

The Impact of Adolescent Development on Fitness and Conditioning Age and Stage

Long-term Athletic Development & Coaching Series, part 2/3

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.w.nyshsi.org on Facebook and Twitter at @YouthSportInst. With me today is Dr. 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 continue.

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. It's good to have you back again. How are you?

00:01:24 Rick Howard, DSc, CSCS,*D, FNCSA

It's great to be here with you, Eric. Thanks so much for having me back.

00:01:28 Eric Utterback

Absolutely. Absolutely. So the last time when we did a first podcast I had pointed out that on the NYSHSI website nyshsi.org you helped draft three resource documents in a long-term athletic development and coaching series, and so we covered the first one a few days ago and the second one, which is today is going to be focused on the impact of adolescent development on fitness and conditioning for ages and stages. So why don't we just go ahead and jump right in on this? Can you talk a little bit about what are differences and similarities in fitness and conditioning for adolescents as compared to younger children?

00:02:20 Rick Howard, DSc, CSCS,*D, FNCSA

That's a great way to start, Eric. I appreciate that. It's often an overlooked aspect from what we see in youth sports is to really look at the fitness and conditioning, and within the fitness realm, we can include strength.

And one of the things I think that gets lost sometimes is we have that notion that strength training is not safe for kids, or that kids should not be lifting heavy weights. And I agree with the second one, the kids don't need to be lifting heavy weights. But the first one, kids should be doing muscle strengthening.

Because we find that muscle strengthening and motor skill development go hand in hand, so they help each other. So if you look at a youngster who might be having a difficult time with a lunging pattern, for example, we have to go back and say, do they not have the strength to do that motor pattern or do they not have the motor ability to do that pattern? So we need to work on both of those to make sure that we're helping all kids through their ages and stages—to be able to do that.

00:03:27 Rick Howard, DSc, CSCS,*D, FNCSA

In a lot of our sports practices, you'll find that coaches will work on, and I have to say it this way, what they think is conditioning. So that would be runs, sprints running around the field, different relays, perhaps different, mostly long distance-type of efforts that they think builds the aerobic capacity needed for most sports. We know that for kids, they do need aerobic capacity, but they also need the ability to get faster. They need the ability to stop and change direction under control. They need all kinds of different movements. So only focusing on that one type of conditioning isn't really helping the other side of that.

Just to finish up this part. Is that we look at youth sports and the overtraining syndrome and doing too much of the same thing. There's also a lot of what we see going on is that they're either under-trained or under-recovered, meaning for under training they're not getting enough of the fitness and conditioning they need to be able to withstand the rigors of participating in youth sports, so coaches will have them basically play to get in shape rather than getting in shape to play. It's much better to have all kids of all ages be able to get in shape to play by doing different fitness and conditioning activities that would be appropriate for their age and stage, and to answer the initial part of your question. The older kids get, the more structured it becomes.

00:04:50 Eric Utterback

So, here's a personal question for you. Do you—if you're coaching youth and adolescents, and this is me focused on conditioning, Do you prefer a coach do like, running sessions pre-practice and or post-practice, or do you like them to hide in their conditioning inside their practice plans?

You know, because some back when we were growing up, right, a lot of times we viewed running as punishment and soon found out that that doesn't work very well. So a lot of times, some youth coaches would save running to the end. But is there benefit to hiding, maybe hiding is the wrong word choice, but implementing drills or or somewhat stations in in your practice plans? Maybe that's while some kids in field hockey over here doing some ball skills, drills or whatever. Other kids are running up and down the field doing overlaps or something else—what are your thoughts on that?

00:06:07 Rick Howard, DSc, CSCS,*D, FNCSA

Yeah, that's a it's a great question. I hope lots of coaches are listening to be able to hear that you should not be having kids do, and you know they're called suicides for a reason. I suppose. You know, suicides at the end of practice, Sprint drills and that type of an activity at the end when kids are already fatigued.

Our job as coaches is to help improve performance, to reduce the risk of injury and to get kids excited about sports and fitness and activity for the rest of their lives. But like you said, they look at this at the end of practice as punishment.

