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# The Talent Trap



FREE YOURSELF AND THRIVE  
AMID THE COMPETITION AND  
CHAOS OF YOUTH SPORT



**LEIGH**  
**ASHTON**

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Names and specific details that are included in stories within this publication have been changed.

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Cover design: Cheryl Smith [www.macarndesign.com](http://www.macarndesign.com)

Text illustrations: Cheryl Smith [www.macarndesign.com](http://www.macarndesign.com)

Editing: Sue Copsey [www.suecopsey.com](http://www.suecopsey.com)

More about *The Talent Trap*: [www.facebook.com/winningbeyondgameday](https://www.facebook.com/winningbeyondgameday)

# Foreword, by Bernice Mene

Teaching was one of the hardest but most rewarding jobs I have done. It helped that there was formal training. Parenting is also a tough gig. Nothing prepares you for it. Sport coaching and leadership fall into the same basket of extremely challenging but highly enjoyable endeavours.

Young children, with the world at their feet, can at times be impatient to grow up. Conversely, parents are often anxious to do what other people are doing, or to offer their children as many opportunities as possible, in case they miss out. There is perceived pressure for our children to acquire skills and maximise opportunities as quickly as possible. Everyone wants help and wants to help.

As a parent, I am acutely aware of the need to let kids have time to build Lego, ride bikes and climb trees. The end goal is independence. Essentially, what I want for my children is that they grow to enjoy something so much that they want to keep doing it, be it sport or music or art. As a coach of my little team, I see it as my responsibility to grow a love of the game and make it more fun than the other extracurricular activities they are enrolled in. It's a long-term quest in search of their passion – but it has to be just that: *their* passion, not someone else's. And if self-motivation is the key, how do we build and grow that in our young children?

*The Talent Trap* is a timely reminder to stop and reflect. It is a thought provoker, a discussion starter for a conversation that must be had. My first Silver Ferns coach said take a little from every coach in your lifetime and use it to mould your game and individual style. In a similar vein, it is important to read widely to arm yourself with as much knowledge as possible in order to form an educated opinion. A worthwhile mantra is to constantly seek to improve.

*The Talent Trap* is an easy read. Leigh Ashton's tone is compelling, and the anecdotes are totally relatable. I recommend it purely to widen your thinking, question practices, and think about the why? Or possibly the why not?

If you are in a position of power, it is your responsibility to review, reflect and challenge yourself and others. I urge you to add *The Talent Trap* to your reading list and see how many times you nod in agreement as the stories resonate with you. This could be the most important thing you read if you want to nurture more athlete enjoyment, wider and longer athlete participation and effective skill development in your sport.

Bernice Mene

- *New Zealand Silver Ferns: International playing career spanning ten years.*
- *Member of the New Zealand Order of Merit for Services to Netball.*
- *Sport leader, keynote speaker, television commentator, languages teacher, education and career advisor, foundation trustee, and youth mentor.*

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*Dedicated to Kalani and Brady*



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# Preface

Sport is a fantastic part of childhood, adolescence and adulthood for many New Zealanders. Yet, there are recurring issues when athletes begin to navigate from youth to adult, from amateur to professional or from enthusiast to elite competitor.

There is a canyon to cross which, along with valuable tests and triumphs, is rife with traps.

At the same time, there are recurring challenges for the coaches and leaders who operate in this perplexing gap between community and performance sport.

A few years ago I was driving home with my husband from a sport meeting. We were frustrated because another lengthy discussion had broken out regarding the problems people were finding with supporting their talented young players. Whether you have been involved in youth sport for five months or fifteen years, these will probably sound familiar.

*"They're overcommitted; they're getting burnt out."*

*"They think they're already high-performance athletes but they're actually a long way off."*

*"There's so much pressure."*

*"They're great at playing their sport, but their physical foundations are so poor."*

*"Each coach and team has their own agenda, and they don't consider the other programmes our athletes are involved in."*

*"They don't take enough time to recover from injuries."*

*"They get complacent because they keep getting selected and stop needing to work for it."*

*"What about the late developers? They're getting missed."*

And on and on it went, as per usual.

