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The Experiences of Athletes, Parents, and Coaches with the Long-Term Athlete Development Model (LTAD) in Youth Soccer Academies

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THE EXPERIENCES OF ATHLETES, PARENTS, AND COACHES WITH THE LONG-
TERM ATHLETE DEVELOPMENT MODEL (LTAD) IN YOUTH SOCCER ACADEMIES

by

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BA (Hons) Kinesiology & Physical Education, Wilfrid Laurier University, 2015

THESIS

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Abstract

The Long-Term Athlete Development Model (LTAD) has been developed to allow children the best chance of engaging in lifelong sport and physical activity. The LTAD focuses on long-term development, not short-term success, which allows for the best opportunity of sport participation and optimal sport potential throughout life (Balyi, Way, & Higgs, 2013). Research surrounding the LTAD model has stated that there is a lack of empirical evidence of the model being utilized within sport, as some researchers believe that it is more theoretical than practical (Lloyd & Oliver, 2012). However, even with this criticism of the LTAD model, Canadian sport policy makers have trusted the scientific research and training methods to implement the LTAD across Canadian sports. With this in mind, the general purpose of the present study was to add much needed empirical evidence for the LTAD model, providing insight into the experiences people have had with the model, as well as evaluating if the guiding principles of the model are being implemented in Canada's most participated team sport, soccer. This occurred through multiple perspectives (e.g., athletes, parents, and coaches). More specifically, the population of interest was Ontario soccer academies, who are attempting to develop the next generation of elite/professional level players utilizing the LTAD model. To achieve this objective, semi-structured interviews were conducted with 21 participants (8 athletes, 7 parents, and 6 coaches) from four different soccer academies. Upon completion of the interviews, they were transcribed verbatim and then analyzed by a research team using an inductive analysis approach (Patton, 2002). To ensure that the current study was credible and trustworthy, several measures were taken including, a reflexive journal, field notes, investigator and data triangulation, and participant member checks. Results demonstrated that these four soccer academies utilize the LTAD model. Themes were organized into research areas for the three subgroups with

coinciding subthemes: athletes (e.g., LTAD experiences), parents (e.g., reasons for enrolling their child in a soccer academy, knowledge of the LTAD model), and coaches (e.g., academy experiences, long-term athlete development, objectives for athletes). Discussion is focussed around several practical implications aimed at bringing awareness to the experiences with the LTAD model by athletes, parents, and coaches, and proposes potential modifications of how to improve overall awareness, knowledge, and communication of LTAD occurring within soccer academies and Canadian sport.

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Chapter 1: Introduction

In Canada and across the world there are multiple youth development models, designed to allow children the best sport experience. These models can either be focused on talent development, allowing athletes to reach the next step in elite competition, or they can be about athleticism, making sure that no matter how much skill the child has, there will be an opportunity for them to enjoy participating in sport. Some of the existing models are the: Differentiated model of giftedness and talent (DMGT), Model of talent development in physical education (MTDPE), Developmental model of sports participation (DMSP), Long-term athlete development model (LTAD), and Youth physical development (YPD). All of these models have both benefits and disadvantages that come with them, but they are allowing sport policy makers to utilize and implement a framework that allows athletes to potentially have a better sport experience. These models will be examined further in the following sections.

For Canadian youth, sport policy makers have decided to adopt the Long-Term Athlete Development Model (LTAD). The LTAD has been created based on empirical evidence from scientific research and training methods. The model has been implemented within Canada to allow children to be given the opportunity to reach their optimal skill level, as well as participating in sport throughout their lives. Before LTAD implementation, Canada had no consistency throughout the country for a fundamental framework describing proper training methods, coaching, and knowledge of sport engagement. This allowed to coaches to teach athletes the same things that they were taught when they were young, which may not be the best form of coaching, as it is very much case by case. Not having a sport-specific framework does not benefit anyone as athletes, parents, and coaches do not have the proper training and knowledge to reach their optimal potential within sport.

Furthermore, although the LTAD has been adopted by Canadian sport policy makers, there is a lack of empirical evidence to show that there is compliance with the model, as well as if the model is being implemented correctly throughout Canadian sports. In Canada, to receive federal funding from National Sport Governing Bodies (NSGB) there has to be a sport-specific LTAD model being utilized and implemented. Resources are allocated to sport organizations based on the implementation of LTAD. There are millions of children playing structured sport in Canada and a high majority of them are playing soccer, which is where this study will investigate. Therefore, the following sections of this paper will be describing the historical foundations of the LTAD, the current LTAD model, alternative youth development models, and the adoption of the LTAD model within Canada. Additionally, the research will be investigating the implementation of the LTAD model in Canada's most participated team sport, soccer.

1.1 Creating a Foundation

In order to build positive environments for developing children in sport, it is necessary to teach sport-specific skills effectively in a positive manner (Banack, Bloom, & Falcao, 2012). A key component to building positive environments for youth sport participation is the coach. Beneficial coaching can help advance the physical abilities of children by positively contributing to their growth and development, which could help maximize their athletic success (Bompa, 2000). The Coaching Association of Canada (CAC) was created after a recommendation from the Task Force on Sport for Canadians to help develop both qualified and positive coaches. The CAC was designed to increase quality coaching and to enhance sport experiences for young developing athletes (Banack et al., 2012). The implementation of the CAC allowed Canadian coaches to be educated about how to provide children and adolescent athletes the essential skills, knowledge, and attitudes throughout all levels of sport. This led to the creation of the National

Coaching Certification Program (NCCP) in 1974, which has advanced into the largest coach education program in Canada (Coaching Association of Canada, 2011).

Having qualified coaching can allow for athletes to reach their optimal potential and sport scientists have reported that there are critical periods in a young athletes' life where effects of training can be maximized (Leite & Sampaio, 2012). For these training effects to occur, sport organizations and administrators need experienced coaches who are educated about how to provide young athletes the opportunity to learn and develop through progressive pathways in sports. These pathways are aimed to nurture athletes from childhood and adolescence to a lifetime of sport participation.

Istvan Balyi, a Canadian sport scientist, has been credited with developing the Long-Term Athlete Development (LTAD) Model for Canadian youth sport participants in 1995. The model was first described in the Canadian Sport Policy document, which was further developed into Canadian Sport for Life (Banack et al., 2012). Robertson and Way (2005) stated that Balyi was an expert on planning and periodization for both short- and long-term training and performance programs, and his original goal was to help Canadian athletes perform more consistently at the elite level.

The LTAD model was originally created for youth development, focused on identifying talented athletes. National governing bodies have visions that athletes can properly develop to successfully perform at the highest level of competition (Martindale, Collins, & Daubney, 2012). Talent identification does not mean early selection with the goal being performance based results. It is developing athletes, giving them the best opportunity for reaching their optimal potential and having long-term success. Martindale and colleagues (2012) described that majority of talent identification programs throughout the world still focus on current

performance abilities, instead of focusing on the athletes' potential. When foundations are not developed to allow athletes equal opportunity at a young age to develop required skills, it could lead to large discrepancies between athletes. In order to provide athletes with the best opportunity for success, talent identification and development programs must focus on developing skills that will be effective at an older age, which also enhance the young athletes' willingness to learn, train, and invest in the progression of their skills (Martindale et al., 2012). If these stages are followed correctly, talent identification and long-term development can provide athletes with opportunities to become the next generation of elite and professional athletes.

For talent identification of young athletes to be successful, the LTAD had to be further advanced as a mechanism to help sport administrators, coaches, and sport participants successfully navigate sport development. More specifically, LTAD is a model that has been created to ensure athletes develop fundamental motor abilities at their optimal physical development stages (Lang & Light, 2010). In order for sport participation to be positive for athletes, it is necessary to follow a plan that allows for athletes to be given the opportunity to develop skills, have fun, and maximize their skill development for their specific sport.

The LTAD was built on combining successful training methods and scientific research from various countries when it was first introduced. The LTAD framework was largely influenced by Eastern Bloc (East Germany, Soviet Union, Ukraine, Czechoslovakia, Hungary, etc.) countries where sport scientists had previously evaluated athlete development models (Norris, 2010). The current research from the Eastern Bloc countries provided Balyi the resources and available information that was necessary to develop a model that was designed for proper growth, development maturation, and athletic development (Norris, 2010). At its core, the

LTAD model helps recommend appropriate training stages for player development that may result in higher sporting achievement throughout life (Balyi & Hamilton, 2004).

The model, like most new developments, was slow to be adopted by Canada. Canadians were first introduced to the model in the Canadian Sport Policy document in 2002 (Canadian Sport for Life, 2014). Balyi also introduced the model to other countries, working with sport authorities in Ireland and England to implement LTAD throughout their youth sport systems (Robertson & Way, 2005). He also worked with Australian and New Zealand sport officials, where many of the concepts have now been accepted (Robertson & Way, 2005). The revolutionary development system, after a slow implementation, began to gain popularity in Canada around 2005, as many sport organizations realized it is critical for the future of high performance sport (Robertson & Way, 2005). Canada also had the added motivation to increase their international sport performance as they hosted the 2010 Winter Olympics. A high performance model was adopted for Canada and the LTAD was a large part of the underlying philosophy.

The creation of the LTAD model spread from a Canadian project for elite athletes, into a worldwide model that included a variety of interest throughout many disciplines and a practical interest from National Sport Foundations (NSFs). Countries around the world have now implemented the scientifically tested model and have developed it for their own sport-specific frameworks. Currently, all national sport organizations in Canada and the United Kingdom are required to have sport-specific LTAD plans in order to receive funding from federal governments (Banack et al., 2012).

1.2 Advancement of the Long-Term Athlete Development Model

The framework for LTAD has advanced throughout the years. A more comprehensive LTAD model was introduced by Balyi in 2005 that attempted to address the interaction between growth, maturation, and training unlike previous models, in which stages were classified with chronological age that have since been deemed flawed (Balyi & Hamilton, 2004). The more comprehensive LTAD model was focused on competition and recovery programs based on biological age (maturation level of an individual) (Robertson & Way, 2005; Lang & Light, 2010). Originally, Balyi and Hamilton (2004) confirmed that sports could be classified as early- or late specialization. Some early specialization sports are: gymnastics, figure skating, and diving, all which require sport-specific specialization. Later specialization sports include: track and field, cycling, racquet sports, and all team sports, which all need a generalised approach to early training (Balyi & Hamilton, 2004). The early and late specialization sports both have individual models with different stages.

