



**YOUR GOALS. OUR GAME.**

**GIVING ALL  
PLAYERS  
THE BEST  
CHANCE OF  
SUCCESS IN  
SOCCER**



**LONG-TERM  
PLAYER DEVELOPMENT:  
A COMMUNITY GUIDE**



**CANADA SOCCER  
BELIEVES EVERY  
PLAYER DESERVES  
THE BEST  
POSSIBLE SOCCER  
EXPERIENCE.**

Whether they dream of playing for Canada's National Teams or simply want to have fun with their friends, taking the right approach to the game when children are young sets the stage for a lifetime of enjoyment.

The **Canada Soccer Pathway** provides a roadmap for players of all ages and aspirations who want to play soccer at the recreational, competitive or high

performance **EXCEL** levels, with the aim of encouraging lifelong participation. The Pathway is built around the principles of Long-Term Player Development (LTPD).



For players under the age of 12, many of whom are lacing up cleats for the first time, the goal of this approach is simple:

**GET KIDS TO FALL IN  
LOVE WITH THE GAME.**

## WHAT IS LTPD?

LTPD is a model of athlete development that parallels what doctors and psychologists have long used to better understand human development: as a series of distinct stages, which take us from infancy through adulthood. A person's abilities, behaviour and emotions, as well as their understanding of the world around them, varies from stage to stage.

Similarly, experts in sport science have identified seven stages of development—each with its own physical and psychological characteristics—that form the basis for LTPD. When young soccer players are able to train and compete in an environment that's appropriate to their stage of development, they not only perform at their best, they also have more fun.

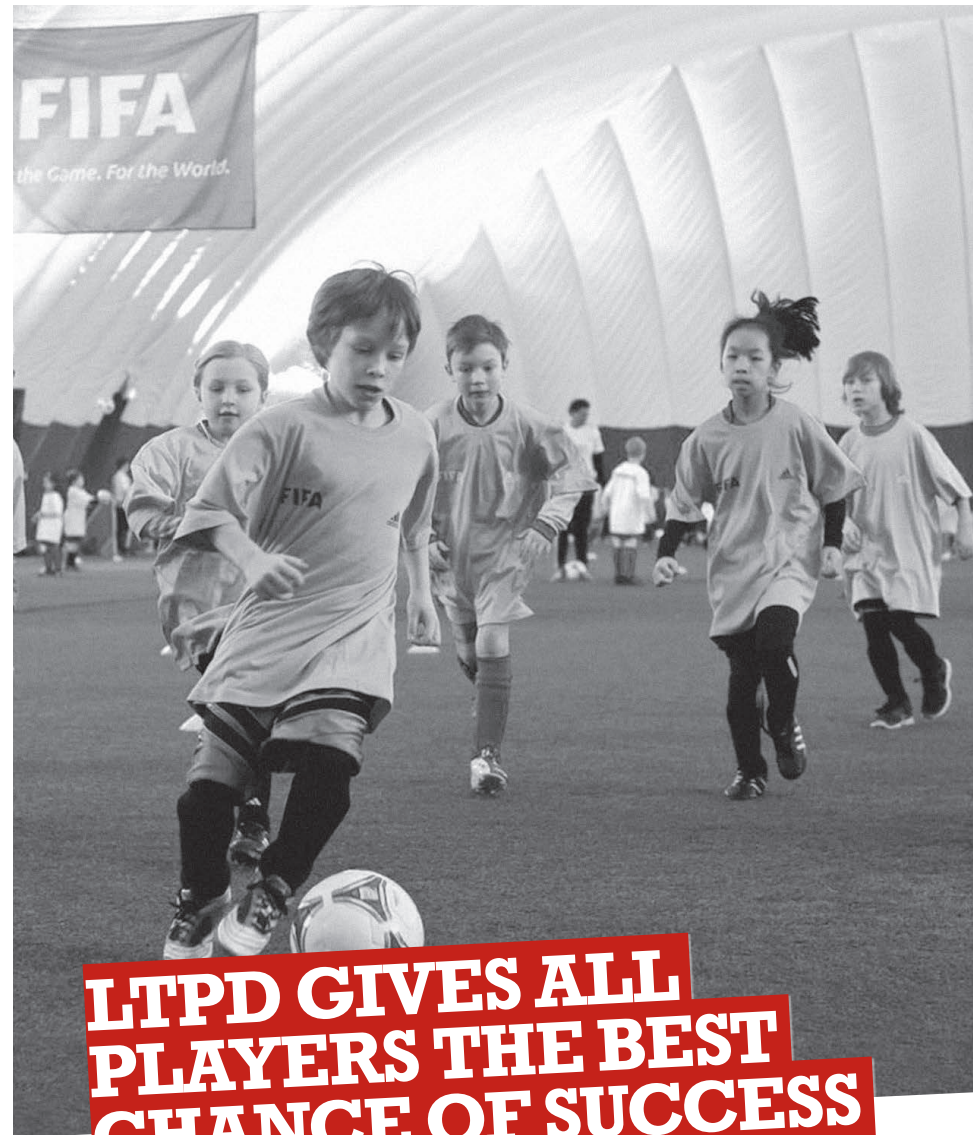
**In other words, LTPD is designed to give players an optimal soccer experience at every stage by putting their needs front and centre.**



## WHY LTPD?

We don't expect kids to compete in spelling bees without first teaching them their ABCs. When activities and expectations don't match with a child's developmental stage, this can set them up for failure.