A great deal of time and money has been spent all over the world investigating and informing in the areas of talent identification (ID), sport development, coaching and training, so why has there been such a lack of impact or change on the front line?

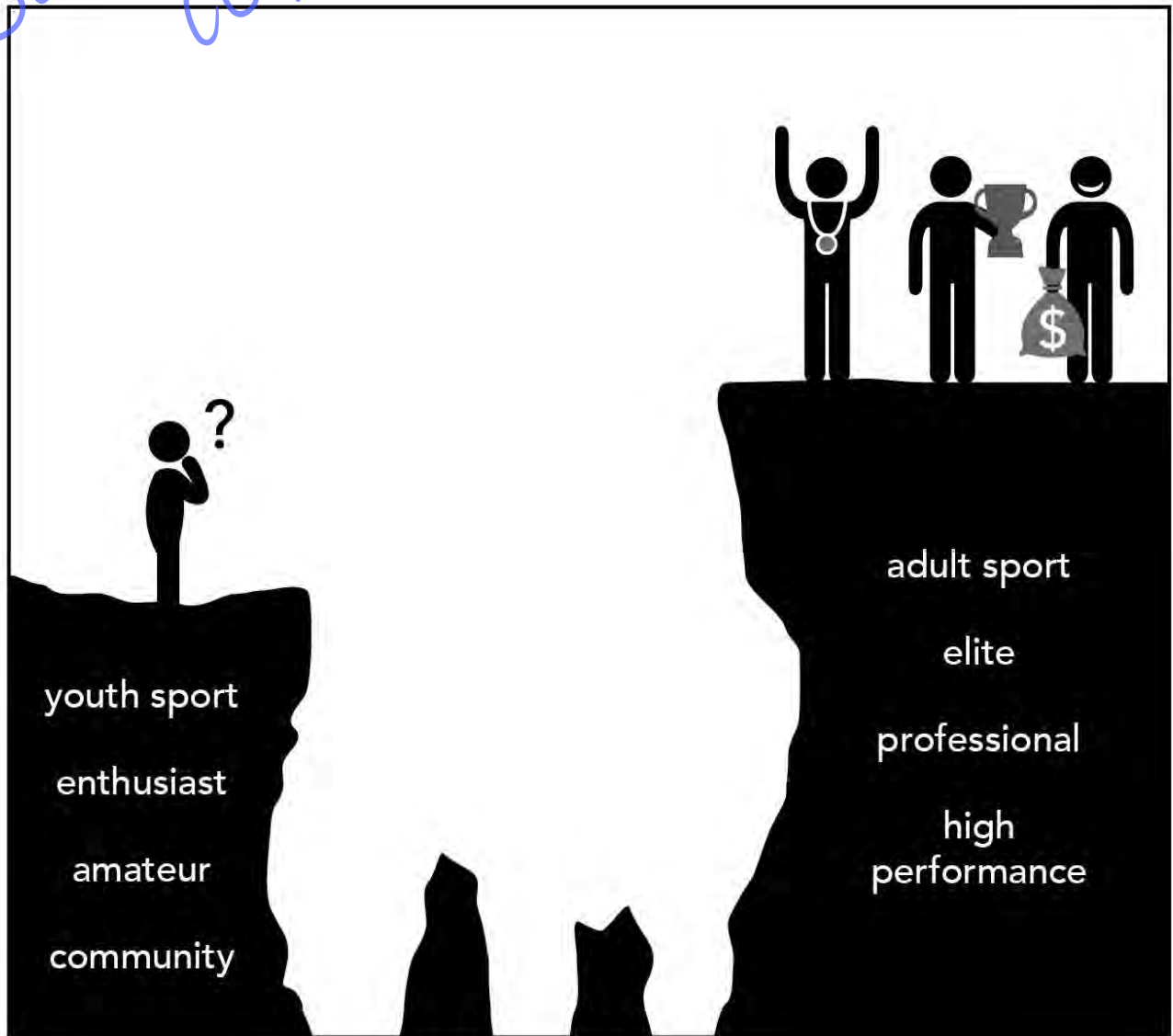
To cut a long story short, that discussion propelled us to evaluate, strip back and challenge the common practices in talent development, athlete development and player development in sport. We were compelled to work out why most people crossing the metaphorical canyon are struggling, why so many are breaking down or becoming disillusioned along the way, and why those that do make it seldom arrive in good shape or (perhaps more importantly) in good spirits.