Early specialization sports required a four-phase model, while late specialization sports required a six-stage model (Balyi & Hamilton, 2004). The models were both generic in nature and were adjusted to be sport-specific. A main feature of LTAD is the “windows of opportunities” within athlete development as it is described as a period where there will be an accelerated adaptation for speed, strength, stamina, and skill if there are proper training regimes and exercises implemented for the athlete (Balyi & Hamilton, 2004). These windows are the critical or sensitive period of trainability for the athlete. Balyi believed that a practical solution was to use the onset of peak height velocity (PHV) “growth spurts” as a way to determine when these windows were open because it can be monitored throughout short- and long-term training.

The LTAD model also allowed development for athletic abilities in children through five core competencies: problem solving, critical thinking, interaction, values, and leadership (Canadian Sport for Life, 2014). The program originally attempted to ensure that children learned fundamental movement skills during their optimal physical development stages in order to promote athletic excellence (Lang & Light, 2010).

Previous literature has suggested that chronological age is not the most efficient indicator of athletic development for young maturing athletes as there is a vast variability in physical, psychological, and emotional development for children at the same chronological age (Balyi & Hamilton, 2004). The LTAD focuses on teaching fundamental physical skills that are athlete centred, coach driven, based on sport science, and organization supported (Robertson & Way, 2005). The model offers a strategic approach to the athletic development of youth, as it assists in creating an environment that enables participants to achieve their optimal potential through the development phases (Robertson & Way, 2005). Athletes who progress through the LTAD model experience both training and competition throughout periodized plans specific to their developmental needs. With a sport-specific and well-planned practice, training, competition, and recovery regimes, optimum development throughout an athletes' career will more likely occur (Balyi & Hamilton, 2004).

As the LTAD model highlights, success in sport is much more than just winning the game, it is also the ability to sustain participation throughout a lifetime. When there is an overemphasis on competition and winning in the early fundamental and development stages of training, it may lead to shortcomings that could affect athletic ability later in sport. The LTAD model covers every aspect of human physical development and is based on sport participation for life. There is no shortcut to success in athletic preparation and it is believed that the LTAD

model helps to create a culture of lifelong participation by highlighting sport's values, improving health and well-being, and identifying an optimal path for athletes (Robertson & Way, 2005).

Some specialists believe that the LTAD model is a strong approach for sport development (Ford et al., 2011). It is an understandable process that allows athletes to start as beginners and progress through phases in order to become elite performers. The correct use of knowledge and coaching for growth and development of athletes allows for athletes to reach their full potential. The LTAD establishes guidelines for coaches, athletes, parents, and administrators in all areas that include planning, training, competition, and recovery. The program allows for progression in sport for both early and late achievers. The LTAD allows for increasingly competitive aspects of sport, as well as ensures everyone who wants to learn sport has an equal opportunity (Robertson & Way, 2005).

With the acceptance of the LTAD model in Canada, there has still been debate to the role of genetic and environmental factors, which contribute to sport performance (Davids & Baker, 2007). Evidence suggests that there are both early- and late-achievers in all sports. Between the ages of 10 and 16, there can be a wide variation in the physical, psychological, and emotional development for athletes (Leite & Sampaio, 2012).

A major factor in the development of athletes within this age group is the coach. Coaches cannot be focused solely on short-term success for their individual or team, they need to acknowledge the fact that in certain situations they have an increased responsibility to enhance the athletes' long-term achievements and their commitment to the sport (Gilbert, Côté, & Mallett, 2006). When the coaches are focused solely on early achievers, strictly centred on competition outcome, it may lead to overtraining, burnout, and/or dropout (Smith, 2003; Fraser-Thomas, Côté, & Deakin, 2008). Although talent detection and early development are key

factors for almost any sport, coaches need to keep in mind that elite sport is composed of both early and late maturing athletes (Leite & Sampaio, 2012). Maturation is a complex process that usually includes physiological, psychological, and emotional measurements and evaluations (Leite & Sampaio, 2012). The difference between a 7-year, 12-year, and 15-year old is considerable. Coaches need to be aware of the variability within maturation and implement these understandings by emphasizing that expert development is a long-term process, especially during development of sport-specific skills (Meylan, Cronin, Oliver, & Hughes, 2010).

1.3 Current Long-Term Athlete Development Model

The Long-Term Athlete Development framework has now been developed into a seven stage model (refer to Appendix A). The stages for LTAD model start at: Active Start and FUNdamentals. Active start is the first stage within the model, it details a child's growth from infancy to young childhood. The children within this stage are developing general motor skills throughout active play. Children are able to explore environments and have daily physical activities with the emphasis on fun (Canadian Sport for Life, 2014). Sport participation within this stage of the model is a mixture of active movement and semi-structured programs such as gymnastics and swimming. The next stage within the LTAD is FUNdamentals. This stage furthers the movement skills of children as they are furthering their overall development with an integration of mental, cognitive, and emotional skills. At this age, it is important that programs emphasize fun and that all of the children are introduced to rules and fair play. The model states that the children should be learning the ABCs of athletics and athleticism within this stage. The ABCs of athletics include running, jumping, and throwing and the ABCs of athleticism include agility, balance, coordination, and speed (Canadian Sport for Life, 2014).

The next stages for the LTAD model are Learning to Train and Training to Train. The focus of these stages change from active play into sport and skill development. Learning to Train is the major skill learning stage. It occurs when the athletes are learning basic sport-specific skills before puberty. These skills involve mental preparation, cognitive, emotional, and physical development that are developed through sport-specific training that occurs multiple times per week (Canadian Sport for Life, 2014). The fourth stage in the LTAD is Training to Train where the major focus for the athletes is on fitness and sport-specific skill development. Within this stage, the athletes are using both mental and physical preparation before competitions, as well as introducing muscle building activities. The athletes are training six-to-nine times per week in sport-specific activities, which include complementary sports aside from the athletes' primary activity (Canadian Sport for Life, 2014).

The next two stages of the LTAD focus on when the athletes are competing in a primary sport and are training multiple times per week for their specific activity. These stages are Training to Compete and Training to Win. Training to Compete is the stage where athletes are training for their primary sport and a specific position within that sport. The athletes have acquired the necessary skills to perform in competitions and are focused on advancing their technical and tactical abilities throughout multiple training regimes each week. Training to Win is the sixth stage in the LTAD model and it is focused on when athletes are performing at the elite, national, and international levels. The athletes are focused on their performance and are going through periodized training plans throughout the year. The athletes are preparing themselves to be at their optimal level before a competition and are always focused on advancing their technical, tactical, and fitness development (Canadian Sport for Life, 2014).

The final stage within the LTAD model is Active for Life. This stage can be entered at any time throughout an individual's lifetime, as it is focused on keeping people involved in sport and physical activity. Within this stage there are specific streams: Competitive for Life, Fit for Life, and Sport and Physical Activity Leaders. These streams are developed to allow sport and physical activity participation at multiple levels of competition throughout any age. Competitive for Life is the transition from moving highly competitive sport to lifelong competition at different age levels. Fit for Life promotes athletes to be active throughout recreational activities and non-organized sport and physical activity. Sport and Physical Activity Leaders is the final stream that allows for athletes who may not be able to participate in sport anymore, the ability to become a volunteer or administrator for a club or organization (Canadian Sport for Life, 2014).

1.4 Alternative Youth Development Models

As previously mentioned, it is important to note that the LTAD model is not the only model that has been suggested within sport as a proposed pathway for youth sport development and there have also been researchers who have stated that the LTAD model is largely theoretically based (Lloyd & Oliver, 2012). The LTAD model has been said to lack empirical evidence that is imperative for the acceptance of the models' benefits. Lloyd and Oliver (2012) stated that the model suggests that there are critical "windows of opportunity" for athletes during their developmental years, where they are more sensible to training and sport-specific skill development, and if the athletes fail to meet these windows it will limit their athletic potential. Ford and colleagues (2011) also stated that there is a lack of evidence for specific aspects of the model. There is a dearth of any significant longitudinal or experimental data that lacks scientific validity (Ford et al., 2011). Researchers have also stated that even though the model assumes

these periods and stages occur, there needs to be more conclusive research with longitudinal evidence.

The need for empirical evidence for the LTAD model has led researchers to raise specific concerns as to the implementation of the model (Norris, 2010). In one of the few studies to address implementation, Lang and Light (2010) examined the British Swimming Association and specifically how the sport organization implemented the LTAD model. The results from this study suggested that the athletes were concerned with the over-emphasis of training and practice (Lang & Light, 2010). Banack and colleagues (2012) also found that some sport organizations were fast tracking athletes through the model to reach the competition stage, and pushing athletes to compete prematurely in endurance-based sports.

Leite and Sampaio (2012) examined Portuguese basketball athletes and the quantity of sport- and non-sport-specific activities. The researchers used the sport-specific LTAD model that was currently being used by the Portuguese Basketball Federation and included male and female athletes, ages six to nineteen, throughout multiple developmental stages (FUNdamentals, Training to Train, Training to Compete, and Training to Win). The researchers found evidence that each stage had significant differences between each group and concluded that there was evidence for different paths. More specifically, athletes who are in the same stage were found to have individualistic results that did not match up to other athletes within that same stage. Additionally, the researchers found similar results to previous literature determining that participation in multiple sports, other than the athletes' primary sport, can help achieve high-level performance in later developmental stages (Leite & Sampaio, 2012). The researchers further stated that the results do not mean that basketball players involved in the early stages of development should not be practicing basketball in their early years, but rather the coaches and

administrators should promote a wide variety of training and practices that are both positive and enjoyable and not just sport-specific (Leite & Sampaio, 2012).

Additionally, researchers believe that some parts of the model are too simplistic (Bailey et al., 2010; Ford et al., 2011) and that it is a limited approach to the holistic development of young athletes (Lloyd & Oliver, 2012). The LTAD model states the importance of physiological properties (e.g., stamina, speed, strength, power, agility, and hypertrophy) but there is a lack of guidance as to when and why these concepts should be trained (Lloyd & Oliver, 2012). There are multiple physiological factors that influence performance and there has to be more empirical evidence for the LTAD model to prove that these factors occur. Furthermore, physiological factors may possibly be individualistic, and even though the LTAD model has physiological age classifications, it could potentially be another limitation of the model that needs further investigation (Smith, 2003).

Lloyd and Oliver (2012) introduced a new alternative model that is all encompassing for ages as young as two years old in childhood up to adulthood (21+). The model is Youth Physical Development (YPD) and these researchers believe that the components are more realistic and the fitness components are trainable throughout childhood. Central to this model is the fact that it bridges the gap between maturation and other periods of trainability, providing essential physical qualities that have had evidence-based results from previous literature (Lloyd & Oliver, 2012).