The same is true when young children are thrust into a soccer environment that over-emphasizes winning at the expense of developing skills and having fun. The negative consequences can last a lifetime: Some kids develop bad habits and poor skills and can become discouraged. Many don't achieve their performance potential. Others end up leaving the sport altogether because they don't enjoy the game.



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by tailoring training, competition and coaching to their needs at the appropriate stage of development.



## THE FIRST THREE LTPD STAGES

The first three LTPD stages, which guide development up to age 12, are built around small-sided games. There are no league standings for these age groups; the focus is on learning and fun.

1

STAGE ONE:

### ACTIVE START

(U-4/U-6 M/F)

Gives the youngest players the opportunity to develop basic movement skills like running, jumping, landing, kicking, throwing, and catching in a fun setting built around informal play and positive reinforcement.

2

STAGE TWO:

### FUNDAMENTALS

(U-6/U-8 F, U-6/U-10 M)

Allows children to develop their movement ABCs—agility, balance, coordination, and speed—and learn the basics of the game while emphasizing fun, cooperation, and maximum time on the ball.

3

STAGE THREE:

### LEARNING TO TRAIN

(U-8/U-11 F, U-9/U-12 M)

This “golden age of learning,” when children become less self-centered and are more able to reflect on their actions and learn from mistakes, provides an optimal window for further development of skills. The focus is on learning by doing, building a larger repertoire of soccer movements and teaching the basic principles of play in a fun and challenging environment.



# PROGRESSING INTO COMPETITION

As children move into adolescence, official league standings are introduced and the game becomes more competitive, with more emphasis on strategy and tactics. With a steady increase in training time over the next three LTPD stages (4-6), a move to larger-sided games and year-round play, the most advanced players are given opportunities for further development with the Canada Soccer Pathway's EXCEL program. Others may decide to continue playing recreationally, moving straight to LTPD stage 7.

4

## STAGE FOUR: TRAINING TO TRAIN

(U-11/U-15 F, U-12/U-15 M)

The onset of the adolescent growth spurt for most kids during this stage is an ideal time for endurance training. Players are also introduced to concepts like mental preparation, goal setting, and coping with winning and losing while learning more advanced soccer skills, including position-specific techniques.



5

## STAGE FIVE: TRAINING TO COMPETE

(U-15/U-19 F, U-16/U-20 M)

Players are now working to hone their soccer skills under a variety of competitive conditions in an 11 v 11 game format that mirrors adult play. Along with the continued refinement of advanced techniques, players work to develop their tactical awareness, discipline and mental toughness.



6

## STAGE SIX: TRAINING TO WIN

(U-18+ F, U-19+ M)

With most of their soccer skills now fully established, the focus for EXCEL players at the National Team, semi-professional and professional levels shifts to performing at their best. They work on adapting strategies quickly to suit changing demands, establishing a pre-training and pre-match routine, and maintaining optimal physical and psychological fitness.



7

STAGE SEVEN:

## ACTIVE FOR LIFE

This stage encompasses boys and girls, men and women of all ages and abilities who want to play soccer for fun and fitness. They may be youth players who don't pursue high-performance play through the EXCEL program, former competitive players who don't intend to play internationally, or professionally or, they may be brand new to soccer. In all cases, the game structure is adapted to suit the level of play, the number of players and the available space.



### LTPD IS PLAYER-CENTERED:

Respecting the developmental needs of players is the number-one priority. This means making sure recreational players have fun, and also that those with special talents are given opportunities for further development as they move along the Canada Soccer Pathway.

### LTPD IS INCLUSIVE:

A handful of players may follow the Canada Soccer Pathway's EXCEL program all the way to a National Team or professional club, but LTPD is also designed for the 99% who won't. It's about giving everyone the best possible soccer experience every step of the way.

### LTPD RECOGNIZES COMPETITIVENESS COMES FROM WITHIN:

The fact that there are no standings for players under 12 does not translate into a lack of competitive spirit. When kids play in an environment where learning is put ahead of winning, they're less afraid to make mistakes and more willing to take risks in order to try out the new skills they've learned during practice. They're free to play their own best game without worrying they'll be chastised for a poor match result.

**WHEN CHILDREN LEARN THE RIGHT SKILLS AT THE RIGHT TIME** — supported by a caring soccer

community of parents, coaches, officials, and volunteers — they become more confident in their abilities and have a lot more fun. This means more of them will grow into healthy, active adults with a lifelong love of the game.