For the record, it isn't "just the way it is," as people have told me, excruciatingly, time and time again.

I have written this book to challenge your thinking and empower you to make change. I will show you what is happening and give you solutions to better support your athletes.

I can help them cross the canyon. I will help you bridge the gap.

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# Introduction

Over the past two decades, the overall awareness, knowledge and status of talent development, athlete development and player development have grown massively.

While more people have more information, there is still a great deal of confusion about how to apply all this knowledge, and the same issues keep cropping up.

## *We are distracted by the word talent*

The word *talent* has spread like a virus. We overuse it and we misuse it: in orienting strategies, in creating programmes, in mapping or tracking success and in labelling athletes. Talent lists, talent programmes, talent development, talent plans, talent ID, talent pathways, talent systems, talent scouts, talent managers, potential talent, emerging talent, realising talent, sponsoring talent, producing talent, developing talent ... and on and on.

A mountain of research indicates that talent is only part of the equation for achieving success, plus there are countless examples of bias in talent ID. The word “talented” can be interpreted in many ways, and means different things to different people, ranging from a narrow view of natural ability to a holistic concept of being very capable, whether inherited or learned.

## *The term talent development causes a clash of ideas*

The first anomaly is that talent implies being exclusive, and development implies being inclusive. Some people identify more with the word talent and an exclusive approach, while others identify more with development and an inclusive approach. Running talent development systems, strategies or programmes that keep both sides happy is extremely challenging.

Secondly, talent development implies developing those with talent, but without additional information it doesn't differentiate between developing the currently talented, or the potentially talented. These two variations require vastly different approaches, therefore development systems, strategies and programmes need to be very clear about which of these they are attempting, and why.

In both instances, the lack of clarity allows individuals to form their own interpretations and then enables opinions and agendas to have a big impact on what is delivered.

Also in both instances, trying to serve two conflicting goals at the same time means that the two goals routinely compete for energy and resources, and regularly undercut each other, resulting in poor and inconsistent progress of both.

The system we operate in right now dictates that anything anyone wants to do for effective development, sustainable performance and creating epic sport experiences must also ensure that the talented young athletes are treated differently and take priority. This does not work, because

the actions required for the talented athletes to take priority usually undermine what is required for effective development, sustainable performance and creating epic sports experiences.

It's likely that you, along with many others, have spent countless hours trying to somehow progress two contradictory outcomes at the same time.

If you have been involved with a development system, strategy or programme that involves the word talent, I wouldn't be surprised to hear that your ideas could only serve half of the objective, you weren't able to please everyone, and the programme or service you put together fell short of what you had hoped.

You probably felt as frustrated as we did.

Maybe you gave up, or maybe you're still looking for another way forward.

### *It seems complicated but it doesn't need to be*

Do not despair. You already know most of the answers – you just haven't implemented them properly yet.

You may feel pressured by the hype to outsource specialist help and high-end remedies, but there's plenty you can do within the mainstream sporting experience. Despite the temptation and to copy and paste what the organisation down the road is doing, there is no one-size-fits-all template; the best way to develop your athletes depends on their needs.

Once you realise "it's not just me", and you learn to recognise the warning signs, the journey to high performance becomes a whole lot easier to navigate. Your experience in youth sport will become a lot more enjoyable too.