Another model that has been suggested is the Developmental Model of Sport Participation (DMSP). Côté and Fraser-Thomas (2007) expanded previous literature and developed a conceptual framework that is based on extensive research with athletes about their progression within sport (Côté & Fraser-Thomas, 2007). The researchers suggested three trajectories within the model: sampling, deliberate play, and deliberate practice. Sampling refers

to an athlete participating in a variety of different sports, deliberate play is involvement in loosely structured activities, and deliberate practice is based around sport activities that have explicit rules and boundaries (Côté & Fraser-Thomas, 2007). The DSMP has received support from research in the past 15 years about the concepts and framework for youth athlete development (Côté & Vierimaa, 2014).

A model focused on talent development programs for elite sport is the Model of Talent Development in Physical Education (MTDPE). Bailey and Morley (2006) have stated that the central philosophy around the MTDPE is that youth athletes should sample a wide range of different sports before deciding to invest and specialize in their later years. The researchers suggest that the benefits of the model support the notion of late specialization and that when youth experience a range of sport early in their life it gives them a better opportunity to become an elite athlete in a specific sport later in life (Bailey & Morley, 2006).

The final model that will be discussed is the Differentiated Model of Giftedness and Talent (DMGT). This talent development model has been developed within educational systems with the central philosophy being about systematic learning transferring natural giftedness into talent (Gagné, 1998). The researcher suggests that the benefits of the model are focused on developing a multitude of aptitudes which will allow a gifted athlete to develop the required talent to be successful within sport (Gagné, 1998).

Sport policy makers are aware that the LTAD is not the only youth development model that exists. Although some researchers believe that the LTAD model is more theoretical than practical, Canadian sport policy makers' trust in the scientific research and training methods of the LTAD model, and for the sake of consistency throughout the national governing sport

organizations, it is the model that has been implemented by Canada. All sports are expected to utilize and implement the LTAD within their individual sport organizations and practices.

1.5 Canadian Sport Adoption

As previously mentioned, the LTAD model was first introduced from the 2002 release of the first ever “Canadian Sport Policy” (Canadian Sport Policy, 2012). The policy was developed to enhance participation, excellence, capacity, and interaction in Canadian sport by the year 2012 through a dynamic and leading-edge sport environment that successfully performed at the highest levels of competition (Canadian Sport Policy, 2012). Norris (2010) described the strategies as four pillars: enhanced participation, excellence, capacity, and interaction. The first, “enhanced participation”, was focused on increasing participation numbers of Canadians engaged in sport. For “enhanced excellence”, Canadian organizations, programs, and clubs had to be quality-based, striving for world-class results from proper funding, resources, and focus from the athletes (Norris, 2010). The third pillar “enhanced capacity”, referred to coaches, facilities, sports medicine, sports scientist expertise, and training elements to provide education, availability, and technology development. The final pillar was the need for “enhanced interaction” from all of the stakeholders in the Canadian sport systems, to increase their communication, cooperation, and collaboration (Norris, 2010).

In 2005, Sport Canada provided a framework and philosophy for lifelong engagement in sports, which not only promoted a revitalization of Canadian sport as a competitive country, but also lifelong engagement in sport and physical activity (Canadian Sport for Life, 2014). Canadian Sport for Life evolved from a project to a national movement and commitments were made to the development of both generic and sport-specific LTAD guides for the nation and each province and territory (Norris, 2010). In 2012, Canada’s Federal, Provincial, and Territorial (F-

P/T) ministers renewed the Canadian Sport Policy for 2012-2022 (Canadian Sport for Life, 2014).

In 2010, over 30 National Sport Organizations had completed their sport-specific LTAD documents and there were a few more sports were close to completing their documents. In total, there are over 80 programs that have been developed and are aiming to implement their sport-specific LTAD models (Norris, 2010). As previously mentioned, to receive federal funding sports systems in Canada and the United Kingdom are required to have LTAD plans (Black & Holt, 2009; Lang & Light, 2010) leading to nationwide implementation of the programs in both of the countries (Banack et al., 2012). Revamping a sport system to encompass LTAD was an ambitious but achievable undertaking and within Canada, speed skating, curling, and alongside alpine skiing were some of the first sports to adopt the LTAD (Robertson & Way, 2005).

As knowledge of the LTAD model keeps expanding, there will continue to be potential improvement in athlete development. As the LTAD model is being implemented and progressing each year throughout sport agencies, there is more cross-agency communication from national sport organizations to municipal levels that is occurring. The current attention and implementation of the LTAD will allow for increased communication regarding the success or failure of the model. The Canadian Sport for Life-LTAD project has changed the progression of youth sport development within the Canadian society to allow for more participation, development, and success within sport.

1.6 Implementation Challenges of the LTAD Model

In recent years, sports scientists and coaches have shown an increasing interest in the LTAD model (Lloyd & Oliver, 2012). The program has developed from a Canadian project for high performance athletes, into a global vision, to allow young athletes the opportunity to

properly develop, with the correct coaching and administration through their chosen sports to obtain their maximal potential.

For any model to be successful there has to be a majority of the population to accept, and a consensus from the population to implement it. The LTAD model was not perfect, and as most developing models, there were advantages and disadvantages that could potentially occur.

Balyi and Hamilton (2004) suggested some potential challenges for the LTAD model such as utilizing adult competition schedules and training methods for young athletes, lack of career coaches, a lack of cohesion between regional, provincial, and national levels for athlete development, most knowledgeable coaches working at the high performance level rather than regional levels and earlier stages, and a lack of correct interventions at the appropriate time in athletes' development (Balyi & Hamilton, 2004).

Similarly, if coaches and administrators do not understand the impact of the LTAD model for youth sport associations, some participants might not receive LTAD training in their practices and organizations. Research has suggested that some sport organizations have difficulty staying up to date with the LTAD model, and that there is a need for research to understand how coaches learn and apply the principles (Balyi & Hamilton, 2004).

Additionally, a fundamental weakness for the LTAD program is that essential programming takes place at the grassroots level, which is not overseen by more qualified personnel from sport governing bodies (Norris, 2010). Provincial Sport Organizations (PSOs) and National Sport Federations (NSFs) need to educate parents, since a large majority of youth sports are run by volunteers. As the complexity of the LTAD model has yet to be understood completely by the entire population, there is continuous concern as to whether the proposed LTAD model is properly understood or implemented by individuals required to adopt the model.

The limited research that currently exists on the evaluation of the implementation of the LTAD model suggests serious concerns regarding only partial implementation by sport organizations (Ford et al., 2011).

1.7 The LTAD and Soccer

The most popular team sport played by youth in Canada is soccer. Shendruk in 2010, found 42% of children aged 5-14 participate in soccer and that it is the top team sport for boys and girls aged 3-17 (Canadian Heritage, 2013). Canada is ninth in the world for soccer registration and according to a 2006 Fédération Internationale de Football Association (FIFA) census, there are 1/39 Canadians enrolled in soccer at either a recreational, competitive, or national level (Shendruk, 2014). Soccer is affordable, which reduces financial burden for most parents. The Canadian Soccer Association (CSA) adopted and implemented their sport-specific LTAD model in 2012. Part of the soccer specific model are pathways where children play soccer recreationally, competitively, or at a high performance (EXCEL) level with the aim of lifetime participation (Canada Soccer, 2015). The Canadian Soccer Association (CSA) purports to utilize the LTAD pathways as their guiding principles for correct training, program design, and the amount of competition that children and youth should be exposed to as players progress from recreational to elite participation (Canada Soccer, 2015).

Soccer Canada has adopted the LTAD sport-specific model to highlight Long-Term Player Development (LTPD). LTPD has been advanced from the developmental matrix, which was mandatory from 2014 and beyond. The developmental matrix was created for children in soccer to advance through the correct developmental stages. Until the ages of 13, children in Ontario do not have to deal with pressure from standings, promotion, or relegation. More specifically, this means that all of the games, training, and competition that the children will be

involved in will be strictly for fun and skill development. Soccer Ontario, by adopting their sport-specific LTAD model, has changed from an emphasis on winning and competition to an importance on fun, enjoyment, skill development, and participation for younger participants.

Within Ontario, a new phenomenon of soccer specific sport academies has occurred within the past 10 years. More specifically, academy soccer is an alternative route for players who wish to attain skill development to reach the next level in soccer. Players do not live at these academies, they are only there for practicing and games. These academies are looking to develop the next generation of Canadian national team athletes, with the focus from qualified coaches allowing athletes to achieve optimal success in soccer. Coaches within academies are focused on individual athlete development whereas competitive clubs in Ontario still are focused on winning games. Another discrepancy between academy and club soccer is the fact that academy soccer is much more expensive than club, with the prices being thousands of dollars compared to a few hundred, this may lead to some highly-skilled players not being able to afford academy soccer and missing the opportunity for the proper skill development. Additionally, this may lead to academies accepting players who can afford it, rather than players who are skilled enough to play there. The academies cost more because the athletes are training multiple times per week with qualified coaches who have gone and completed additional National Coaching Certification Program (NCCP) courses, more than just the required to coach competitive club soccer: 'Respect in Soccer', Make Ethical Decisions, and Making Head Way in Soccer programs, which are six thirty minute online tutorials. The academy coaches have additional NCCP training such as: LTPD, Provincial 'C', Pre-Provincial 'B', Provincial 'B', National 'B', and UEFA 'B' coaching licenses.

These academies are housed within the Soccer Academy Alliance Canada (SAAC) league, The Canadian Academy of Futbol (CAF) league, and independent leagues that purport to follow the guiding principles of the LTAD and LTPD. The academies follow the same developmental matrix in which they promote lifelong enjoyment of physical activity, provide structured player development, describe best practices for elite player development, and create long-term excellence (Soccer Academy Alliance Canada, 2015). Many talent and development programs are encouraging children to participate in structured sports earlier, and focus on only one sport from a young age, dedicating large quantities of training to this sport on a year-round basis (Malina, 2010). Soccer academies are promoting this to parents making decisions about their child's soccer participation. The sport-specific training that these young children experience in these soccer academies could be affecting their future success within soccer.

Parents' perceptions of sport-specific programs that will give their child an edge for the pursuit of potential scholarships or professional contracts are affecting decisions about a child's sport participation (Baker, Cobley, & Fraser-Thomas, 2009). Baker and colleagues (2009) stated that specialized training during early developmental stages has been linked with negative consequences for physical, psychological, and social development. While the LTPD model attempts to balance training load and competition throughout childhood within a sport-specific academy, emphasis placed on results rather than optimal development processes may hinder a child's sport development (Balyi & Way, 1995; Bompa, 1995).

The LTAD was created fundamentally based upon physiological principles and skill development stages. If these principles are adopted and applied by practitioners for strictly the development of children into elite athletes (Canadian Sport Policy, 2012; Badminton England, 2006; British Gymnastics, 2006) it could lead to a sport system that is not all encompassing for

lifelong physical activity for every individual. Sport organizations would be losing valuable members in early development, which could negatively affect each person's long-term development (Robertson & Way, 2005).