There's a real interesting study done, it was in Maryland a number of years ago with with the football team. And what they would have them do is at the end of practice, they would run these sprints and as soon as the last person finished the team would go again and if they didn't make a time, everybody had to run more. So what ended up happening is that all the players looked at this running as punishment, not as conditioning as a privilege to be able to get better at football.

00:07:03 Rick Howard, DSc, CSCS,*D, FNCSA

But they also found that those athletes who at the end of the line—they were getting slower because they were training the wrong energy system, right? They're training the aerobic energy system and they couldn't keep up.

They were practically at their maximum heart rate because they never got time to rest. So I think coaches sometimes don't really think about our energy systems and how they work in sports across all ages and stages.

You know, most sports are intermittent, or stop start, stop, start, stop, start. And kids need a lot of that, which you can certainly do with games, activities and all kinds of cool ways to get kids in better condition. Overall, there's an interesting expression that says, if you want to get faster, chase and be chased. You know, kids learn as you're growing up, all those great games we learn like tag. Just simple games and I'll do that—I've trained kids from all ages actually. But it's amazing how much even my college athletes love in the offseason when we just do fun games. Yeah. And they're getting conditioned, they're getting in shape, but they enjoy it and it helps them to really see how they can get better and improve that without the old drudgery of, alright, we're going to do our sprints, we're going to do this.

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

But if you think about our coaching and how it's set up now, it's basically formed a lot out of what came out of World War 2 with skills, drills, structures, lines, all that sort of stuff, yelling punishment, things that we know now don't work, but unfortunately we still see it.

00:08:30 Eric Utterback

Very, very insightful. So obviously when kids are transitioning through adolescence, and they're having the sports participation—kids are getting growth spurts at different times, right? So how can we as coaches or as parents, identify those growth spurts that kids are gonna be going through?

00:08:52 Rick Howard, DSc, CSCS,*D, FNCSA

You know, it's interesting here in the United States, we do a very bad job of that. In the UK and some of the other European countries, they actually track and monitor kids' height and weight every quarter. So fall, winter, spring and summer, they'll take a measurement and they'll track to see when their height seems to be getting the greatest and when their weight seems to be getting the greatest. And in boys we get better in height, weight and then muscle tone. It happens in sequence—in males that happens all at the same time, right? And then females. That happens one right after the other. So, we get height and weight and then muscle. You could look at these data and see when that point is when kids are going through that because that really does describe what we mean by the growth spurt, by adolescent awkwardness. And we know that there are several things that coaches and parents need to be aware of for their young athletes after going through this particular stage.

00:09:49 Eric Utterback

Very interesting. So when you're on these measurements in Europe, are these just the athletes or are these like every child in the classroom setting?

00:09:58 Rick Howard, DSc, CSCS,*D, FNCSA

Weel, it depends on where you are and the athletes, and I know for Canadian Support for Life, they're doing a wonderful job connecting with their physical education community to try to get all of these measurements through school, through school nurses, physical educators, coaches, to try to track that.

Because here's the other part of the scenario: You might have a U-8 coach, and then you have a different U-10 coach, a different U-12 coach. So you might you keep changing coaches, but who's keeping track of that data? So in the U.S., because of the way our system is set up, we often say, well, you know, parents should be in charge of that data. And parents are like, "what? Nobody told me. What do you mean What is that?" Everybody has that cool little growth chart inside the door frame in your house somewhere where you're tracking your kids as they get taller, right? Everybody does that, but nobody's looking at it and says, "Wow, you grew so much more this year than you have in the past. We really need to let your coach know." Right, that coaches will see it like you know, wow, all of it officially like we should.

00:11:01 Eric Utterback

OK so, a child through adolescence goes through growth spurt, and then we talked a little bit about strength training and and muscle strength should an athlete, an athlete in adolescence, strength training or go through strength and conditioning, or should they? Should they stop or like what? Like what's the advice there as they go through their growth spurts?

00:11:24 Rick Howard, DSc, CSCS,*D, FNCSA

You know that that's a great question too, because there was a wonderful paper done in 2012 by Rhodri Lloyd and John Oliver in the UK and they created what they call the "Youth Physical Development Model" and within it goes through all of the different sports parameters for conditioning and what should happen across childhood and adolescence, because there was the notion that there were these windows of opportunity for kids that like, if you didn't work on speed between the ages of six and eight, you're kind of behind the 8-ball, right and the window implies that it closes. But what they found was that all the physical attributes are trainable across childhood and adolescence, and that muscle strength has been cited in many position statements over the years.

