Table Tennis SA - Athlete Pathway

Introduction

Table Tennis South Australia has developed an athlete pathway which is based on Table Tennis Australia’s (TTA) FTEM Pathway.

Foundations, Talent, Elite & Mastery (FTEM) is representative of the “whole of sport” pathway from common and unique phases of development for participants at the active lifestyle, sport and high performance sport phases.

The framework has been generated by sport practitioners of the AIS Athlete Pathway Development team to address the current shortfalls in applied research and practice specific to athlete development.

The FTEM framework consists of 4 stages of the skill and performance development of sporting participants with a further 10 smaller stages. These are:

- Foundations (F1, F2 and F3)
- Talent (T1, T2, T3 and T4)
- Elite (E1 and E2)
- Mastery (M).

Foundation

F1 – Basic Movement Foundations

The key characteristic of F1 is the participant’s early exposure to a variety of movement experiences that afford them a broad range of essential movement foundations. The focus is on the early learning, execution and acquisition of basic movement foundations, relating to locomotor skills (moving the body through space – running, hopping, skipping, sliding, leaping, galloping) and object control skills (manipulating objects – throwing, catching, bouncing, striking, kicking and rolling).

Key Drivers: parents, siblings, family, friends, playmates

F2 – Extension of Movement Foundations

The characteristics of the F2 component relates to advancing and refining F1 movement experiences through continued broad exposure to formal and informal play, practice and games, in both sport and non-sport specific way. In this phase, the participant is exposed to greater movement challenges, and whilst parents, playmates and other family members still have an ongoing role in development, this is usually supported by involving more professional levels of instruction and feedback such as experiences delivered by teachers, coaches or other specialists.

Those participants electing not to progress to more sport specific pursuits (F3) are able to translate their movement foundations into active lifestyle activities. However, if the participant’s goal is to move beyond F1 and F2 movement foundations, then attaining proficiency in the F1 and F2 movement foundations cannot be underestimated.

Key Drivers: parents, teachers, coaches, friends

F3 – Sport-specific commitment and/or competition

The F3 phase is characterised by an increase in the commitment to training, sport specific skill development and/or formal engagement in competition. This phase encompasses the beginning of most “traditional” club or school sport experiences, where the participant commits to a specific sport in a formalised setting. F3 activities, however, can also include the pursuit of personal improvements in either a competitive (e.g. marathon) or non-competitive environment (e.g. rock climbing).

In all cases however, foundational skills (F1 and F2) are now applied within the constraints or conventions set by the sports’ rules and regulations and the movement skills become more specialised.

Athletes (or participants) may remain at the F3 level for a life time (through choice or ability), or move quickly beyond this phase should they be identified as having potential for high performance sport (T1).

While the F1 to F3 movement experiences play a key role in providing a foundation for sports participation, their critical ability to contribute to movements associated with a healthy and active lifestyle (e.g. bushwalking, dancing, etc.) cannot be overlooked.

Key Drivers: clubs, coaches, teachers, private providers, self

Talent

T1 – Demonstration of Potential

At the T1 level, athletes typically exhibit demonstrable gifts or talents in the physical, physiological, psychological and skill domain, which indicate potential in high performance sport. Now classified as the beginning of the high performance pathway, where athletes arguably outperform 90% of their peers. This may occur through formal or informal talent identification processes including self-identification prompted by an individual’s self-awareness of their ability to outperform their peers. In recognition of the complexity and limits of athlete prediction, T1 represents an initial assessment of potential only and this must then be confirmed in the next stage at T2.

Key Drivers: Level 2 & 3 coaches, Table Tennis Australia, Table Tennis South Australia, clubs, schools, self

T2 – Talent Verification

The confirmation or verification of talent (T2) is seen as sequential and complementary to T1, where evidence based observations (T1) should be supplemented by the subjective judgements and intuition of coaches or talent scouts. There are no fixed time frames for the T2 process, although a magnitude of months rather than days or weeks is recommended.
During T2 athletes are immersed in an observational trial period within the specificity of the training and competitive environment to demonstrate sport specific skill acquisition, commitment, motivation, “coachability”, and other positive psychology, self-management and relevant traits. This phase is crucial to confirm whether initial impressions of potential can be sustained. Verification of talent by a known benchmark ideally leads to the formalisation of the sports support to the athlete within the T3 phase.

**Key Drivers:** Level 2 & 3 coaches, Table Tennis Australia, Table Tennis South Australia, clubs, schools

**T3 – Practicing and Achieving**

After being confirmed as potential elite athletes (T2), athletes are now committed to sport specific practice and investment in high training volumes, striving for continual performance improvements and are focused on a benchmark outcome (T4).

This phase arguably contains the largest cohort of future elite athletes, yet they also represent the most vulnerable participants due to traditional funding and athlete support priorities being preferentially aligned to the ends of the pathway, rather than its middle, often translating into a number of deficiencies in key development areas including coaching, competition, equipment etc. Quality of the development support environment is critical here to reduce dropout and underachievement. Given the measureable lack of attention often provided to athletes at this stage of development, T3 represents a fertile area for future investment and potential international advantage.

**Key Drivers:** Level 2 & 3 coaches, Table Tennis Australia, Table Tennis South Australia, clubs, athlete, coaches

**T4 – Breakthrough and Reward**

Gaining professional support for continued development is the key feature of T4. An athlete’s efforts to improve their performance at T3 are essentially rewarded at T4 where they may earn an athletic scholarship at a University or an Institute or academy of sport, or are drafted into a professional team or an elite training squad greatly enhancing their developmental progress. Similarly, performing at a key event (e.g. a major championship) can be a critical milestone that leads to the increased likelihood of being noticed and supported by the sport or the system.

Maximisation of pre-elite interaction with the elite is critical to advance a T4 athletes development and is a critical transition period into open, senior and international competition (E1).

**Key Drivers:** athletes, high performance agencies, Table Tennis Australia, Table Tennis South Australia, clubs, coaches

**Elite**

**E1 – Senior National Representation**

For Olympic sports, athletes at E1 are defined as achievement of an elite status through selection and representation for their country at the highest senior international level. For professional sports, athletes are playing at the highest possible levels of professional competition.

**Key Drivers:** athlete, coaches, Table Tennis Australia, high performance agencies

**E2 – Podium Success**

For Olympic sports, athletes at E2 are defined as achieving podium success at peak senior international competitions such as World Championships, Olympic Games and World Cups. For professional sports, those at E2 achieve relevant professional accolades such as the competition’s most valuable player or they win the equivalent of a major competition premiership or tournament (e.g. Premierships, Best and Fairest).

**Key Drivers:** athlete, coaches, Table Tennis Australia, high performance agencies

**Mastery**

**M – Sustained success at E2**

Those reaching M or mastery level in Olympic sports are successful at an E2 level over multiple high performance cycles (i.e. a typical 8 year period based on two high performance cycles of four years). Professional mastery athletes, like their Olympic counterparts, achieved repeated and sustained success at E2 over an enduring period or era (e.g. 8 to 10 years).

**Key Drivers:** athlete, coaches, Table Tennis Australia, high performance agencies