Ontario soccer academies are complex in nature, as they attempt to develop elite level soccer players through the proposed LTPD and progression of physical, psychological, cognitive, and social development. Unlike club soccer in Canada, soccer academies have focused on individual development with proper training and competition. Club soccer has had a traditional “winning at all cost” mentality for years that academy soccer is trying to diminish. Soccer academies are looking to evolve Ontario soccer by playing in a positive and competitive environment, allowing players the best competition. Furthermore, academy soccer is looking to develop individual players by giving them the best opportunity to reach their full potential.

1.8 Purpose of the Present Study

The present study will examine the experiences with the LTAD model within Ontario youth soccer academies from various perspectives – athletes, parents, and coaches. While many academies purport to utilize the LTAD model as a guiding framework for player development, there has been little scrutiny or evaluation of the implementation of the LTAD within soccer academies. Sport-specific academies, such as those specializing in soccer, are largely unregulated entities. Despite this fact, many families make significant developmental and financial decisions regarding their children's soccer futures based on claims made within the academies. By understanding the experiences of this specific population, it will add to the much needed empirical evaluation of whether or not the LTAD is actually being utilized and implemented in Canadian sporting environments. Therefore, the purpose of the present study is to understand the experiences that the athletes, parents, and coaches have had with the LTAD

model in academy soccer and to examine whether the guiding principles of the LTAD are actually being utilized within soccer academies to allow athletes the best opportunity for development, as well as enjoying their experience.

Chapter 2: Methods

A qualitative methodology was utilized to examine the experiences of athletes, parents, and coaches have had with the LTAD model within the soccer academies. Qualitative research was best suited for the current study as it allowed for the researcher to understand experiences people had within youth soccer academies. The procedures for the current study included demographic questionnaires and semi-structured one-on-one interviews with individuals involved in the soccer academies including athletes, parents, and coaches.

2.1 Ethics

Before conducting any research, proper ethical procedures were approved by the Wilfrid Laurier University Research Ethics Board (refer to Appendix B). After the research was approved, the participants were recruited via purposeful sampling, as this study attempted to obtain information-rich cases (Patton, 2002). Participants were contacted and provided with a consent form that outlined the details and methods of the current study (refer to Appendices C, D, & E). Parents of the athletes and the coaches completed the consent forms. Parents provided consent for their children to participate in the study and the athletes were also asked to fill out a consent form to determine they also wished to participate in the study. Study participants were able to ask questions prior to the study and were also debriefed at the end of the study.

2.2 Theoretical Framework

The present study utilized a qualitative phenomenological approach as the guiding theoretical framework. This theoretical framework helped to determine the experiences of the athletes, parents, and coaches involved in the soccer academies. According to Patton (1990), a phenomenological approach describes the meaning of the lived experiences for several individuals involved in the phenomenon. Patton (2002) further suggested that conducting in-

depth interviews with individuals who have experienced the phenomenon under examination, was a way a researcher can achieve a phenomenological perspective. Using this approach allows a researcher to develop an understanding of the ways that the individuals within the phenomenon perceive their experiences (Patton, 2002).

In order to adopt a phenomenological approach, the researcher must gain knowledge regarding how individuals understand the world and learn what individuals experience as salient. Then the researcher must employ valid methodology to allow individuals to express these meanings (Patton, 2002). For the current study, the phenomenon being examined was the LTAD model within youth soccer academies. By conducting in-depth interviews, the researcher was able to gain knowledge to help understand how programs based around long-term athlete development function. Interviews, demographic questionnaires, field notes, and a reflexive journal were used by the researcher to understand the phenomenon and the essence of the lived experiences for the individuals within the study (Patton, 2002). To gain an even greater understanding for the lived experiences of individuals within a phenomenon, phenomenology necessitates that core meanings and common themes are captured through a commonly experienced phenomenon (Patton, 2002).

Therefore, the phenomenological approach was best suited for the current study, as it allowed the researcher to find the core meanings that the individuals experienced and to search for the shared experiences within the population (Creswell, 2012). This theoretical framework allowed for the researcher to obtain information about each individual's experiences (athletes, parents, and coaches) while participating in soccer academies (Creswell, 2012).

2.3 Participants

Recruitment for the participants occurred by e-mail and in person conversations with coaches and parents. Overall, there were 30 academies contacted to participate in the study. The researcher chose to contact academies that were in the Southern Ontario region that would be accessible to complete in person conversations to help build rapport. The academies willing to participate in the study were four self-selected academies from Southern Ontario regions. The researcher obtained participants from each academy for each subgroup. Before any interviews occurred for the current study, there were three pilot interviews completed with one person representing each subgroup (athletes, parents, and coaches). The pilot interviews occurred with an athlete and a parent that have gone through the academy system, and a coach that used to be at an academy. These pilot interviews allowed for the researcher to modify and adapt some of the interview questions that were not relevant for the participants which further helped the validity of the questions being asked.

For the current study, the researcher completed 20 separate interviews with 21 participants, 8 with athletes, 7 with parents, and 6 with coaches. All participant names within the results section were pseudonyms for both confidentiality and anonymity reasons, additionally following the methods section there was a chart provided for the parent-athlete dyad who participated in the study (refer to Table 1). For the parent and athlete subgroups, snowball sampling occurred, as the researcher would interview the parent first and then ask if the athlete would also like to be a participant within the study. There was one interview that was completed at the same time with two athletes, the athlete sample was males ages 10-14 and for the best opportunity for an information-rich case, the researcher decided that it would be best to interview the two athletes together, to make them feel comfortable as they might have felt intimidated

talking alone. Additionally, with that age group there were some athletes that were more talkative than others. For the interview questions, the researcher was able to probe the athletes to gain additional information that might not have been initially shared. The researcher utilized both the interview guide and added questions based off of the individual interviews to help develop information-rich cases.

Additionally, as previously mentioned there were three subgroups of participants: athletes, parents, and coaches. After the initial conversation, participants were contacted prior to the start of the study and there was proper consent obtained from the parents for each athlete as all participants were under the age of 18. After consent was obtained from the parents the researcher also had the athletes consent themselves if they wished to participate in the study. The ages of the participants were 10-14, as the researcher was specifically interested in sampling athletes in the Training to Train stage of the LTAD model. This specific age group provided shared experiences within academy soccer that led to themes emerging for the athletes' subgroup.

The researcher chose this specific age group because ages 10-14 represent a very specific stage of the LTAD model. This is a time where athletes were transitioning into more physically demanding training and competition regimes. However, athletes are also still at an age where they are developing and cannot be rushed into competition. This LTAD stage is defined as the Training to Train stage and is classified as when young athletes learn how to train and learn the basic skills of their specific sport. Additionally, athletes participated in aerobic activities to prepare for sporting events such as warm-ups and cool-downs, stretching, hydration, and nutrition, mental preparation, and pre-and post-competition recovery routines (Balyi, 2001). Youth soccer players within this stage are dealing with a transition from just learning the

fundamentals of sport, into competition and training, with emphasis on training. The ratio of training to competition at this stage in the LTAD model varies, but experts believe that for best results a child should be involved in 60% training and 40% competition for their specific sport (Balyi et al., 2013). These percentages can vary, but for this stage in the model it is most important for the athletes to train in competitive situations that will prepare them for competition and games. Balyi (2001) further stated that athletes who miss this stage might never reach their full potential, which makes it an essential stage to evaluate within youth soccer academies.

2.3.1 Sampling. For this study, purposeful sampling strategies were used to ensure information-rich cases from each participant (Creswell, 2012). The groups were homogenous, as each participant was involved within a specific subgroup: academy athletes, parents, and coaches. Each subgroup was described in depth and because there was similarity across participants, it allowed for minimal variability leading to saturation and shared experiences (Creswell, 2012). The reason for having these three subgroups was to obtain multiple perspectives from individuals understanding their academy experiences. By having more than one perspective, the researcher was able to understand the different lived experiences across these subgroups and gain a holistic representation for the LTAD model within the soccer academies and the experiences the participants have had with LTAD. Additionally, to justify the involvement for including a parent subgroup, within the culture of soccer, parents are very involved. Parents will watch both practices and games making sure that they do not miss anything that their child is involved in, which led to the researchers determining that they would be a viable subgroup within the study with the ability to discuss LTAD.

Additional to snowball sampling, criterion and cluster sampling were also used, as there was a certain criteria required for the athletes to be selected for the study (Creswell, 2012). The

sampling criterion included only male athletes. The researcher decided that only including males within the athlete subgroup would allow for more shared experiences. Also, there was gender inequality in terms of participants within the soccer academies, as there are more male registrants than females. This was determined by the researcher, as one of the academies participating in the study only had a male program. Furthermore, one could guess that participant involvement within the academies might be differentially experienced based on gender. While interesting, a gender analysis was beyond the scope of the present study and, therefore, only males were interviewed for their experiences. The other subgroups (parents and coaches) included both sexes. For the parent subgroup, the parent who was most involved with the academy was interviewed. The coaches group included anyone ranging from: head coach, assistant coach, and technical directors. The researcher wanted athletes, parents, and coaches who were familiar with the academy structure and had lived experiences within the academy. This led to the researcher to only allow participants to be eligible for the study if they were registered within academy soccer for at least two years. Having at least two years of experience at an academy level allowed for more information-rich interviews from the athletes and parents. Similarly, coaches had to have at least two years' of experience coaching at an academy in order to gain knowledgeable information in regards to the LTAD model.

2.4 Procedures

Participants started by completing a demographic questionnaire prior to a semi-structured interview. The demographic questionnaires were given to the parents and the coaches. Some of the demographic questionnaires were completed by the participants in person, whereas some were e-mailed to the researcher prior to interviews occurring. It was used to determine which participants met the requirements to partake in the study. Additionally, it allowed the researcher

to determine the participant's background information which helped structure some interview questions accordingly.

2.4.1 Demographic questionnaires. There were two individual demographic questionnaires created for the current study (refer to Appendices F & G). Specifically, one questionnaire was created for the parents and one for the coaches. The parents' questionnaire included general demographic questions such as personal information (gender and who was primary person involved with academy), contact information (phone number & e-mail) and their child's information (what sports they play, age, how long have they been associated with the academy, etc.). The coaches' questionnaire also included personal and contact information. Additionally, there was a section on coaching experience and how long they have been associated with both academy soccer and that particular academy. The information collected from these demographic questionnaires helped determine which participants met the requirements to participate in the semi-structured one-on-one interviews.