There was one and there was a consensus statement done back in 2014, if I remember right that had a lot of different organizations sign on supporting resistance training, strength training for kids of all ages, the criteria being that the child should be able to listen to and follow directions. And I'll talk to coaches and parents and even teachers and they'll give me that funny look like, Wow, that would mean that nobody could ever do strength training, right?" Listen to and follow directions. That's not happening. But, you know, generally speaking, that they can understand what you're saying.

00:12:43 Rick Howard, DSc, CSCS,*D, FNCSA

But the other key point is that they want to be there because our job is to reduce the risk of injury. So if you get a kid that their parents says, "well, I want my kid to get bigger and stronger," but they have no interest in being there whatsoever. They're a risk actually, at that point in time, they're not ready for it because they're not prepared to take it on, to make sure that they're keeping themselves out of harm. And if you're working with a group of kids, it's a whole different structure than if you're doing a one-on-one scenario with the child.

So for that situation we often recommend. Well, maybe that's the time to have one-on-one application to make sure that you're engaging the kid in exercise and then strength training. But doing it in a way that keeps him or her safer when they're doing it. So strengthening conditioning, they generally find that the age is anywhere around six to eight—around the same age that kids feel that they're ready to participate in sports is the same time that they can start a fitness and conditioning program that includes strength training, but the cool part here is the strength training that we keep saying. The kids aren't miniature adults. It doesn't mean we take the kids to the gym, we put them on the treadmill, then we put them on all the machines and we say God, that was great. That was so fantastic. Head on home.

Here's the opportunity to teach kids all different types of movements, whether it's body weight, whether it's using bands, whether it's using some tubes, some dumbbells, some kettlebells, some lightweights, so they learn all the different tools that are available to them to be able to work out and to be able to do all that stuff.

00:14:09 Rick Howard, DSc, CSCS,*D, FNCSA

There are a lot of trainers and coaches who will say, well, kids should only do body weight exercise and they can't do a squat unless they could do this much of their body weight or do number of squats in a certain period of time. They can't bench press unless they can do 20 push-ups and all these things are, because the last time I checked—I think you'll note it too—we have an obesity epidemic. So if you're asking all these kids that you want to strength train, you want to get them stronger to find something that they're good at, something that they could latch on to. But you say, well, you know, unless your relative strength is where it needs to be, you can't work on your absolute strength. Like, why?

The kid that you want to work on their absolute strengths, you could help them regain some of their relative strength at some point in time. So we put some really strange conditions on kids when they're training that shouldn't be there. We should find what they're good at and let them do that.

00:15:02 Eric Utterback

Right. It's really interesting that you mentioned this study with Rhodri Lloyd and John Oliver, so shameless plug here for acsm and the National Youth Sports Health and Safety Institute. In 2023, we will be launching a youth fitness specialist certificate where John Oliver, Rhodri Lloyd and Avery Faigenbaum are going to be the three instructors on this certificate.

And it's going to be modeled from the essentials of youth fitness book that your system is published. So if anybody's listening to the podcast and you are involved in working with youth athletes in coaching or fitness, definitely be on the lookout for that. Coming up in 2023.

00:15:47 Rick Howard, DSc, CSCS,*D, FNCSA

And that's a great book. I'll plug it as well. They did a fantastic job. And the three are the leaders in the field I think of pediatric exercise science and its application to coaching and sports for kids.

00:15:47 Eric Utterback

Excellent. Thank you for highlighting that. We really appreciate it.

So what are the types of ages that coaches and parents should be aware of?

00:16:12 Rick Howard, DSc, CSCS,*D, FNCSA

Well, you know that that's a great question, because what you'll see in a lot of training guides that will have specific ages listed, you know kids between the ages of six and 10 or seven and 11, and you'll see that they're different within the coaching series #2 paper that we put together, we broke down the stages by age only because there are four or five different ways of looking at it, so we chose the best of a few of those ways to kind of come up with ages just as a guideline.

Just as we were talking about the physical development models that Lloyd and Oliver came up with, they do actually have chronological age in there, but with the caveat that chronological age, which is the age of kids from the time they were born, right? So if I was born four years and seven months ago, I'm four years, seven months old, chronologically, but developmentally, that could be a little bit different. Especially as they get older, so we need to keep track of that.