### *I will help you*

This book isn't heavy with the scientific language of academia, and it doesn't glow with the aspirational tones of high-performance sport publications. I present information that you can use, alongside scenarios that you can identify with. I think differently about why things happen the way they do, sharing my own stories and recounting lessons shared with me by exceptional leaders and coaches.

Just like you, I have been there. Shivering on a Saturday morning in July, a dusk medal ceremony in November, a team van driving across country to a national championships, anxiety during team talks, calm words walking across to the arena, nail-biting finals, hoarse voices, holding a clipboard, building a programme, applying for funding, speaking to a full auditorium, consoling an emotional teenager. I watched my parents play, tried every sport on offer at primary school, was competitive throughout high school and even had a brief stint warming the bench in a semi-pro league. Now I look through the lens of an adult on the other side.

I am capable and knowledgeable, but I am not a researcher and I will never claim to be an expert. To be frank, there are no experts who can cover the entire spectrum from youth to

elite, because the sporting landscape is dynamic and ever-changing, plus there are numerous different scenarios, cultures, contexts and experiences. I have linked research and recommendations with real experiences to look for trends, but there may not be a study or statistic to back up every point I make.

My objective is to help more young athletes have great experiences and achieve more success. This is influenced by people at all levels, therefore this book is written for those of us on the front line, for those of us facilitating the front line and for all of us steering the direction of the front line: parents, coaches, team managers, trainers, administrators, development managers, selectors, high-performance managers, committee members, CEOs and board members.

This book answers the questions I am most often asked, and addresses the areas I see people having the most trouble with.

That's enough about me – let's get started.

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## **Part 1**

The Short Answers

# 1. Simple Concepts and Guidelines

The *talent trap* is a term I want you to remember. It means we're so distracted by the idea of talent in youth sport that we don't give other, more important things the attention, energy or resources they need. These "more important" things vary according to different situations, so I will describe them as we go along and guide you through a step-by-step process where you can identify which factors are top priority for your sport and scenario.

The talent trap is caused by the misuse and overuse of the word *talent* in youth sport. When we do this we give immense value to an inconsistent and unreliable predictor of success; we confuse people with conflicting ideas, and enable a misdirected, biased process to determine who should and shouldn't be supported. This has a damaging ripple effect on the perceptions, identity, motivations and expectations of athletes, and those of everyone around them.

If we want to help unleash any, or all, of the sporting potential that athletes possess, it is really important to understand the significance of the talent trap and associated concepts. Each will be discussed and analysed in this book, however, to set the scene I'll begin by summarising the key information.

For young people to develop into awesome adult athletes, they need to still be competing in adulthood. This is fundamental. If our actions inadvertently lead to players dropping out, then we are undermining our attempts to help them succeed.

If the goal is to make it to elite or professional sport, carrying on performing at the same level is not enough. Athletes who want to achieve at this standard need to keep getting better. If our schedules and expectations for training and competition push athletes to survive through long periods of staying the same or getting worse, this will cause them to lose interest or be overtaken, and therefore to fall short of the target. Of course, we must recognise that not all athletes aspire to elite or professional sport; some simply want to enjoy the environment sport provides.

The end point for navigating the talent trap is still about growing the capabilities for sport and achieving excellence. When I challenge what we're doing, please don't assume I don't care about competition or performance, or mistake my intention as political correctness.

It's not about diffusing performance, it's about elevating it.



The following simple guidelines provide clarity for supporting young athletes and bridging the gap from community sport to performance sport:

- 1** See them as people.
- 2** They own their journey.
- 3** Look at the big picture: sport, physical, lifestyle and mindset.
- 4** Stop telling them they're talented.
- 5** Stop breaking them, physically or emotionally.
- 6** Enhance the main experiences before adding extras.
- 7** Growth and progress involve challenge.
- 8** Enable rather than force.

That's everything you need to know, in a nutshell.

