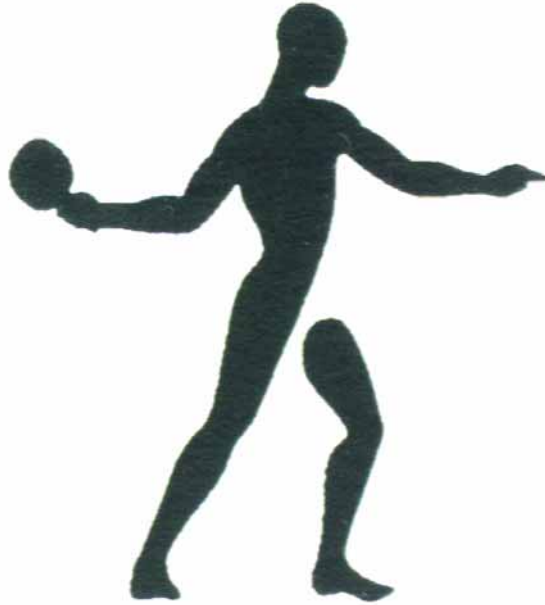


Junior Progressions

100 Steps to Excellence

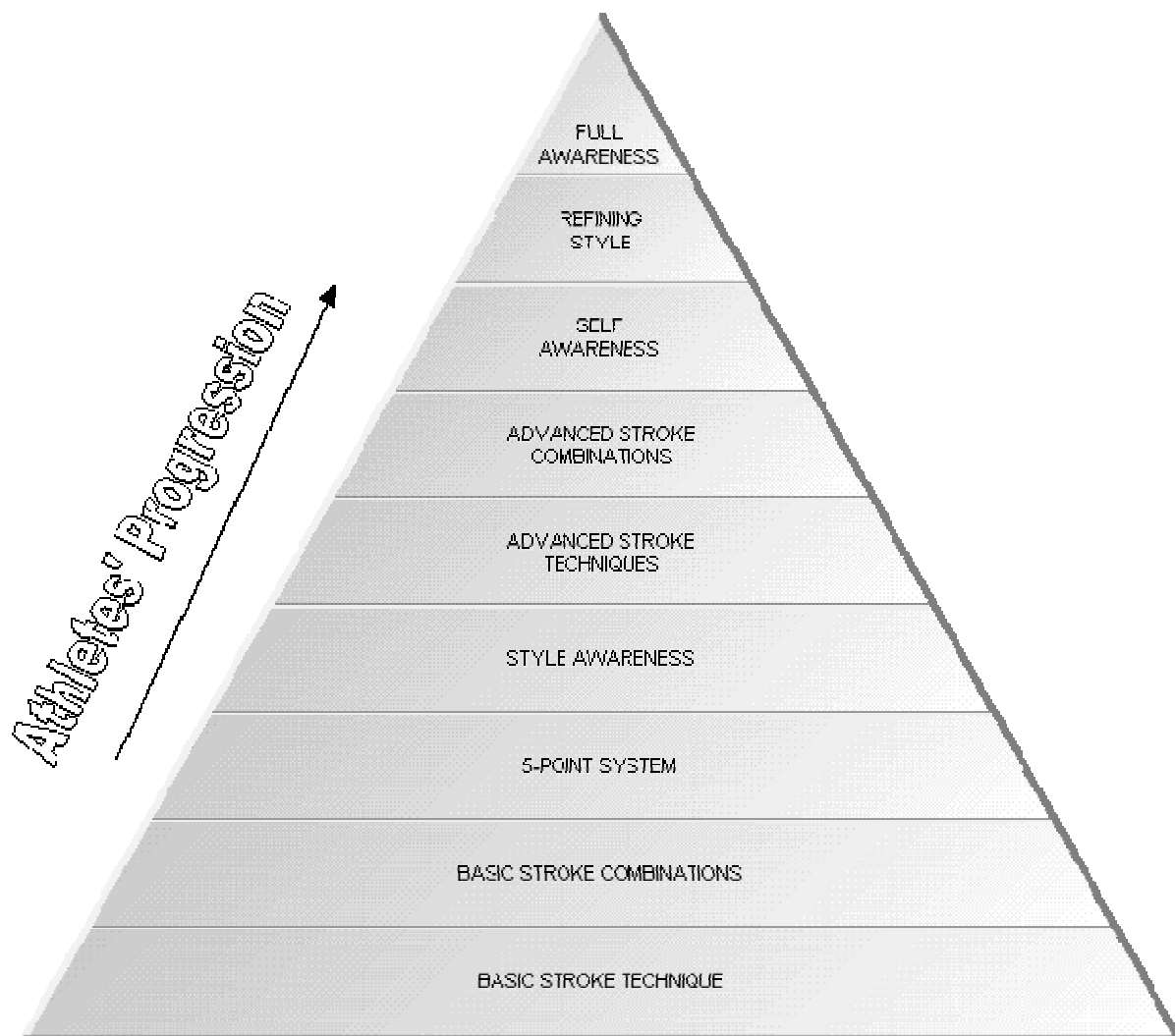


A Guide for Athletes, Coaches, and Parents

Created by: Richard McAfee, USATT National Coach

THE TABLE TENNIS “PYRAMID OF SUCCESS”

Where are you on the Pyramid?



The Stages of Junior Athlete Development

As Junior Athletes progress in Table Tennis, they pass through very definite stages of development. The "Table Tennis Pyramid of Success", illustrates the path of the athlete through this process. The Pyramid shows the nine developmental stages that athletes go through in their journey to becoming a complete player.

Stage 1 – Basic Stroke Technique (Age 7 + under)

At this stage, athletes are simply learning the fundamental techniques of the game such as basic strokes, elementary spin theory, simple serve and return, and the rules of the game.

Stage 2 – Basic Stroke Combinations (Age 8)

Once the athlete can control the basic strokes, the coach then begins to combine these strokes together to form combinations, bringing together both forehand and backhand techniques. This combining of strokes also requires that the athlete begin to move more, and lessons in footwork start during this stage.

Stage 3 – The 5-Point System (Age 9 + 10)

When the athlete can control the basic stroke combinations, the focus is turned to learning how to play points. As most points in a game are finished by the 5th stroke, the emphasis is placed on the first 5 possible strokes of a game. As all points must begin with either a serve or a return, these techniques are stressed during this stage. Third and fifth ball attacks are introduced, as well as 4th ball counter attacks or defense. The goal of this stage is to move the athlete from thinking of executing one stroke at a time, into planning out whole points.

Stage 4 – Style Awareness (Age 11)