But this gives us a guide, so most often you'll see it broken up into early childhood, which is usually up to about age eight or so, middle-childhood. And there's a crossover of ages here, so middle-childhood to early adolescents, depending on what sources you look at is around six to 12, 10 to 14. So that's what we usually think of as youth, right? But youth is really an all-encompassing term of all kids up to age 18. So that's really childhood to early adolescence.

00:17:37 Rick Howard, DSc, CSCS,*D, FNCSA

The middle adolescence is kind of what we think of traditionally, almost as our high school age in the U.S. Middle adolescence, around 15 to 18 years old, somewhere around there. And then late adolescence, which in a lot of societies, you know, we would say in our social norms, while they're adults, because they're 18 to 21 or so. But you know, developmentally, we know that kids don't fully develop up until about age 25.

So there are a lot of different characteristics that we can look at, and there are ways that we can at least have guidelines to see where kids are along this chart. Factoring in their training ages and their chronological ages and how they're developing.

00:18:15 Eric Utterback

So, how do these types of ages then influence training and coaching?

00:18:19 Rick Howard, DSc, CSCS,*D, FNCSA

Well, that's another great question because unfortunately when we look at our kids as miniature adults, we have the same exact skills and drills that we give our eight-year-olds, we give our 10-year-olds, we give our 14-year-olds and our 20-year-olds and it shouldn't be that way.

When we think of early childhood, we just want kids to embrace the joy of playing and being out and doing something, so it doesn't have to be a structure.

So really just focusing on the social interaction, we're not comparing them to one another. You know, at that age, kids don't necessarily compare themselves to their peers. As long as somebody tells them they're doing a great job, like, oh, good, I'm doing a great job right?

00:18:54 Eric Utterback

Right.

00:18:55 Rick Howard, DSc, CSCS,*D, FNCSA

Physically we really want them to work on those key motor skills, so working on them individually. Like helping them through what a running pattern should look like. I taught elementary and middle school Phys Ed for years, so I have some pretty good experience with this too, that a lot of kids never learned it. So we would get kids who would transfer to our school and they're like 5th, 6th grade and nobody has ever shown them: how you walk, how do you run and...

00:19:18 Eric Utterback

Really. Yeah.

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

...what does that motor pattern look like? So, I think we could do a much better job of helping kids to identify motor patterns and you could keep training them. That could be fun, like still playing games, but still have an impact in the coach's eye toward what it looks like to have a developmentally appropriate motor pattern. What does it look? Can they skip? Can they hop? What can they do? What can we work on and practice? What can we help with as they go through that continuum and then include some strength and conditioning movements? You know, doesn't mean they're doing deadlifts and heavy back squats. But they could just do physical challenges to see how they do.

Remember, we grew up like tug of war was so cool, right? But you know, now all of a sudden we can't have kids do a maximum contraction. So we couldn't do a tug of war. Kids can't do plyometrics. So they certainly can't be jumping rope or jumping off of the swing or anything. They have to control all that.

00:20:10 Rick Howard, DSc, CSCS,*D, FNCSA

So we kind of went a little too far overboard on some of these things that kids can and cannot do. So for our youngest kids, make it fun. Show them a variety of skills, a variety of movements, different ways they can play. You can integrate games.

I was at a conference a couple of months ago where we did a presentation on how you could incorporate games into strength and conditioning programs for athletes of all ages. And it was very popular and everybody loves it. You get to run around and play and do all this cool stuff, but you're getting in shape at the same time.

We have this structured notion of what we think strength and conditioning or fitness and conditioning should be, and you know, we always say kids' number one reason for participating in sports is that it's fun. So keep it fun.

00:20:53 Rick Howard, DSc, CSCS,*D, FNCSA

As kids get a little bit older, then you can, you know, start combining a couple of those motor skills when they get to that, you know, six to 12 or so range.

So, like we were talking about with soccer combining running and kicking—can you actually put those two skills together? Running and throwing, running and catching and a lot of the things that you see in sports combine motor skills in specific ways? Then can you also find complementary motor skills in one

sport and another and say all right, so if I'm playing soccer, for example, I'm getting a lot of good lower body movement and not so much upper body. So can I incorporate that even within practice just to make it fun? So that you're learning how to be adept at all different types of movements across the lifespan, across sports and even within one sport.