# ATHLETE DEVELOPMENT ESSENTIALS

## (or Player/Sport Development)

Key things to understand when helping young athletes develop into awesome adult athletes:



They still need to be involved in adulthood



They should keep getting better



Not everyone aspires to the highest levels



Labels cause a ripple effect



All selections involve bias



The word *talent* is misused and overused

Youth sport is full of complicated development models and expert recommendations, but you don't need to be overwhelmed. The following simple guidelines are a great starting point for supporting athletes through mixed messages and tough decisions.



See them as people



They own their journey



Stop telling them they are talented



Stop breaking them, physically or emotionally



Enhance the main experiences before adding extras



Look at the big picture: sport, physical, lifestyle and mindset



Growth and progress involve challenge



Enable rather than force

## 2. Taking on the Impossible

I haven't always understood the concepts or followed the guidelines listed on the previous page, in fact, quite the opposite. Our approach to youth sport in New Zealand (NZ) doesn't typically operate in line with them either.

I used to think it was sensible for well-intentioned adults to attempt to identify young sportspeople who would probably be awesome in the future. I have delivered and listened to lots of lectures to young athletes insisting they devote themselves completely to their sporting goals. I used to tell them that not being focused and not working hard would waste their potential. I used to think that it was fine to ask teenagers to stop playing for their team, or miss their team practices, for extra stuff that only the really special players got to attend. I thought more programmes meant more opportunities and declining invitations meant a lack of commitment; that a robust talent development programme would always include sport training, fitness training, nutrition, and sport psychology workshops. I used to accept that sometimes parents needed to push their kids, and that those parents knew more about what the kids actually wanted than the kids did themselves. I used to be impressed by coaches and administrators who claimed their influence was responsible for athletes making it to certain levels of competition. Although sceptical, I would accept that it was okay for a talented young player to be managed through prolonged injury. I have stood at the front of crowded auditoriums telling parents and kids they needed to stop doing so many other programmes... before encouraging them to do the programme I was running instead.

Those things did not and do not help. I genuinely felt I was doing the right thing and many of you probably do too. I was totally swept up in "the way it should be done" while completely overlooking some obvious alternatives.

Let's revisit the seemingly impossible challenges we all face, release the pressure to prioritise talent, and draw from the concepts and guidelines to get some direction.

*"They're overcommitted and are getting burnt out."* Let's stop creating extra programmes, teams, sessions, seminars or meetings for the special ones to attend. Instead, we can make their main sport programme or team experiences better.

*"They think they're high-performance athletes but they're a long way off."* This is far less likely to happen if we stop telling them they are elite, or high performance, or talented.

*"There's so much pressure."* So let's stop putting pressure on them to be in any (including our own) programmes or teams. We could reassure them that they can choose their own path with no reprimands, and that the important things are how they embrace the journey and that

they keep improving. We can also inform them that most of the best athletes at the top level weren't the best at junior level.

*"They're great at playing their sport, but their physical foundations are so poor."* We can stop encouraging them to accelerate their sport- or position-specific development, and give them time to develop all areas. This will be easier if we widen our criteria and expectations beyond only sport performance, and if we reduce the number of sport programmes they are expected to do at the same time. We could also upskill as many sport organisations and coaches as possible so they're better at integrating physical and mindset components with their sport activities.

*"Each coach and team has their own agenda, and they don't consider the other programmes the athletes are involved in."* Again, this is reduced when we stop encouraging multiple programmes and teams at the same time. They will be less inclined to do extras on top of their regular team and competition sport, if the regular experiences are awesome and if the extra stuff doesn't claim to be for talented or advanced competitors.

*"They don't take enough time to recover from injuries."* Let's stop making them feel they're so talented that they're indispensable to their team, or that the upcoming selection or talent ID opportunity is unmissable.

*"They get complacent because they keep getting selected and stop needing to work for it."* Okay, so let's not select them in so many things. We can stop talent ID groups, talent programmes, and stop repeatedly telling them they are talented. Instead, we could challenge and extend them with quality competitions and guide our coaches in how to engage the athletes in their own development. We can also shift the focus of what we celebrate to emphasise successful traits such as camaraderie, integrity, self-awareness, leadership and perseverance, rather than natural talent.