During stage three, the athlete's natural style begins to express itself. It can be seen in how the athlete chooses to begin putting their points together. Does the athlete naturally prefer to hit rather than loop? Does the athlete have natural early or late timing? Does the athlete prefer to play close to the table or at mid-distance? These and other telltale signs start to show as the athlete learns to play whole points. During this stage, athletes should be introduced to the basic styles of the game, through written materials and the use of videotapes. They should watch the better players at the club and place these players into style categories. Finally, the athlete should write a complete description of his or her own style. An athlete's style is normally a blend of two of the major styles.

Stage 5 – Advanced Stroke Techniques (Age 12 + 13)

Now that the athlete understands what their style will be, they must begin to learn the advanced techniques necessary to complete that style. What these techniques are will vary greatly from style to style. Pips-out hitters, all-round topspin attackers, and choppers all need to learn very different techniques.

Stage 6 – Advanced Stroke Combinations (Age 14 + 15)

Once these advanced techniques are learned, they must be combined with the athlete's existing strokes and blended into the desired style of play. During this stage, the 5-Point System is revisited and practiced using the new combination of advanced strokes.

Stage 7 – Self-Awareness (Age 16)

At this stage, the athlete has all the technical tools necessary to execute their desired style of play. The focus at this level of development is on gaining match experience and learning how to use their style to defeat opponents at the International Level. As the athlete is still somewhat inexperienced, they are still focused more on what they are attempting to do than on what their opponent is doing. The athlete has become self-aware but often cannot focus outward towards their opponent.

Stage 8 – Refining Style (Age 17)

As the athlete begins to gather more and more match experience, they will continually be making small corrections and additions to their style of play. Ideally, athletes will return to this stage over and over again throughout their competitive life. When an athlete stops learning and improving their game, their development is over.