So now you can become a little bit more semi-structure. Like alright, let's introduce these dumbbell moves. It's kettlebells, the cool thing with the way strength and conditioning and and fitness has gone over the past few years is that we've made it much more mobile, right, much more portable. You could take out bands, dumbbells, you can do all kinds of cool stuff at relatively low cost, right? You're not wheeling out the Nautilus machine out onto the field you have a lot of stuff that's available to you and you can put that out there and say here's what we can do. Figure out what that is.

00:22:11 Rick Howard, DSc, CSCS,*D, FNCSA

So those are important things that we can add to it and then have the kids just start to feel a little bit more about the social awareness part. And this gets back to the coaches and the parents too, you know, really creating that environment that everybody is where they are and that's OK that the competitive part of it isn't important yet and that's I think what's getting lost on a lot of kids and why they're dropping off.

00:22:35 Eric Utterback

OK, a little off topic here, but I gotta...I have to hear your personal choice. You mentioned that you have several years experience as an elementary and middle school Phys Ed teacher. My favorite test, if you will, in elementary school we had to climb a rope and touch the brass joint that connected the ceiling to the rope. The most terrifying thing in the world for like a 4th, 5th or 6th grader. But it was...what a great experience and great memory. A test of strength, confidence, overcoming, fears. Do they still have—do schools still do that anymore? I don't know.

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

So well, here's the piece of what the thought process is, kids, back when we grew up, who would go to climb that rope and were unsuccessful became the decision makers in schools and school systems and parents who would go and say I do not want my kid doing that, what a horrible experience.

There's got to be something else that we could find for them to do so, that was one aspect of it. When I worked in the school system. There's also the other element that things you don't think about when you're a kid. But those ropes have to be inspected to make sure that the the connection is still there. So we found in the school district where I was, we actually had to contract with the guy who did flagpole repairs because he was the only one who had the equipment to get all the way up to the top of the ropes to be able to check to make sure that it was secure.

The other amazing thing: when you think about it, what was on the floor when you climbed that rope?

00:24:18 Eric Utterback

Ohh, about a 2 inch mat.

00:24:20 Rick Howard, DSc, CSCS,*D, FNCSA

The two-inch mat, like most kids, don't even want to lie on their back to do exercises on that anymore. It doesn't have enough padding on it, but that's like holy cow, we got more than four feet off the ground and fell on that thing that you were hurt. So you know they got a lot of that stuff together and said, well, you know, maybe there are better alternatives to climbing that rope.

And I hear you—we talk about growth and maturation. I'm what they would refer to as a "late mature." So I didn't hit puberty growth and all that stuff until I was well into high school. So when I was a younger kid growing up, you know, I had a hard time with some of this stuff. I couldn't climb the rope when I was younger, but as I got older I could and I did very well, but it just shows us that when we're looking at kids through this developmental continuum along the spectrum—all kids should be getting these opportunities as they continue to grow and develop because they'll get there.

And maybe they won't. Maybe their growth, their strength to mass ratio just won't allow for that. But there are other things that they can do, so making sure that there's enough variety of things to do, I think it's really important. And if I were to do that and Phys Ed again, I would make sure I had more like a long jump pit. You jumped six to seven feet in the air and you got this really nice pad. You climbed 20-30 feet up on the roof and you got nothing. So that's one thing I would do.

00:25:36 Eric Utterback

Well, also safety. As a kid, I often thought to myself, you know, OK, I have a lot of trust here and it's just like a roller coaster, right? I'm getting on this roller coaster and I'm pretty sure it's been inspected and everything's good to go, but we'll see, right?

00:25:51 Eric Utterback

OK back on topic. So, can you pinpoint benefits of strength and conditioning for children and adolescents?

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

Yeah, you know that they're relatively the same as is for anybody, right? And that's the really cool part of this, is the strength and conditioning, it has health and fitness implications. So it's really good for your cardiovascular conditioning, your muscle endurance, muscle strength, muscle power.