*"What about the late developers? They're getting missed."* I propose we stop making lists they can be missed off.

Doesn't that all seem pretty straightforward to you?

For some, this snapshot might be enough to shape a new perspective. But for many of us, changing stance might take a while. I know all too well the situations that make us hesitate and cling to the idea of talent, those moments when we justify something by saying it's not so bad, the habits that normalise staying the course when deep down we know that things aren't working, and the uncomfortable feeling of cycling back to where we started.

That's why I will take the time to set the scene, show you the little things that are wreaking havoc, even though they seem normal, and shed a light on the opportunities to do things differently.

There is so much good we can do with all of the nonsense out of the way.

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## **Part 2**

Where Are We Going Wrong?

### 3. Talent

Every week the youth sport sidelines are abuzz with awe and commentary about yet another skilful young player making an impact.

“Did you see that girl? Talk about potential – she’ll be one to watch!”

“We’ve got some real talented juniors this season; over the next couple of years we’ll be really strong”

“They’d better not let his talent go to waste ...”

Talent is great to have and great to watch, but what does it mean for these ahead-of-the-game young people?

Talent, in its most simple definition, refers to a natural aptitude or skill. In sport, people often talk about someone having talent in relation to their natural physical talent, and others use the term to mean having a wide array of capabilities for sporting success. Another popular word in youth sport is potential: demonstrating qualities or abilities that could be developed or might result in future success.

But success in elite sport requires many things, including a strong work ethic, genetics and body shape, ability to learn and respond to coaching, interpersonal skills, mindset, resilience, the ability to stick to a training programme or game plan, execution of skills under pressure, fitness, athleticism and actual skills and capabilities – not the potential for them.

Talent in sport provides great entertainment. It’s thrilling to watch, and is often credited for helping teams or individuals win. It seems like only a few have talent, so people either want to have it, want more of it, or want to associate with it. This feel-good experience occurs with talented adults and can be even more awe-inspiring in talented youth.

But the question we must address is: will a “talented” young athlete become a successful adult athlete? And with identification, development, support and investment, will a young athlete who shows “talent or potential” be more likely to become a successful adult athlete? To summarise a great deal of research, literature and personal experience, the short answer is: maybe, but not necessarily.

Let’s look at some things that happen.

Billy was the best football player in his town at age fourteen, and went on to become a successful professional athlete.

Samantha showed a great deal of physical skill in youth hockey, but didn’t achieve success at the elite level due to shortcomings in other areas.

Mark and Phil matured physically much earlier than their peers, so they had a physical advantage in youth rugby and received many accolades. Mark continued to improve ahead of his peers and thrived as a senior, but Phil did not.

Shelly was a dedicated and hardworking volleyball player with all of the personal characteristics needed to succeed, but did not continue through to the highest level because she couldn't execute the sporting skills to the standard demanded by the competition.

Aaron was highly capable and a good leader in his school's swimming team, but did not pursue swimming to higher levels after two seasons of frustrating experiences.

Kate was a young triathlete who didn't stand out to selectors at an early age, but went on to achieve great success in elite competitions.

Tom had excellent skills and game play but poor physique and athleticism. This was apparent in youth grades and continued through to adulthood where, even with these shortcomings, he went on to achieve at the elite level for many years.

Rebecca was an enthusiastic young tennis player who won one high school championship after another. She was also great at basketball and loved art. Rebecca chose to stop playing tennis at age nineteen, and went on to have a successful career in graphic design.

No long-term or retrospective studies conclusively prove that youth sport talent will reliably lead to adult sport achievement.

None.

But there are plenty of studies where traits and habits linked to mindset traits and personal character have been accurate predictors of success across a range of disciplines.

We have all come across quotes from renowned leaders and coaches expressing the view that attitude is essential. Yet in youth sport, attitude often drops in status when there is talent around.