Stage 9 – Full Awareness (Age 18)

This is the stage of development that all athletes strive for. It is often called “the peak experience”. During this stage, the athlete is almost totally focused outside himself. Fully aware athletes often report feelings of time moving slower, the ball appearing larger, and feeling that they can do anything they want to with the ball. While most athletes experience this “peak experience” at some point in their lives, the fully aware athlete can reproduce this experience much more often.

Important Points

Please remember that an athlete's development does not follow rigid, set stages. Rather, it flows as a process with each athlete spending more or less time in any one stage, as needed. Movement is not always in an upward direction. Sometimes, an athlete will need to return to a lower stage to correct some problem or learn material that was missed.

Most coaches feel that it takes about ten years of training to take an athlete to the top of their game. Hopefully, the Table Tennis Pyramid of Success will give athletes, coaches, and parents, a guide to understanding the athlete's journey towards reaching their goals. While many try to become champions, only a few actually make it all the way to Stage 9. In fact, some athletes will stall out at each level. These athletes will make up the majority of players who participate in our sport. For that reason, it is important for everyone involved to understand, ***“that the quality of the journey is more important than the destination”***.

The Pyramid of Success not only represents the path of the athlete but also the overall development of our sport. There will always be a smaller number of athletes at each increasing Pyramid Stage. The greater the numbers of athletes entering Stage 1 of the Pyramid, the greater the number of elite athletes produced, and the higher their level will be.

Junior Athlete Progressions

INTRODUCTION

The purpose of this document is to help coaches, junior athletes, and parents understand the complexity of the skills needed to reach the International Level.

HOW TO USE THIS GUIDE

This guide is based on, "The Pyramid of Success", which breaks down the development of the Junior Athlete into nine stages and assigns the suggested age level for each.

Each Stage has been broken down into nine skill categories. These include:

1. Technical development
2. Goal Setting
3. Periodization
4. Physical Training
5. Injury Prevention
6. Nutrition
7. Sport Psychology
8. Media Skills
9. Sportsmanship

It is suggested that players, coaches, and parents review these progressions regularly to help evaluation the athlete's progress.

When moving up in age levels, some time should be spent reviewing and refining previously learn skills. However, most of the practice time should be spent focusing on the new skills. The 100 athlete progressions are separated into the appropriate stages from 1 to 9. If there are no new skills marked for a stage, then the athlete should keep developing previous skills.

Please remember that junior athletes will develop at different rates often depending on rates of physical and emotional maturity. Athlete development is a constant process that flows from one development level to another. This document is only a guide to this process and ***NOT AN ABSOLUTE STANDARD FOR DEVELOPMENT.***

It is our hope that this guide will contribute to the development of International Athletes that can represent their country with pride and success.

BASIC DEVELOPMENT CONCEPTS

- Table Tennis is an early developmental sport, requiring training at an early age to produce an International level player.
- Speed is an essential component of the game. There are three types of speed needed at the International level. These include: ball speed (power), foot speed, and the ability to play quickly (time pressure). To reach International standard the Athlete needs to have at least two of the three.
- To reach International Standard, the Athlete needs to develop one or more weapons that he/she can depend on to win important points.
- To be on track to become an International level player, the main technical development of the Athlete should be completed by age 13.

100 Steps to Excellence

Technical development

STAGE 1

1. Athlete will be able to produce and explain a proper grip, including pressure points.
2. Athlete will be able to demonstrate the proper ready position.
3. Athlete will be able to execute the following basic strokes with correct form, directional control, and with an 80% success rate when fed by coach:
 - Backhand push and forehand push against under-spin
 - Backhand and forehand blocks against topspin
 - Backhand and forehand drives against topspin
 - Backhand and forehand topspins against under-spin
4. Athlete will demonstrate an understanding of the basic elements of all strokes:
 - How to touch the ball - Friction versus force type of ball contact
 - When to touch the ball - The proper timing for each of the basic strokes
 - Where to touch the ball – The proper contact location on the ball for each of the basic strokes
5. Athlete will learn basic under-spin and topspin theory. This includes:
 - How spin effects the flight of the ball
 - Where to touch the ball to produce each spin
 - The concept of going with or against the spin
6. Athlete will understand the following basic theories:
 - The role that racket acceleration plays in all strokes
 - The role of the back swing in helping with stroke timing.
7. Athlete will learn basic serves as he/she learns each stroke.
 - a. Example: Backhand push = learn a backhand under-spin serve