2.4.2 Semi-structured interviews. As previously mentioned, there were 21 participants that participated in 20 separate interviews, with one interview being completed with two athletes. The semi-structured interviews for each subgroup ranged in length. For the athletes, the interviews averaged 15 minutes in length (range 8-21 minutes). Parental interviews averaged 18 minutes in length (range 14-31 minutes), and the coaches interviews averaged 24 minutes in length (range 18-36 minutes). Some of the interviews occurred in person and the other interviews were telephone conversations. The interview questions varied from general experience questions, activities occurring within the youth soccer academy, and goals developed from participating within academy soccer (refer to Appendices H, I, & J). Interviews took place throughout the latter half of 2016 (September-December) and into 2017 for the months of (January-February).

Semi-structured interview questions were developed to help guide the responses of the participants but not bias the responses. The researcher is a competitive soccer player, and they considered their own background experiences and interests to avoid bias within the research. The researcher informed each participant that they played soccer to make them aware that he would know terminology and examples that they wished to share. To avoid bias, the researcher kept a reflexive journal that ensured the researcher was aware of their own biases and perspectives of themselves, as well as the participants who were being interviewed (Patton, 2002).

Questions were geared towards understanding the athlete, parent, and coach experiences with the LTAD model within a soccer academy. Interviews were based on non-biased open-ended questions that permitted additional probes by the researcher if necessary. When participants indicated that they were not fully aware of the LTAD model (specifics, guidelines, meaning, etc.), the researcher probed the participant by asking about experiences within the academy that were reflective of the LTAD stage such as the format of practices, games, communication, training schedule, etc. Using this procedure, individuals were able to reflect upon LTAD principles within the academy even if they did not know exactly what they were when asked.

2.5 Data Analysis

For phenomenological research, Tesch (1990) stated that data collection and data analysis may occur at the same time. Data analysis involved both data organizing and data interpretation for each participant interview. Two triangulation methods were used to evaluate the data. The first method of triangulation utilized was investigator triangulation. This occurred with the primary researcher first evaluating, organizing, and exploring the interviews that were then examined by an additional researcher before any themes were determined. The second method of

triangulation utilized was data triangulation. Data triangulation involved the different sources of information that were gathered throughout the interviews. Both of these methods of triangulation helped to strengthen the research study (Patton, 2002).

Additionally, field notes taken during each interview helped the researcher record specific observations, which added meaning to the understanding of the experiences. The information that was obtained from the data collection was enhanced through the use of field notes. The researcher also recorded the relevant information throughout the duration of each interview. This information specifically for the coaches' subgroup, allowed the researcher to understand the importance for the coaching levels obtained. The researcher also kept track of how each interview was going and was aware of the body language of the participant, as well as other emotions and reactions that occurred throughout the interview. The researcher found that some participants had passionate feelings about the LTAD model being beneficial for youth development. All of the participants were able to complete the interviews and no interviews had to be stopped from boredom, heavy emotions, or inability to answer the question.

All interviews were transcribed and provided to the participants to check for accuracy and validity. Member checks allowed for the participants to clarify any information that they discussed throughout the interview, as well as add, omit, or change any additional information in some areas that the participant might not have been thinking of during the interview (Creswell, 2012). The transcripts were sent to the parent and coach participants via e-mail as it was the most direct form of transfer. This allowed for the participants to return the member check if they wished to change any information. For the member checks, the researcher did not have to change any original information for the participants as all participants were articulate and content with their responses. For the athletes, most of them were too young to have e-mail, so the researcher

called them on the phone to discuss if they wished to add, omit, or change any additional information. The athlete subgroup also did not change any original data collected.

Data analysis occurred from an inductive analysis approach. Inductive analysis allowed the researchers to become completely immersed within the details and specifics of the data as the researchers found patterns, categories, and themes (Creswell, 2012). The researcher utilized both the demographic questionnaires and semi-structured interviews within the inductive analysis. The researchers first explored the interviews by reading them multiple times, the researchers were able to immerse themselves within the data collected (Tesch, 1990). The researchers analyzed the data working inductively from particulars to more general perspectives going back and forth, developing a coding scheme and categorizing the responses, until they were able to develop patterns within the data that then led to themes emerging (Creswell, 2012). After the themes emerged, subthemes were found within the coinciding themes that helped demonstrate the experiences of the participants. For example, the theme for parents (Knowledge of the LTAD Model) had three subthemes that emerged (Parents were not knowledgeable about the LTAD model, LTAD in the academy is beneficial, and Knowledge regarding the training structure). Within the quotations from the participants, the subthemes allowed the researchers to pull out individual meaning units that highlighted individual thoughts, ideas, and pieces of information that the participants shared in the interviews (Tesch, 1990). The process of developing meaning units was thorough, as a research team made sure to not lose the context for the participant experiences. By having meaning units, the researcher was able to describe each theme and the respective meaning units that emerged within the themes. For the current study, the subgroups (athletes, parents, and coaches) were all separated when investigating for themes and their

corresponding meaning units, which were listed in tables following each section of results (refer to Table 2, 3, and 4).

Methodological rigor was established through the application of verification, validation, and validity (Creswell, 2012). Verification, validation, and validity were all key components for phenomenological analysis within the current study. Verification occurred from reflexive journaling, triangulation, and field notes collected. A reflexive journal allowed the researcher to write down their position before, during, and after interviews were conducted. The researcher was able to describe their own predispositions and inform their interpretation of the information that was developed from the study, as well as what they were able to gain from that information. Having this reflexive journal allowed the researcher to avoid imposing meanings on the data and be more fully open to the data acknowledging what they learned from the phenomenon (Creswell, 2012). Each interview was read over, multiple times, by the researchers to obtain an overall feeling for them (Creswell, 2012). Investigator triangulation allowed the researchers to read the interviews, categorize the data, and come to an agreement to develop the themes, which allowed for the results to be reliable and avoid bias (Smith & McGannon, 2017). Validation came from the multiple data collection methods utilized by the researcher (demographic questionnaire, semi-structured interviews, and member checks). More specifically, member checks allowed for the participants involved to assess their responses and validate whether the data was an accurate representation to reflect their experiences (Smith & McGannon, 2017). By the participants not having to change, add, or omit any information, the interviews were deemed credible and the research valid (Smith & McGannon, 2017). These methods allowed the researcher to describe the experiences that occurred within the phenomenon of youth soccer academies. Descriptive validity allowed the researcher to report on information from each

specific interview, allowing for more accuracy and worth from the data collected, which was essential to understanding the interviews. After examining each interview, with interpretive validity the researcher was able to understand the significance from the data collected and treat each statement from the participants with equal worth (Maxwell, 2002). By having this methodological rigor, the researchers were able to find shared experiences from the current study that will help grow the body of empirical evidence examining the experiences and implementation with the LTAD model.

Table 1
Parent-Athlete Relationship

Parent	Athlete
Heather	Matt
Tom*	Mike
Pam	Tyler
Sheldon	Nick
Jon	Cory
Cam	Kurt
Doug	Kyle
Patricia	Alex

***Coach at an academy**

Chapter 3: Results

The results are presented in three sections. The first section describes characteristics of the academy. The second section provides background demographic information regarding the athletes, parents, and coaches. The final section presents themes surrounding Long-Term Athlete Development in soccer academies from the athletes', parents', and coaches' perspectives.

3.0.1 Academy profiles. Coaches from all four soccer academies within the Southern Ontario region consented to be part of the study. All of the academies had been in practice for at least 10 years. Each of the academy websites presented the importance of overall athlete development, but only one of the academies specifically named the Long-Term Athlete Development Model. Three of the academies had both male and female programs/teams, whereas one academy ran a male only soccer program. All academies offered specific training programs to multiple age groups. Training progression began with individual technical training and development to younger athletes to elite academy soccer teams for older athletes. Three academies were registered as Soccer Academy Alliance Canada (SAAC) academies while one academy was independent.

3.0.2 Demographic information regarding athletes, parents, and coaches. Athlete participants were eight males from the four different soccer academies, with an average age of 11.5 years old (SD 3.2) (age range 9-13) and an average time spent in academy soccer of 3 years (SD 4.9) (year range 2-6). All eight of the athletes participated in multiple sports, both within and outside of school. Of the eight athlete participants, four indicated that they had older siblings who were previously enrolled within a soccer academy, while four athletes indicated that they were the first family member to be part of a soccer academy.

Seven parents across the four academies participated in the study. All parents indicated that they were the most involved parent within their son's academy soccer development. Four of the parents were males and three were females.

Six coaches representing all four academies participated in the study. Coaching experience at the academy level averaged for 11.3 years (SD 6.2). All of the academy coaches were coaching the elite academy teams, while still being involved with the development programs and progression of academy team training. All of the coaches had a minimum coaching standard of the Provincial (Ontario) 'B' License, a registered NCCP course. Additionally two coaches had further training which included a FIFA "B" License, and an American National Youth License.

3.1 Thematic Results

The follow sections provide insight for themes and meaning units that were developed for each of the subgroups. The thematic results are presented in the following order: Athletes' Experiences, Parents' Experiences, and Coaches' Experiences.

3.2 Athletes' Experiences

The criteria used to determine if a theme was established within the responses elicited from the athletes was at least six of the eight athletes stated a clear response reinforcing a similar factor. Overall themes are presented in Figure 1 (refer to appendix K). The following section is an expansion of the theme through supportive quotes. Additionally, athlete meaning units follow the quotations in Table 2.

3.2.1 LTAD Experiences

3.2.1.1 Multisport participation. The Long-Term Athlete Development Model states that early sport training and competition should not be focused entirely on one sport, but rather, optimal performance in one sport is enhanced by participating in a variety of sports during the early years (Balyi et al., 2013). Athletes' evaluation of their activity participation supported this component of the LTAD. While all athletes indicated that soccer was their favourite sport, they also communicated that they enjoyed a variety of sports as well.

Soccer, my favourite sport is soccer. And then sports I play are football, volleyball, baseball, and basketball. And at school anything that comes out I try-out for, like cross-country and track. – Mike

What sports do I play...? I honestly play... I do a lot of athletic stuff, for example I do all the school sports, I play volleyball, basketball, cross-country, I do track and field... soccer other events in track and field such as like long jump and shot put and that's pretty much all the sports at my school. And my favourite sport is soccer. – Alex

3.2.1.2 Academy emphasizes practice and development. Within the Training to Train stage of the LTAD model, which these athletes are currently in, the environment was developed with skill repetition as a priority. The purpose of this was so that execution becomes reliable and that acquired skills may be transferred from a practice to a competitive game scenario (Balyi et al., 2013). All of the athletes commented that they had two or more practices and usually one

game per week. This followed the recommendations for the training-to-train stage of the LTAD model which recommends a 60/40 ratio between times spent practicing and competing.

