rick Howard, DSc, CSCS,*D, FNCSA

And I think a lot of that they're attributing now to the social element of playing sports that so many kids missed out on during COVID and you're isolated. You're not getting that social aspect that you need. So we haven't really touched on that part of sports so much, but like getting to know other kids, learning

how to get along with other kids, being part of a group, being part of something bigger than yourself, it's huge for kids. And we see so much going on with mental health as part of our health and well-being. That's suffered for kids who haven't had that opportunity to do what we as humans need to do.

So another great way of promoting sports, I think, is a great way for kids to get to know kids better, be with kids. Better because sometimes in a school environment, you don't always get to be as social as you want to be either.

00:25:48 Eric Utterback

Absolutely. Yeah. I mean, the social part is huge for me. I mean, just look at some of these interviews you've seen with adult athletes or professional athletes, even at the collegiate level. And you asked them, what are some of your favorite memories?

And you see this a lot in the post-game press events at the NCAA Tournament for basketball and you'll, you know, kids up there really upset because their college career is done and then a journalist may ask them, "what are you gonna remember the most about your time at college XYZ?" And they say the time with my teammates, the bus rides, all the meals. They don't even talk about getting to the NCAA tournament or right.

00:26:30 Rick Howard, DSc, CSCS,*D, FNCSA

Yeah, yeah, yeah.

00:26:31 Eric Utterback

Other aspects, and these are grown adults and so they shouldn't be any different for young kids going through this process either. I mean, social aspect is huge. So glad you touched on that.

00:26:41 Eric Utterback

A little bit so closing thought as we as we wrap up here... I know you've shared a lot and covered a lot of things, but is there any particular honed in comment on a closing thought that you have?

00:26:56 Rick Howard, DSc, CSCS,*D, FNCSA

I think that it's a process and I think we often focus on the product rather than the process, right. We always say that if you saw a group of kids with uniforms on and they're at the mall sitting at the food court and they're having something to eat, somebody would come by and put the first question they ask: Did you win?

00:27:15 Eric Utterback

Oh, right,

00:27:16 Rick Howard, DSc, CSCS,*D, FNCSA

They didn't say "hey, did you have a good time?"

00:27:19 Eric Utterback

"What are you eating?"

00:27:20 Rick Howard, DSc, CSCS,*D, FNCSA

Yeah. Yeah. Like, "how's the season going? What's your favorite part about playing?" No. "Did you win?" It's the product where you're always focusing on. So I think we so often lose sight of the process of the growth and development, the things that can happen when kids can be, like, just outside that comfort zone a little bit and then rise to that level and do their best and play well.

So I think that in our society and in our culture, we're focused on the win, rather than, "How do you do? How? Like what's the most fun part about being able to go out after a contest and celebrate together like this? Like how much fun is that?" So I think we lose sight of that.

And then getting back to what you're saying earlier too, I think about the coaching education. I think that is such a huge piece that we really need to get more people to rally behind to make sure that coaches are doing what they need to do. We often use the analogy like "Can you imagine like you're in math class in school and all of a sudden it's test day!" So what happens? You get all the kids up at the board, you put the problem up and they're all sitting there. The parents and fans are behind them screaming and yelling at all the kids trying to solve the math problem on the board, right? Screaming, yell...like you wouldn't ever accept that in a classroom like why do we accept that on the field for 10-year-old kids who are just trying to learn and have a good time?

00:28:41 Rick Howard, DSc, CSCS,*D, FNCSA

So you know when you really start looking at what we do in youth sports compared to any other aspect of our society, we would never allow this stuff to go on that for some reason we're allowing now. So I think my closing thought of what we should all carry forward, is to embrace that process and whatever we can do to help that process, we should be out there doing it for a parent of a kid.

I always tell the story. I take my dogs for a walk around this park and they always have soccer practice and you have a soccer coach, a bunch of kids who are learning how to play soccer. And all the parents, during practice, the parents are just sitting there on their phones, or they're just talking to one another.

I'm like: What if you were in school? What would happen with your kids? You'd be taking your kid home and going. Hey, you know what? I noticed that you don't do as well on some of your reading comprehension as some of your class, let's work on that together.

00:29:31 Rick Howard, DSc, CSCS,*D, FNCSA

Right. But go out there like you have absolutely no idea whether the kids are learning what they're doing. And I've noticed that like from a motor skills perspective, the kids aren't doing as well with their skills as they probably could be. And the reason I say is they probably could be they might kick the ball and it might be 10 feet wide of the net.

They can do every celebratory dance ever made with precision, with confidence, with complete motor control like alright, so they have the ability to do it. They're just not focusing that ability on kicking the soccer ball. So if we could get parents to be a little more involved in the process of helping their kids to learn, and I think that kind of, you know, get into a whole other subject here when we start figuring out, like, the physical education process and what parents have learned. Because I think sometimes they feel a little bit not as confident, perhaps in the abilities to help out. You know. How do you kick a soccer ball?

Like what should that look like? I was sitting with a group of friends this weekend, and we were talking about that they just had their field day.

00:30:26 Eric Utterback

Right.

00:30:31 Rick Howard, DSc, CSCS,*D, FNCSA

And they were doing corn hole and like, that's pretty cool. But, you know, I said, it's interesting to me to notice that when I see kids doing corn hole, they're they do it on the same side. Like if the right-handed, they step with their right foot and like, whatever happened to teaching oppositional throwing and they're like... "What do you mean?"

00:30:46 Eric Utterback

Oh my.

00:30:46 Rick Howard, DSc, CSCS,*D, FNCSA

Like they never heard of it.

So nobody knew anything about what that could look like to lead with your opposite leg when you throw something. So it was interesting. So I think there's a lot that may have been lost in translation that I think if we all just got on board together, I think we could use a lot of the resources that are already available to us and then grow from there.

00:31:08 Eric Utterback

I'm sorry Rick, but I'm chuckling on the comment about corn hole, because I was at my nephew's high school graduation party. And I played cornhole for about 3 hours straight, about eight or nine games. And, you know, we had had team partner, you know, but we were doing so well. And as our family always does, we raise each other and you know, just tease each other. And you know, we are pretty hard at it and we have a great time.

And I found myself coaching because so many people were doing that there, with the right hand, with the right foot and I'm like what are we doing here? So you know with a little instruction and encouragement, they changed and then they started getting the bag into the hole and I was like.

"What am I doing? And now they're just as good!"

00:31:56 Rick Howard, DSc, CSCS,*D, FNCSA

Yeah, right. Right. Yeah.

You know that's a good point too though. Because maybe parents do know, but they don't want anybody else to find out because they want to make sure their kid who knows how to do it is the only one who can do it.

00:32:07 Eric Utterback

Good point. That's funny. That's funny. Well, hey, listen, I really enjoyed this conversation, and like I mentioned at the top, this is conversation. One of three in a long-term athlete development coaching series. This one obviously on ages and stages to form developmentally appropriate youth sports. It was great and I look forward to doing the other two.

00:32:28 Rick Howard, DSc, CSCS,*D, FNSCA

Eric, thank you so much. I really appreciate the conversation. All right, we'll talk soon. Have a great day.

You too now bye bye.

00:32:35 Eric Utterback

Right.