STAGE 2

8. Athlete will be able to produce correct 2-step footwork in both directions while executing correct strokes.
9. Athlete will be able to produce mixed stroke combinations against both under-spin and topspin, using all of the basic strokes with a success rate of 80%.
10. Athlete will be able to successfully complete simple consistency drills with a partner.
11. Athlete will be introduced to the concept of inside and outside ball contact to control the direction of the ball.
12. Athlete will be able to change their point of contact on the ball to correct for the change between topspin and under-spin ball feeds.
13. Athlete will be introduced to the concept of using the lower body to produce power.

STAGE 3

14. Athlete will be introduced to the concept of producing topspins at different speeds (gears) by controlling the amount of body used.
15. Athlete will learn and be able to produce the Modified Forehand Serve Grip.
16. Athlete will focus on developing the necessary hand skills to produce heavy spin services.

17. The Athlete will be introduced to the concept of “stopping” the spin on the opponent’s serve when returning serves.
18. The Athlete will learn the relationship between racket acceleration and going with or against the spin on the opponent’s strokes.
19. The Athlete will be able to produce both Forehand and Backhand drop shots, flips, and pushes against short serves.
20. The Athlete will be able to produce and explain the effect of sidespin on the ball.
21. The Athlete will be introduced to the concept of applying and redirecting power against an opponent.
22. The Athlete will be introduced to the concept of becoming “un-weighted” when generating maximum power.
23. The Athlete will be able to produce both Backhand and Forehand Loops against both Topspin and Backspin ball feeds.
24. The Athlete will be able to practice (with a partner) using the five ball sequencing system. This consists of practice focusing on one of the first five strokes of the game:
 - 1st. – Serve
 - 2nd. – Serve Return
 - 3rd. – 3rd. Ball Attack
 - 4th. – 4th. Ball Defense or Counter Attack
 - 5th. – 5th. Ball Attack

STAGE 4

25. The Athlete, working with the coach, will begin developing his or her own personal style of play. This will be accomplished by examining:
 - The characteristics of the styles of play currently used at the World Level.
 - Their strengths and weaknesses and which style of play they best match-up with.
 - What style of play would they most enjoy playing?
26. The Athlete will learn basic strategy consisting of the four ways to win a point. These include:
 - Power
 - Setting traps for the opponent, varying speed, spin, height, and placement to force errors
 - Special Techniques – combination rackets, special serves, or unique shots
 - Time Pressure – playing faster than your opponent is comfortable playing
27. Practice will focus on developing patterns of play which best suit the style of play of the athlete.
28. The Athlete will develop effective techniques from close, mid, and far distance from the table with the bulk of the practice focusing on the ideal distance from the table for the athlete’s style.
29. Crossover footwork will be introduced and practiced during this stage.

STAGE 5

30. The Athlete will develop the advance stroke techniques necessary to complete their own style of play.
31. The Athlete will be able to make the necessary grip adjustments during play to enhance specialized strokes.
32. Drills will focus on consistency and learning the new skills.

33. The Athlete will focus on improving their serve and receive game focusing on the correct serve placements and patterns for their style.
34. The Athlete will focus on improving their footwork focusing on the movements necessary for their style.
35. The Athlete's training will continue to focus on the development of their strongest strokes (main weapons)

STAGE 6

36. Practice during this stage focuses on adding the advanced techniques into the Athlete's style of play using the 5-Point System of training.
37. The athlete should now have the technical skills necessary to implement any of the four basic ways to win a point against any opponent's style of play.

38. The Athlete's main technical development should now be complete.

STAGE 7

39. Practice during this stage focuses on specific tactics against different styles of play and at various stages of the match.
40. Drills during this stage become more and more random, forcing the Athlete to begin to concentrate more on what the opponent is doing.

STAGE 8

41. Practice during this stage focuses on making small technical changes that have been proven necessary through intensive match play.