Three times. So... my... like we do a FIFA 11 warm-up and then we go onto like... like a mini like a few drills and then he like helps us like get the... do it like right. And then we scrimmage afterwards... It's... well its one game a week, and then three practices a week. And I play with the older team during games, when they're short. – Matt

Well, I'm with the academy for three days a week... Three times and a game for my hockey team. Yeah. So on... I think it's Saturday... no Sunday's I have a game on... for hockey so I miss... so I miss soccer for my hockey game and then I play with the year older. – Cory

3.2.1.3 Technical skill development. The objectives for athletes during this stage are to build a strong aerobic base, develop speed and strength, continue to develop their technical skills, and start to be introduced with some sport-specific tactical skills (Balyi et al., 2013). The athletes' comments pertaining to technical skill development were all similar to the recommendations for the Training to Train stage of the LTAD.

We started with some skills, cone skills, and then we went to passing, then after passing we went to passing and shooting, then after that he told us to put all we did in the practice into the game and then that would be the end of the practice. Always have a ball at our feet. – Kurt

Well, so far now, what we're doing right now is mostly fitness so we're doing lots of fitness, footwork, moving our feet a lot and then we're doing some catching, we're doing some low balls and a bit of push the ball so not catching it but when we just push the ball away from the goal, his goal is like for us to be in good shape and be able to catch all the balls. – Nick

3.2.1.4 Positive relationships with coaches. While the LTAD does not specifically detail what the athlete-coach relationship entails, the model does infer that the relationship should be based on respect. In support of this, all of the athletes' interviewed commented that they had a positive relationship with their coaches. Although athletes may have experienced different coaching styles, they still felt that their coach was helping them with their soccer development.

They treat us very well, when we make a mistake they'll tell us but they'll do it in a nice way like they'll tell us what we've done wrong and what we can do better and how we can improve from what we did wrong. – Kurt

They treat me... they treat me nice, you know if I make a mistake they'll tell me they're never rude, or you know they don't pick on me. But they're nice; they respect me, just like I respect them. – Alex

3.2.1.5 A large focus was not placed on winning. The traditional “results based” approach to win-at-all-costs at an early age can cause short-term results, but does not support

long-term engagement and performance in sport (Balyi et al., 2013). Athletes supported this LTAD contention commenting that the main focus of the coaches was not to win but rather to develop the skills of everyone within the game. Athletes described the equal play approach for competitive play and the opportunity to try various positions.

Most of the time it is equal play so I would say it is equal playing time for all of the players, yeah. – Mike

Yeah, yeah there's... there's different shifts sometimes three will go on, or four and after five minutes or around that when he knows you're tired and you've played enough he'll switch it up and he'll switch us back on after. So yeah, we all get a fair amount of playing time. – Alex

Sometimes I play... I play like three different positions. I play on the right, I play on the left, and I play up top. So I'll move around depending on the game. – Tyler

I am a goalie so just goalie. And sorry, one more thing that I forgot to say. Like once every other week we play futsal in the gym. Where I play as a player. – Nick

3.2.1.6 Competitive atmosphere. Competition during the Training to Train stage of the LTAD model allows athletes to overcome adversity and disappointment. During this stage, meaningful practice and competition can challenge an athlete, which has been shown to be beneficial for preparing athletes for future competition (Balyi et al., 2013). Within the academies, the athletes mentioned that it was highly-skilled competition and a positive competitive environment that motivated the athletes to work hard.

It was competitive for sure. It wasn't like rough but it was competitive, there was a lot of passing, there was a lot of running, there was a lot expected of you to run and make passes. – Kurt

Yes it is competitive because... they... if you do something wrong they like correct you and they like force you to (laughs) they just correct you. – Kyle

3.2.1.7 Enjoyment of the soccer academy experience. One goal of the LTAD model is to encourage athletes to take more responsibility and independence in learning new skills in order to progress their development (Balyi et al., 2013). However, it is also recommended that during the Training to Train stage of the LTAD, coaches ensure that competition is still fun and enjoyable. This recommendation was supported in that all of the athletes' stated that they were enjoying their experiences with academy soccer and overall development.

I really like the soccer here and playing, it is competitive and fun to play. I like the practicing and games and being able to just play soccer. It's really helping me with my development and giving me the best opportunity to develop my skills. – Mike

I think it's more competitive than rep and I like it more than rep I think it is... the players are more skilled and they're more fun to play with. I'm having fun at the practices as I have a few friends on the team. – Tyler

3.2.1.8 Knowledge of the LTAD recommendations. Interestingly, as the previous responses indicated, athletes validated the usage of specific LTAD principles within the academy. However, when asked directly about the LTAD model, they knew what it was but they had a hard time describing the specific recommendations and guidelines within it.

They explain to us what we're doing in practice and why we're doing it. Like why we need to work hard. And like I've heard of Long-Term Player Development. That model, but I've never been clearly explained... I think I understand what it means. Like the goal is to change to see... to be able to develop lots of players long-term, that's what I assume it means based on the title, but they'll always tell us what we're doing and why we're doing it. – Nick

Not really to us, I overheard them talking to parents, but not to us... Not... not really like it doesn't really come up as something you... like they talk about that much. – Kurt

Table 2
List of Meaning Units for Athletes

Athlete Themes	Athlete Subthemes	Meaning Units	Respondents
LTAD Experiences	Multisport participation	Two or more sports	A1-8
	Academy emphasizes practice and development	Multiple practices	A1-8
	Technical skill development	Drills Passing Dribbling Shooting Skills Scrimmage (Game) Possession Warm-up Fitness	A1-3, 5, 7-8 A1, 4, 6-8 A3, 5, 7 A5-7 A5, 6, 8 A1, 2, 4-6, 8 A2, 8 A3-5, 8 A2, 4
	Positive relationships with coaches	Encourage Direct instructions Nice Good Respect	A1, 6 A2, 7 A3, 6, 8 A4-7 A2, 8
	A large focus was not placed on winning	Equal playing time	A1, 3, 6-8
	Competitive atmosphere	Very competitive Challenging	A2-4, 6-8 A1, 8
	Enjoyment of the soccer academy experience	Competitive Skill development Fun Enjoyment Best opportunity Friends	A1, 3, 5, 8 A1-3, 7, 8 A1, 3, 5, 6, 7 A1, 2, 4 A1, 2 A3, 6
	Knowledge of the LTAD recommendations	Do not know specifics Not very competitive Develop long-term Never clearly explained to them	A1, 2, 5-7 A3 A2, 4, 8 A2, 4, 5, 6

3.3 Parental Experiences

Parents were interviewed within two specific areas. The first area of inquiry included assessment of factors that influenced their decision to enrol their son in a soccer academy. The second area of inquiry surrounded their knowledge of the LTAD. A theme was determined when five out of seven parents indicated a consensus. The two areas of interest and their emergent themes are presented in Figure 2 (refer to Appendix L). Elaboration of the theme through supporting quotations will be discussed in this section. Additionally, meaning units for the parents are presented after the quotations in Table 3. Parental comments that do not support the overriding theme will be reflected upon in the discussion section.

3.3.1 Reasons for Enrolling their Child in a Soccer Academy

3.3.1.1 Quality coaching and development. Parents stated that their reason for enrolling their son within academy soccer was due to the development focused programming and the quality of highly trained coaches.

I just wanted something for him but something that I thought was more... more focused in the... into basically teach the team you know like basically qualified coaches instead of the volunteer coaches who might have or have not the qualifications. I did not know what I was going into it with the academy but I expected that the coaching would be more qualified and that there would be more distinct teaching on the game instead of focusing on kind of winning games and just playing the game you know. –

Doug

I chose this academy because I have been looking around online and I felt that it... it looked well to me I didn't really know too much about soccer so to me I had been looking online and to me it seemed really organized, like the webpage and when I looked online as to what they said about the academy how it was a developmental academy and it seemed to me that it was focused on development and not so much on... you know the politics of like you know wins and everything is winning. – Patricia

3.3.1.2 Skill development. Parents mentioned throughout their interviews that they wanted their son to gain technical skills while playing academy soccer.

We definitely want our son to progress and just basically keep up his skills, learn new skills; I mean our goal is that he eventually can possibly play at a university. – Pam

Yeah, I think just... I just want him to be trained at the best possible... like he does want to be a professional soccer player and I'm sure a lot of kids, boys that age do (laughs) especially if they're in an academy but he's really got it in his mind that that's the thing he wants to work towards and I just want them to be able to help him get to where he wants to go, like develop his skills, and I find, you know what I found we've only been there in an academy with our academy, for two years maybe not even, and he's made

such an improvement what they've done with like him...

what they've taught him, amazing yeah. – Heather

3.3.1.3 Enrolment decisions were not based on LTAD implementation. Parents commented that implementation of the LTAD model within the soccer academy did not influence their decision to select that academy for their child.

Well actually I didn't know that until... I thought... I didn't realize it was a different system when... when he went to our academy we had other reasons for going there and we just learned. – Heather

Well, the fact that they follow that model I mean it's again I think... I kind of... I had more general expectations then... I mean... I didn't... I did not take my son to an academy because of the... because they follow this long-term player development, this was not necessarily the... the motivation it was more like because I had kind of a... I wanted them to get exposed to physically people who really teach soccer. – Doug

3.3.1.4 Opportunity to become an elite soccer player. Parents saw the soccer academy instruction as a way to increase the probability of their son becoming an elite soccer player. While they wanted their child to have a positive experience and life balance along the way, they also wanted to give their child the best opportunity to develop into a professional/elite athlete.

We want life balance for our son, that is hard to do with the level of soccer, it's almost like you're all or nothing and we

as a family have to make a choice and we have to balance... life priorities with soccer and... but we also feel if you're going to do something you're going to do it to the best of your ability... my son being a natural and strong athlete he's doing well in soccer so therefore we are willing to provide the opportunity for my son to advance with soccer and we don't want to hold him back in any way, shape, or form with the understanding that he needs to commit to it as well. – Cam

I just like that... I just want to help him like achieve his goal, you know however far he takes it I want to be there to support him and to make sure that I make the best decisions on which way to go like next... yeah but I just think that as long as he's being treated properly and treated fairly, which I didn't think he was at the other place, that's important. – Heather

3.3.2 Knowledge of the LTAD model

3.3.2.1 Parents were not knowledgeable about the LTAD model. Parents lacked knowledge regarding the specific recommendations and proposed training progression of the LTAD model.

I don't have a lot of knowledge about it... I just know that it's... skills focused... it's not focused on winning games it's all about development and development at certain ages

and I know that they look at different targets for different age groups and this is basically the first year where it starts to actually... really sort to start to count some of the games but it is very much focused on development over winning and losing. – Pam

I didn't have any prior knowledge of the model, and you know what the coaches... not so much, they mention that they follow the long-term player development program but they've never actually explained what it is. – Patricia

3.3.2.2 LTAD in the academy is beneficial. Although parents were not aware of the LTAD progression requirements or specifics, they were aware that the soccer academy, in which their son participated, followed the LTAD progression guidelines. They felt that because the academy followed LTAD principles it was beneficial for their son and helped with their soccer development.