In the book *Grit: The Power of Passion and Perseverance*, author Angela Duckworth compiles years of research on highly successful people across sport, business, military, science and the arts, and demonstrates that passion and perseverance play a much larger part in achieving at the highest levels than talent does. Duckworth simplifies her findings into the simple formula: Talent x Effort = Skill; Skill x Effort = Achievement, and explains that yes, talent is important, but that effort counts twice.

When we come back and look at our world of youth sport, what makes us focus so much attention on youth talent? Why do interested parties invest so much time and money in trying to increase their talented athletes' likelihood of success in elite and professional sport?

As far as I can tell, the logic that propels talent development is this: if you can capture the talent displayed during youth and build on it, then that individual's capability as an adult might be exceptional.

If.

Might.

## 4. Talent Development

Imagine this scenario. A fisherman competes every year for an award for the region's biggest fish. He decides to build a huge pond and catch schools of young fish to bring back to his pond to grow.

This might sound good in theory, but it raises a lot of questions.

How can he know if the fish he's going to catch will grow to be the biggest? How many will he need to catch? Will conditions in his pond be just right? A fish out in the ocean might still grow bigger than his, so can he justify the investment? What about the stress of the net and transition to the pond? Even with a great pond design, and everything perfect for the fish to thrive, will the fish grow as big as they would in the wild without the challenges of needing to compete to eat or escape natural predators?

On the flip side, what might happen if instead, he redirected his investment to supporting the natural environment, perhaps by reducing damaging toxins and then implementing a better tracking, monitoring or locating system for when the fish were almost fully grown?

I relate the fisherman's manufactured pond to many talent development programmes and initiatives operating right now. I relate the ocean to sport teams and core playing experiences: the weekly competition structures, coaches, team mates, training and practising, the opposition, the referees, and winning and losing.

The moral of this story is, it's awesome if you can catch young talent and develop it outside of its natural environment, but you'll need a really big net with lots of resources and an understanding that there are risks and no guarantees. Alternatively, you can help young talent grow within its natural environment.

Of course the pond analogy can be built up or unravelled with further twists and layers to the story. For those of you who identify with the pond scenario, I'll keep going for just a moment.

Will it be enough for the fish to thrive in the pond, or will they need to cope with being released back into the ocean? What might happen to this generation of fish, or to the ocean, if other fishermen copy the pond idea? Should the fish have a choice about getting into a net? Can fish parents leverage or lobby for their little fish to gain entry to the best ponds? Will the fisherman regularly assess the growth of his fish, and what will happen to those who don't progress as fast as the others? Will he boost their levels of support, or will he send them back out to the ocean to fend for themselves? What if, instead of a pond, the fisherman nets off an inlet where the fish can somehow get in and out to access super-foods, healing plants and grandparent super-fish to learn from? What if he loses interest in the competition and eats the fish?

Thankfully, young athletes are not fish.



In the previous chapter we identified *where* talent development stems from: a notion that if you can capture talent displayed during youth and build upon it, then those individuals' capabilities as adults might be exceptional. We highlighted the *if* and the *might*.

We also started to understand *what* it is: i.e. talent development is an attempt to increase young athletes' likelihood of success in elite and professional sport.

Now let's look at *why*. Across the spectrum of sport environments I have worked in, worked with, or learnt about, each usually involves one or more of four different intentions regarding talent development:

- **Future performance:** a belief that resourcing the development of young individuals who seem the most likely to succeed will lead to winning performances or elite success in the future.
- **Retention or recruitment:** an objective to support the best-performing individuals so that they will stay in the team, programme or competition and/or so that more will join.
- **Service:** a desire or feeling of responsibility to support young athletes who show advanced capabilities.
- **Engagement or connection:** a context for engaging or connecting athletes with the wider organisation or other learning and development objectives.