STAGE 9

42. Practice during this stage focuses on preparing the Athlete to "Peak" for major competitions.

Goal Setting

Athletes should:

STAGE 1

43. Establish written technical performance based goals and share them with coaches and parents. These goals should be reviewed regularly. The purpose of these goals is to have the Athlete concentrate on technical development not competitive development. Example: To execute 8 out of 10 forehand drives, against topspin that are placed alternately from the middle of the table to the wide forehand of the athlete.

STAGE 4

44. Set realistic but challenging competitive goals and separate them into:
 - Long-term 5 years
 - Intermediate 2-4 years
 - Short-term 1 yearThese goals should include ranking levels and specific tournament results.
45. Be able to develop specific objectives necessary to achieve the short-term goals. These include:
 - Technique
 - Strategy and Tactics
 - Physical fitness and training levels
 - Sport Psychology

STAGE 5

46. Be able to demonstrate that he/she is developing intrinsic motivation during training and matches. This includes:

- Showing consistent intensity during practice.
- Showing dedication to physical and psychological training.
- Moving towards independence as a player
- Becoming more involved in the planning of their training plan

47. Be able to demonstrate that he/she is developing intrinsic motivation during training and matches. This includes:

- Showing consistent intensity during practice.
- Showing dedication to physical and psychological training.
- Moving towards independence as a player
- Becoming more involved in the planning of their training plan

Periodization

Athletes should:

STAGE 4

48. Demonstrate an understanding of the training cycle principal.

49. Work with their coaches to develop the yearly competition schedule and to establish which events they wish to “peak” for.

50. Demonstrate an understanding of the different phases of the training cycle.

These include:

- Preparation
- Pre-competitive
- Competitive
- Active Rest

STAGE 5

51. Work with their coaches to develop specific training cycle plans for these “peak” events. These plans should include:

- Goal Setting
- Initial Evaluation
- Technical Training
- Development of an aerobic base
- General and specific table tennis anaerobic training
- Strength training
- Power training
- Psychological Skills training

STAGE 9

52. Be able to shorten their training cycles which will allow for more “peak” tournaments during the year.

Physical Training

Athletes should:

STAGE 1

53. Be introduced to a program of basic exercises that become part of their warm-up program. These exercises need to be age appropriate and are designed to prepare the athlete for future training.

STAGE 2

54. Be introduced to simple movement exercises that help develop the needed foot skills necessary for the sport.

STAGE 3

55. Begin a program of general physical training that consists of age appropriate exercises without added weights.

56. Begin a program of aerobic training through on the table movement drills.

STAGE 4

57. Understand the need and begin a program of regular physical testing.

58. Incorporate a program of circuit training (without added weight) designed to improve anaerobic fitness.

STAGE 5

59. Begin a program of supervised age appropriate weight training to develop the needed base of strength needed for the sport.

60. Understand the role of strength training, aerobic training, and anaerobic training within their planned training cycles.

STAGE 6

61. Understand the need for and incorporate a regular program of flexibility training in their overall training program.

62. Incorporate Power Training (Plyometrics) into their training cycles.

STAGE 7

63. Be able to help the coach in designing their own fitness program that incorporates the principals of periodization.

STAGE 9

64. Be able to design their own year-round fitness program that fits into their overall long and short-term goals for the sport.

Injury Prevention

Athletes should:

STAGE 1

65. Demonstrate an understanding of the role that proper warm-up, stretching, and cooling down play in injury prevention.

STAGE 3

66. Understand the concept of R.I.C.E. when treating injuries.

- R – Rest
- I – Ice
- C – Compression
- E – Elevation

STAGE 5

67. Understand the 5 levels of pain, what treatment to seek and how much play is safe at each level.

- Level One - Discomfort or mild pain that goes away with warm-up.
- Level Two - Mild pain during play but goes away within 24 hours.
- Level Three - Mild to moderate pain during play that continues after 48 hours.
- Level Four - Moderate pain that continues during play and is not helped with warm-up.
- Level Five - Moderate to severe pain that alters table tennis technique.

STAGE 6

68. Understand that strength training is important in both injury prevention and improving performance

Nutrition

Athletes should:

STAGE 1

69. Understand the importance as well as practice proper hydration at all times during and after practice and competition.