It all starts with the fundamentals, if the kids are taught the fundamentals and they start at grassroots and work their way through it, long-term player development in the end you're going to have successful players all around and... how do I feel? I think it's a good thing. – Cam

I'm... you know... the academy soccer the way they have it right now, I like the fact that it is very focused on development and not so much focused on these wins and losses... I think it's really important at this age that they

don't ride children for mistakes and this is where you are able to make these mistakes and learn from them and you grow from them I really support it I think it's... it's a really great program that's been developed for growth. – Pam

3.3.2.3 Knowledgeable regarding the training structure. Although parents were not knowledgeable about LTAD recommendations within the academies, they were very aware of the daily activities within the academy that involved multiple weekly structured practices designed for skill development.

They do a lot of drill based... they do a lot of drills, they... they do a lot of skill development, like footwork, I know that they are incorporating a futsal league on Saturdays to... which is highly developmental towards ball skills and just quick movements and... positions, they do scrimmage at the end of every game. – Pam

They are practicing three times a week and they usually start out with a little bit of a warm-up and then they got some skills and drills that they run and then in between the drills for skill development they put small games, you know three a side, four a side into a small area to play out a game and perhaps make some corrections based off of the skill that they were taught and then they'll go back to another skill training session and then they'll break out again in teams and do the games. There are a lot of touches

on the ball, like they are passing drills, dribbling skills, shooting skills, I think like basic skills and stuff like that. –

Jon

Table 3
List of Meaning Units for Parents

Parental Themes	Parental Subthemes	Meaning Units	Respondents
Reasons for Enrolling their Child in a Soccer Academy	Quality coaching and development	Geographic area Qualified coaching Development Politics with club team	P1, 2 P1-4, 6-7 P4-7 P3, 4
	Skill development	Develop soccer skills Life skills	P1-7 P4, 5
	Enrolment decisions were not based on LTAD implementation	Structure Coaching Individual player development Competition Did not know there was a different system	P1, 4, 6 P1, 3-5 P1, 4, 5, 7 P2, 7 P3
	Opportunity to become an elite soccer player	Life balance Elite opportunity (Scholarship) Fun Achieve goals Their own choice	P1, 2, 4, 6 P1, 2, 4-7 P2, 7 P3, 5, 6 P2, 3
Knowledge of the LTAD model	Parents were not knowledgeable about the LTAD model	Structured practice Development focused Not focused on winning games No prior knowledge Own Research	P1, 5 P2, 5 P2, 5 P1-3, 6, 7 P4, 5
	LTAD in the academy is beneficial	Fundamentals Focused on development Quality coaching Great program	P1, 7 P1-7 P4, 6 P1, 2, 4, 5
	Knowledge regarding the training structure	Technical drills Skill development Scrimmage (Games) Practicing multiple times Small-sided games Warm-up	P1-3, 5, 6 P2, 3, 5-7 P1, 2, 4, 6, 7 P1-7 P2-5, 7 P2, 4

3.4 Coach's Experiences

Three specific areas of interest were assessed with the coaches. These areas were related to their own coaching experiences, issues surrounding the LTAD, and their objectives for the athletes. Themes and meaning units were developed in each area. In order for a theme to be developed, four of the six coaches had to report a similar perspective. The specific areas and supporting themes are highlighted in Figure 3 (refer to Appendix M). This section provides theme elaboration through supporting quotations. Following the quotations, meaning units are presented in Table 4. Alternative perceptions than those portrayed within the themes will be reflected upon in the discussion section.

3.4.1 Academy Experiences

3.4.1.1 Involvement with programming. The coaches indicated that they had a high degree of control over what drills they were running at practice. The LTAD model is a framework that does not offer specific technical drills. Therefore, coaches were able to interpret this recommendation as they saw fit in actual practices.

I'm the owner of the soccer academy. And... and my function in the academy right now is... is I assist coaches

I'm an assistant coach for one team and I also am a part of the technical team kind of overseeing the academy. I'm quite involved yeah, I got people that work for me but I'm very involved in the day to day in person and direction of the academy – Dan

So I am the technical director of our soccer academy. I'm responsible for all the programming I'm responsible... I

manage coaches, I hire coaches, I train coaches, I try and implement long-term player development programs for each team's annual cycles. – Chad

3.4.1.2 Philosophies of the soccer academy. The coaches were able to develop the overall philosophy for their soccer academies. There was consensus that the philosophy of the soccer academies was to develop successful individual athletes and not necessarily winning teams.

Yeah, I mean, I think the philosophies have always been about developing the individual and that long-term player development maybe came after... defined what... we were doing from the very early time... always about... you know, from... that perspective, like looking at holistic views of the... person, not just about soccer trying to find good... the best training environment for that person treating everyone as an individual, trying to develop individuals rather than develop teams. So... you know there's lots of things that, there's lots of facets to that. – Chad

What is the idea...? I guess it is like a... a higher level of playing, an opportunity to be more passionate about the game so I guess... the philosophy is the opportunity to train more often and the opportunities... and knowledge to play the game. So it's more than anything I would say to be able to develop the players to their best of their abilities. – Mark

3.4.2 Long-Term Athlete Development

3.4.2.1 LTAD implementation in the academy. Coaches felt that the LTAD was better implemented in the academy than in club or city regulated soccer organizations. This was due to the fact that, academies have more highly trained coaches than club coaches and that they have an individual development philosophy, whereas, soccer clubs emphasize team wins, rather than individual skill improvements.

In my opinion, the long-term player development actually is better in the academy system than the club system, seeing that most of the coaches here have licenses, they're maybe not professional coaches because there's not a big thing in Canada as professional coaches... but they're eager coaches that have done more than just the volunteer roles and the basic soccer. Like myself I have my Provincial 'B' and I'm working... I'm already on the list for my UEFA "B" for next year... So in practices and games we really don't spend a lot of time from the U8 to the U14 on tactical, where the players don't mentally get it, we're working mainly on technical focus: ball control, passing, recognizing space, vision, understanding width and depth, more of the principles of play than actually the lines and circles for tactical positions. – Steve

Well, long-term player development came from the academy model; it's not a club model. Clubs are trying to,

to do this now and the... the thing about it is to... really help the individual grow, right it's not about helping the team grow. So that we're trying to change the philosophy of the club system right... so as, I don't know if you're aware or not but our club director is one of the guys that founded long-term player development here in Canada... in Ontario actually, you know, MG with DJ and one other person actually wrote the whole model out for the OSA (laughs) to do this, including OPDL and all that kind of grassroots thing. – Tom

3.4.2.2 Knowledge of the LTAD model. Coaches were very aware of the specific principles outlined in the Training to Train stage of the LTAD for boys aged 10-14. Coaches had a complete understanding of LTAD recommendations, as well as the way that they implemented these recommendations.

Yeah I mean like... I mean under the age of 10 you know we're playing seven a side, over the age of 10 when we get into competition, we're getting into nine a side but like we're doing a lot of training still in terms of two a side – three a side – four a side, so there's still a huge focus on small-sided play in training and as well as in competition so that's still a big emphasis and then in addition to that there's obviously a very big focus on technical skills and refining... developing and refining technical skills and they

are being introduced to a more formal speed and strength and conditioning program that we do with a strength and conditioning coach so that... that focuses you know on all the ABC's and the SAQ you know speed, agility, balance, coordination, quickness but like so... and then we are also you know very much we're using movement and touches on the ball drills like we really don't like static drills we like to use very much dynamic kind of exercises or activities and small-sided games that have conditions, so we use a lot of condition soccer that involves decision making and because that's for us very-very important at that this age as well so not one game, repetitive basic drills but more game situation. – Dan

Yes, so with my players for example what I'm trying to do is... the first and most important part is the touches, we have had a lot of success with our players being more technical and when players from overseas, when we've had coaches come over and they've looked at players they've always said that our players are technically good and that is a result from doing all the touches and it builds muscle memory and it... it allows them to try stuff that... so that is a success right from there so what I want to get out of my players especially because they are still at that age I'm still

going to have them for a couple of years before they move on, I'm just I just want to get them to try things and kind of speed their game up a bit so every single year we get a bit more intensive we get more in detail with the playing and then at a younger age we are focused mainly on just being technical, so all the touches and stuff, the age I have now we start to look at the tactical so we start to look at more mental side of the game, reading the game reading plays, so that's where the progression comes with age for at least the U10 I would say... U9 they're getting there, they are starting to understand that more but at U10 we start to look more at the tactical. – Brad

So particulars for 10-14 would be... so they're in sort of Training to Train phase of long-term player development I guess transitioning to training to compete so for example we place no emphasis on scores or standings up until the age of fourteen the we... we recognize that the scores of a youth game very rarely have reflection on the actual balance of the game you know because, basically because every single player is making errors all the time, like constantly making errors. So it becomes impossible to predict which error is going to result in a goal, or which error is going to result in a goal kick. The goal kick doesn't

have any bearing on the score line so it can't be measured, where as you know one error leading to a goal is measured so you know not having an emphasis on score lines with then mean we are moving players out of the best position into different positions and we know that we might take our strong centre midfielder who is kind of holding it together, as soon as we move him out of that position it might invite some pressure, it might... concede some goals, but it's important for that strong centre midfielder to maybe get a flavour for what it is like on the left side of midfield because maybe his favourite position is centre midfield but then he can empathise with what the other players want from him having seen it from the outside. – Chad

3.4.2.3 Adaptation of the LTAD model. Coaches mentioned throughout the interviews that the framework for the LTAD was working for the overall skill development of athletes but that given the opportunity; they would change some aspects of the model to add additional improvements.

Well I would prefer, and I mean that it is a personal opinion but I am not the only one to share it but I would prefer smaller-sided soccer at the younger stage level like I would prefer five-or-six a side at under 10, I would prefer seven a side at under 12, I would prefer smaller-sided

soccer than we're doing currently other than currently identified under the games structure you know? – Dan

With the... for the LTPD model the only thing I would change some of the restrictions for time on the field. So... currently I can... during the younger years they only allow one of two practices a week at an hour and a half, I'm not exactly sure what that time frame is... but I don't think it's enough time on the field. It doesn't need to be structured but its high energy high pressure all the time, but there needs to be more time on the field to actually learn. – Brad

3.4.3 Objective for Athletes

3.4.3.1 Create a positive experience for athletes. The coaches clearly articulated that one of the most important objectives of the academy was to promote soccer enjoyment and positive experiences for players within the academy. While they recognized that skill development was paramount to the academies purpose, they also understood that creating a positive and enjoyable environment was necessary as well.