It can help with body composition for a lot of kids, flexibility. You know, it used to be said, oh, you can't do strength training. You'll get muscle bound. Oh it's bad, it's bad, it's bad. But then they found out that, you know, for a lot of kids who start an exercise program, they're moving into a greater range of motion than they were previously, so their flexibility can actually improve, especially if their flexibility isn't up to standard where we think that it should be. So it also helps to create those habits that hopefully get kids to continue to want to strength train.

You know, I had a just a quick side story: when I was a kid growing up, I had a kid move into our neighborhood when I was in 7th grade and his older brothers had a weight set, and that's when we all really got hooked on it, right? So I've been resistance training since I was in 7th grade. Kid brought this stuff over. We found out we're actually pretty good at it. We loved it and we've never stopped doing it, so I'm proof positive that it can actually create that lifetime of wanting to continue to strength train.

00:27:14 Rick Howard, DSc, CSCS,*D, FNCSA

It's not a well known fact, but I'm I'm actually a competitive strong man, even at my older years. So, you know, I still keep at it. I walk the walk and I think that's an important factor too is kids really respect when you compete. And if you're working with kids, if you're coaching, they love to see that you still compete. You know what that feels like and you can talk their talk as they're going through what they're talking about too, but you can also notice that it doesn't take a lot and it's not a lot of stress. It doesn't even take a lot of time.

00:27:42 Rick Howard, DSc, CSCS,*D, FNCSA

You're talking about the the three authors of your program this this year. You know, a lot of research has been done by them too that you can incorporate this into your warm-up. Coaches are going, “oh man. We're already practicing for two hours now. We're gonna need another hour in the gym.” No!

I mean, like, you're talking about hiding, about integrating the conditioning part into your entire practice. You can do the same thing with the resistant side. At certain points in the practice you could put that together. I've worked with lots of kids and lots of groups, and that's exactly what they've done. It makes it fun. It makes it enjoyable for everybody who's doing it, and it doesn't take a whole lot of extra time. So that part is really good too.

As I said before though, with the motor skill performance, that's one of the really excellent things that I think with the strength training, it helps to reinforce those patterns so that those kids get those patterns together and improve their strength.

When we talk about the long-term athletic development models, Rodri Lloyd, of course, was lead author on the position statement on that. But we went back and talked through that. Those are really the key elements. Focusing on muscle strength and motor skill development from an early age helps to give kids that self-efficacy where they feel skilled with what they're doing. They're happy with what they're doing, it's a good experience, and those are some of the key factors for lifelong sports participation. So those are just a few of the benefits.

00:29:05 Eric Utterback

Excellent. Wait, listen, just listening to you right off some of these these tidbits from these journal articles. How fascinating would it be if you support organizations, recreational clubs, teams, whatever you want to call them—We're able to share some of these just basic articles with with parents and coaches at the beginning of season, just have them read through and just so they're aware of some of the concepts, the language and so forth, I think it would be of great benefit.

00:29:33 Rick Howard, DSc, CSCS,*D, FNCSA

You just shared my dream so...

00:29:37 Eric Utterback

Right. I mean it would be amazing. Implementing that is another thing, but that's another topic for another day.

00:29:43 Rick Howard, DSc, CSCS,*D, FNCSA

At least getting it out there. I mean, there are a couple of groups who are trying, but unless you know they're out there, it's passive. You have to go find them rather than actively seeking out the the groups to say here's what we want to share with you.

00:29:57 Eric Utterback

All right. So kind of winding this down. What are some practical tips for meeting kids where they are when introducing strength and conditioning? I think that's really important. I think you mentioned it earlier, just with anything. Sometimes you've got to meet kids where they are and then kind of go from there. So anything you got to share on there?

00:30:17 Rick Howard, DSc, CSCS,*D, FNCSA

Sure. Yeah. And you know, we're talking about many of the the partnerships here for this series with the U.S. Center for Coaching Excellence, looking at it from a coaching perspective: How do you coach kids, how do you meet the kids, where they are? How do you make it fun? How do you add variety? You know kids don't want to see the same thing every day. Like Ohh, when it's Monday, we must be doing this, this and the other. Or you know if it's the entire season, this is all we do. Like change it up, make it fun.