STAGE 2

70. Understand how to make healthy food choices from all the nutrient groups in the food pyramid.

STAGE 4

71. Understand the importance of maintaining the optimal body weight

STAGE 5

72. Understand how to eat properly before, during, and after competition

73. Understand the negative consequences of drug use in life and sport.

STAGE 6

74. Understand how to make good nutritional choices when traveling both domestically and internationally

Sport Psychology

Athletes should:

STAGE 1

75. Be introduced to the importance of keeping competition in the proper perspective.

76. Be able to use imagery to rehearse or to change technique before or during play.

STAGE 3

77. Develop a ritual before every serve or serve return that will enhance relaxation and concentration.

78. Be able to use imagery to correct incorrect strokes during practice or competition.

STAGE 4

79. Develop a ritual before every serve or serve return that will enhance relaxation and concentration

80. Develop a confident physical appearance during practice and competition.

81. Understand the body/mind relationship and how one can affect the other.

82. Understand how important the role that positive self-talk plays in reducing stress, enhancing self-image, and allowing the body to perform at its highest level.
83. Understand how damaging negative self-talk can be on performance and the enjoyment of the game.

STAGE 6

84. Be able to concentrate on court and develop mental techniques to help develop the skill
85. Understand that he/she must concentrate only on the things that they have control over.

STAGE 7

86. Understand the level of arousal that they need to train or compete at the highest level and develop techniques to deal with under or over arousal issues.
87. Understand how to recognize negative mental scripts and actively change these into positive scripts by through active rehearsal.

Media Skills

. Athletes should:

STAGE 5

88. Always be friendly and cooperative with reporters.
89. Always speak positively about opponents.
90. Always make sure that your sponsors' logos and products are visible.

STAGE 7

91. Always dress appropriately for all interview or public situations
92. Maintain good posture and make eye contact with fans or press.

STAGE 8

93. Be able to speed clearly and slowly when speaking in public.
94. Make an effort to show their personality when giving interviews or public speaking.
95. Be aware that you do not need to answer any personal questions that you feel uncomfortable in answering.

Sportsmanship

Athletes should:

STAGE 1

96. Understand that honesty and integrity on the court are more important to one's life than winning.

STAGE 4

97. Demonstrate proper on court etiquette before, during, and at the conclusion of the match.
98. Always take responsibility for their actions.

STAGE 5

99. Know the rules of the sport and how to properly deal with difficult on court situations.

STAGE 9

100. Appreciate the benefits that you receive from table tennis and be willing to give back to the sport.

Suggestions for Robot Training

Level 1 – Basic Stroke Technique

The Robot is the perfect practice partner for this level of training. Its ability to deliver a constant feed to one location allows the beginner to concentrate on learning the basic techniques. It also allows the coach to be on the same side of the table as the athlete so that the coach can work more directly with the athlete.

Level 2 – Basic Stroke Combinations

At this level the Robot's ability to oscillate the ball to any area of the table is the perfect training for developing basic footwork and stroke combination skills.

Level 3 – The Five Point System

The Robot is the perfect tool for teaching serve return. Unlike a human partner, the Newgy can consistently produce the same serve over and over. This is excellent for learning spin theory. Your Robot can also be used for third and fifth ball attack.

Level 4 – Style Awareness

At this level, advanced footwork drills and physical conditioning can be accomplished easily with the Robot.

Level 5 – Advanced Stroke Techniques

At this level, each athlete will be learning new advanced techniques related to their own style of play. As with learning any new stroke, the Robot's ability to produce a constant feed makes it the perfect training partner.

Level 6 – Advanced Stroke Combinations

As the Athletes style becomes clear, several websites offer Robot Drills designed for every style of play.

Level 7 – Self-Awareness

At this level, Athletes are developing match skills. By using the Robot's random oscillation feature, the Athlete can work on developing reaction skills.

Level 8 – Refining Style

As the Athlete continues to grow and develop, the Robot is always ready at any time or place to develop the needed work out. Athletes at this level need daily training. Practice partners are not always available but the Robot is.

Level 9 – Full Awareness

By the time the Athlete reaches this stage, he or she should understand how to use all the training tools available to achieve success. This includes the Robot. Technical training, movement training, and physical training, the Robot can provide it all.

It is the sincere wish of this Coach that “Junior Progressions” will help every Athlete and their Coach to reach their dreams.