As a side note, as well as applying to talent development, these intentions also apply to general development. When an organisation chooses the title of talent development instead of broader titles such as athlete development, player development or sport development, their development intentions simply skew to prioritise supposedly talented athletes ahead of everyone else.

In Chapter 9, I will unpack *how* talent development programmes or initiatives usually operate. But for that to make sense we first need to talk about selection and talent identification, athlete development, how young athletes are often doing too much, and the word *elite*.

Here's a quote from coach, teacher and researcher Joseph Drabik (some twenty years ago) to lead us in: *The weak of today may be the strong of tomorrow, of course, and weeding them out leads to the loss of future talent.*

# PRAISE FOR THE TALENT TRAP

“This book is a game-changer. Written by one of the most intelligent, thoughtful, and well-equipped coaches I’ve ever known – Leigh Ashton – it documents the TRUE nature of how young athletes grow into world-class and world-class people. This is a ‘must-read’.”

BRIAN GRASSO – PERFORMANCE COACH & YOUTH  
DEVELOPMENT EXPERT USA & CANADA

“When our son embarked on a journey of competitive youth sport over a decade ago, I just wish we had a book such as this, and I wish his school coaches had had a copy too. This is a thought-provoking book, but with a very practical aspect, complete with tools and suggestions. If you are a coach, please consider reading this. If you are a passionate parent wanting the best....and that is a loaded statement.... Then perhaps have a read too.”

STEPHEN EDMONDS – PARENT NZ

“I cannot speak highly enough. The Talent Trap is outstanding – parents, coaches and sport leaders at every level need to read this book.”

MICK WATSON, NRL CLUB CEO AND  
INTERNATIONAL ATHLETE MANAGER

“A must read for all, whether administrating sport or a parent or teacher or coach. Easy suggestions of how we all can make changes that can only benefit our young athletes. Fresh ideas and thought-provoking suggestions that will ultimately help round the table discussions at all levels.”

DIANNE LASENBY - CEO AUCKLAND NETBALL AND  
GM NORTHERN STARS NZ

“I experienced the high performance circles of sport as a young adult. To everyone out there who are parents, coaches, or adults who influence young athletes - you absolutely must give this book a cheeky read!”

CAITLIN DOWDEN – ATHLETE NZ

“The Talent Trap is a must read for ALL involved in sport and at ALL levels. Leigh offers an extremely articulate insight into how we think/act and presents outstanding perspectives along the way. The book will open up your mind from start to finish and challenge a lot of your thought processes. Please, please, please, take the time to read The Talent Trap, you will not regret it!!”

NICK WHITE - HEAD COACH AND TALENT ID  
MANAGER, AUCKLAND CRICKET

“I have been a professional coach and coach developer for 36 years across community and high performance sport. This is the book I should have been handed when I started. It explains the pitfalls of past systems and provides simple solutions for the future development of young people. Written in common sense language and based on experiences lived in the sporting sector, this is a phenomenal piece of work.”

DAVE CLARKE - NATIONAL COACH AND PERFORMANCE COACH UK & NZ

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In youth sport, the word *talent* is everywhere. We overuse it and we misuse it. This is a treacherous trap.

When we fall into the **talent trap**, we give immense value to an inconsistent and unreliable predictor of success. We confuse people with conflicting ideas, and we enable a misdirected, biased process to determine who should and shouldn't be supported. This has a damaging ripple effect on the perceptions, identity, motivations and expectations of young athletes, and those around them.

This book exposes common everyday actions that seem harmless, but which are wreaking havoc. Whether you are a parent or coach, programme manager or CEO, it will shed light on how we can all do things differently and guide you to lead change.

To thrive in youth sport and give young people the best chance of ongoing success into adulthood, we must free ourselves from the **talent trap** and re-focus on the things that really matter.

### About the author

Leigh Ashton has worked with thousands of aspiring young athletes. With plain language and refreshing reassurance, she shares real stories, makes complicated things simple, and will challenge your thinking but immediately empower you with solutions. *The Talent Trap* is a must-read for anyone involved in youth sport.

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