How do you keep them engaged all the time in the process? Ask. Kids, you know, it's one of Tom Ferry's key points for his particular program, for sports is to ask the kids what do they like? What do they want to do? When I taught, this was my favorite activity, I would have kids, bring in games and sports that they either learn from their siblings or that they learn at a camp they went to, or that they would go up and look up and then teach back to the class. And we had some of the best games that we would do as warm-ups and other things throughout the whole rest of the year.

00:31:13 Rick Howard, DSc, CSCS,*D, FNCSA

The kids loved them.

To be able to figure it out and the kids felt excited that what they brought to class was meaningful. You know, so often we just say, well, here's what you're doing because we said so. And we know what's best. So go on out and do it. But having kids be part of that process is really exciting. So I'll do other things like during the warm-ups, I'll pick on somebody...not pick on, I shouldn't say that way.

I will select somebody who did something that doesn't seem to be what everybody else would think. So like, I'll have them get in the ready position, so showing me the athletic stance, for example. I'll do that in a warm-up a lot and then I can pick somebody who doesn't usually get called on. And I say, you know what, that looks really good today. Why don't you pick the next thing we're gonna do for the warm-up, and they usually turn around and look behind them. Go with me. I'm like, yeah, what do you want to do? Because so often we pick captains for sports. And how do we pick them? They're usually the best athletes on the team, but nobody's ever developed a leadership capacity as a captain, so sometimes it works, sometimes it doesn't. There's a lot of conversation now about rotating captains, doing different things, so I like to do it, especially with kids who are between like 4th and 12th grade, rotate them around at practices.

Who gets to lead this? Who gets to do that? Integrate some of the leadership skills and other types of training, all the things that we see sports give kids. But as coaches, we have to be pretty intentional of

how we're doing that. Especially when we see all the negative aspects of sports that have come out, you know, kids stop playing, parents interfering, officials not wanting to go out like...how do we bring back the joy and excitement of sports in itself? And I think by adding in some of these cool things about how we could really get strength and conditioning, fitness and conditioning to be an exciting part of what the kids do I think is really going to help us in the long run.

00:33:03 Eric Utterback

Making great stuff today, Rick, so any closing thoughts as we wrap up? What you got?

00:33:10 Rick Howard, DSc, CSCS,*D, FNCSA

I have a tag line that's on my personal e-mail that says, "You can't go wrong getting strong." You know I've never seen anybody that says, you know, if I wasn't so darn strong, I'd have been able to do this. Right? So, you know, I'm the guy that everybody calls when you want to move, right? So you got to move, you got to move a couch. I'm like, cool. love doing that. I love figuring all that stuff out.

00:33:28 Rick Howard, DSc, CSCS,*D, FNCSA

Yeah, that's your fault. If you're in the strongman competing.

00:33:32 Rick Howard, DSc, CSCS,*D, FNCSA

Right. But I really enjoy doing stuff like that. I love the challenge.

But I think we just have to figure out how do we really bring back the passion and the joy that we had when we grew up and wanted to climb that rope or wanted to play that sport? And share that with the kids now so that they can see what it is too. So that fun that we talked about.

And it's interesting when you're talking about Avery Faigenbaum before he told me the definition that he likes best for fun is the different. It's the balance between success and challenge.

So, you know, kids need to have, they need to experience some success. And if you talk about that zone of learning, they get some success, but they get some challenge.

If it's too easy, it's no fun. You know, if it's too hard, it's no fun. If they're having no success, no fun. So how do we balance that success and challenge to truly make what we're having kids do really be fun for them? So that they'll want to continue doing this always and then share that joy with the next generation.

00:34:29 Eric Utterback

Great stuff. Hey, I look forward to our last podcast recording here next. Actually think we're gonna cut that tomorrow and we'll be able to put these three out together. Really, really enjoy this conversation.

And then our last one coaching series three will be on matching child-centered policies to age and stage appropriate developmental youth sports. Sounds exciting and I can't wait to chat some more on that tomorrow so thanks.

00:34:59 Rick Howard, DSc, CSCS,*D, FNCSA

Sounds great. So we'll get it out there.

00:35:02 Eric Utterback

Yeah. Yeah, right. Thanks again, as always great chatting with you.

00:35:07 Rick Howard, DSc, CSCS,*D, FNCSA

Eric, thank you so much, I appreciate it.

Bye bye then.