Define for a successful experience, love of the game, they have to love the game of soccer first and foremost because then they're going to keep coming back and... I don't think there's anything... any one thing more important when you're talking generally, maybe specifically some people might say yeah my most important thing is this, but lots of general things would be: enjoyment of the game, team

bonding, camaraderie, friendship, healthy lifestyle all of those things, you know you want from every single person.

– Chad

As long as they have a smile on their face, and at the end of the day you know what the kids remember, they remember like even at the end of the season how they progressed, like how they feel like... like every one of them talks about... even my son there, the end of the season he knows he got better and if... if he didn't I would know (laughs) right, there's no smile on his face or anything, he's driven he loves the game, he hasn't asked to play any other sport (laughs) kind of thing and in terms of competitive nature you know, have fun with football and stuff at school and that kind of thing but "hey you want to try hockey this year? No. – Tom

Table 4
List of Meaning Units for Coaches

Coaches Themes	Coaches Subthemes	Meaning Units	Respondents
Academy Experiences	Involvement with programming	Very involved roles	C1-6
	Philosophies of the soccer academies	Maximize player potential Best opportunity Individual player development Creative players LTAD Holistic development	C1, 6 C1, 5 C1-6 C2 C1, 3-6 C1, 3, 5
Long-Term Athlete Development	LTAD implementation in the academy	Believe in LTAD Focused on technical skills Prepare players for higher competition Mission is to improve each individual player Better in academy system	C1, 3-6 C1-6 C2, 4 C1, 3, 5, 6 C4, 5
	Knowledge of the LTAD model	Small-sided games Technical skills Tactical skills ABC's (Agility, speed, and balance) Muscle memory Developing a flavour for the game Not just winning games	C1, 3, 5, 6 C1-6 C2, 4, 5 C1, 2, 4-6 C2 C3, 5, 6 C1, 4, 6
	Adaptation of the LTAD model	Small-side games More time on the field Change coaches training Change travel restrictions Overall game development	C1, 3, 5, 6 C1, 4, 6 C2, 4-6 C3 C3, 6
Objective for Athletes	Create a positive experience for athletes	More confidence Fitness Love of the game Enjoyment Technical Improvement Holistic development Long-term goals Scholarships	C1 C2-5 C3, 5, 6 C3, 5, 6 C1-6, C1, 3, 4 C1, 5, 6 C2, 6

Chapter 4: Discussion

The purpose of this study was to examine the experiences that athletes, parents, and coaches involved in Ontario soccer academies with guiding principles of the LTAD model. While currently there exists information in the literature regarding the guidelines of the LTAD model, there is a lack of empirical evidence with regard to LTAD implementation. Furthermore, there exists limited information regarding the LTAD model from athletes', parents', or coaches' perspectives. Therefore, the purpose of the present study was to evaluate the implementation of the LTAD guidelines within four Ontario soccer academies from the perspective of athletes, parents, and coaches. Several interesting themes emerged that were different for each group of individuals who were evaluated. Discussion will be presented regarding each group of participant's knowledge of the LTAD, soccer academy implementation of the model, perceived benefits of the model, and improvements to the model that would benefit soccer in Ontario. This study was one of the first to evaluate the implementation of the LTAD model within youth Ontario soccer academies. A summary of the key findings for this study are listed in Appendix N.

4.1 Athlete Experiences

Athletes stated that they were all involved in multiple sports, besides academy soccer. According to Balyi et al. (2013), it is within the Training to Train stage of the LTAD model that athletes begin to refine their focus from many sports to include only a few sports in different seasons, so the sports do not conflict with one another. Athlete statements supported the LTAD recommendations for late-specialization team sports. It was important to have early engagement within that sport, as the athletes have to get comfortable with touches on the ball and the dynamic movements involved within a soccer game. However, it was also important that these athletes were not specializing in soccer too early in their developmental stages and they were still

obtaining multiple skills across a few sports (Balyi et al., 2013). These findings also supported previous research suggesting that early sport engagement and deliberate practice for a primary sport, with participation in a variety of a few other sports, can lead to elite performance (Ford, Ward, Hodges, & Williams, 2009).

Athletes also reflected on their practice and technical skill development, as the athletes were practicing multiple times per week and were continuing to develop their technical skills. The Training to Train stage of the LTAD is arguably the most important and challenging stage in terms of skill development. This stage is strenuous for athletes' bodies because often times they are experiencing growth through puberty at the same time they are experiencing a heavy training volume based on refining basic sport-specific skills, while acquiring new tactical abilities (Balyi et al., 2013). Programing within the academies supported LTAD recommendations from the athletes' perspective, as the athletes stated that they were developing strength, speed, and aerobic capacity throughout their practices.

The LTAD also suggests that periodization is an essential component of developing athletes at all levels and that an annual cycle for summer sports has a preparation period starting in October, with competition occurring in the summer months (Balyi et al., 2013). The soccer academies appeared to follow these recommendations for the training schedule but athletes competed throughout the year at the academies. Interesting to note, Ford and Williams (2012) investigated late-teen professional and non-professional (elite) soccer players. They found that the professional players spent more time practicing and playing soccer growing up than the non-professional (elite) players and they gathered more competition time throughout the years (Ford & Williams, 2012). For the current study, the competition that the athletes were involved in during the winter training sessions involved scrimmaging with their team, other academy teams,

and weekend indoor/futsal games. Therefore, too much competition than is recommended within the LTAD for this stage may have been experienced by the athletes. However, with the academies trying to develop elite, potentially professional players, it is not hard to see why this recommendation may have been violated. Proper periodization needs to be closely monitored within the academies in order to prevent injuries and burnout within the athletes.

The athletes also felt that they were developing positive relationships with the coaches, which may further contribute to increased participation, enjoyment of playing academy soccer, and their overall experience. The LTAD does not specifically state that there needs to be positive relationships built between the athletes and coaches for an enjoyable sport-specific experience, but a key factor for the Training to Train stage that the LTAD does mention is character building. Coaches must provide more autonomy for their athletes and build trust, as well as acknowledge the athletes' increased sense of responsibility to their teammates, themselves, and respect for their sport (Balyi et al., 2013). The findings from the current study suggested that positive youth development was occurring within the academies, as players felt that they were respected by the coaches and vice versa. These findings were similar to previous research investigating positive youth development within elite level soccer. Taylor and Bruner (2012) found that having a positive relationship between the player and the coach was beneficial for elite soccer athletes. The researchers concluded that having a positive relationship with the coach may be important for the development of increased personal agency, attention, and effort towards challenges that the athletes would encounter within competitive soccer (Taylor & Bruner, 2012).

Since the mandatory implementation of LTAD, Ontario soccer has tried to change the focus of soccer from results based to a more enjoyable game for all athletes. Ontario soccer changed their approach and implemented the LTAD model in 2013 to allow children more

touches on the ball, follow a clear development pathway, and to have more qualified coaches understanding players' needs at each developmental stage (Ontario Soccer Association, 2013). Soccer academies adopted the same approach. Athletes in the present study did not feel pressure from the coaches to win games. They all mentioned that they were obtaining equal playing time, playing in multiple positions, and not being punished for making mistakes. However, within team sports there is a winning and a losing team. For athletes to enjoy their experience within academy soccer, it is beneficial to have a competitive atmosphere to keep athletes motivated (Balyi et al., 2013). Competition in sport allows for athletes to learn how to deal with adversity that they will inevitably face outside of sport. All of the athletes mentioned that they enjoyed the competition at their academies. The athletes were participating in environments with meaningful competition throughout their academies. This competition allowed for the athletes to stay motivated and work hard, and overcome the challenges associated with competition. These findings are similar to previous work by Keegan, Spray, Harwood, and Lavallee (2010) who found that competition among peers had positive benefits as players tried to be better than their teammates and their teammates tried to be better than them, and so doing, everyone became a better soccer player.

The final theme that was discovered for the athletes' was in regards to their knowledge of the LTAD recommendations. The athletes previously heard their parents and coaches using that term before, but they had a hard time describing any details or knowing any recommendations for their specific stage in the model. This is a very significant finding. Although athletes could not state the recommendations and specifics of the LTAD model, they could clearly articulate what the academies were implementing in terms of training to games schedules, motivational culture, coaching relationships, and individual development. For the most part, the perceived

experiences of the athletes validated the implementation of LTAD guidelines. Though athletes may not know about the LTAD model in theory, they are experiencing the behavioral recommendations within the model.

4.2 Parental Experiences

Parents were first asked to reflect on factors that influenced their decision to enroll their child in an academy soccer program. Parents indicated that they enrolled their son in academy soccer because of the development focused programming and the quality of coaching. Parents also wanted a life balance for their child so that they could be involved in a well-structured sport environment and also have a positive experience while doing so. Despite parents indicating their desire for a positive sport environment, they also wanted their son to develop technical skills that would help them become a better soccer player. Previous research suggests that parents enrolled their children in elite sports organizations in order to provide an opportunity for both collegiate scholarships and potentially professional contracts (DiFiori, 2010). In relation to previous research, the findings of the current study also suggest that parents were focused on giving their son an opportunity to become an elite soccer player and wanted to have their son take their soccer skills as far as they possibly could. Advancement through soccer was a recurring theme for parents.

The parents felt that their child's soccer skills improved and that their skill was much better than when the athletes first started at the academy. The current study had similar findings from research by Livingston and Schmidt (2016) who found that parents were seeing greater skill improvement among their children, especially those who were engaged in sport from an early age. Within the Training to Train stage in the LTAD, Balyi et al. (2013) recommend that parents have patience during this stage as their son is going through puberty and the potential for growth

spurts may slow down skill acquisitions. It is encouraged that parents are aware of this fact so that if an athlete becomes frustrated with learning plateaus, parents can help address these emotions.

Parents felt that within the academy their child was privileged to experience high quality and experienced coaching. The qualified coaching at the academy level, allowed the parents to follow LTAD recommendations and trust the training that the coach was providing for their child. Interestingly, none of the parents indicated that they had any disagreements with the coaches when it came to the type of training that they were providing for their child. Smith, Smoll, and Smith (1989) developed the term “athletic triangle” which was based on the relationships between the coach, parent, and athlete. Smoll, Cumming, and Smith (2011) found that negative interactions between the parents and the coaches could have significant consequences for the child and deter the athletes overall sport experience. By having qualified coaches who have completed their NCCP certification, it allowed the parents to have positive interactions with the coaches, which ultimately benefits the psychological development of their child.

Parents stated that they did not base their decision to enroll their child in the academy based on the academy philosophy of LTAD guidelines. Parents also acknowledged their ignorance regarding the LTAD model but stated that as long as their child was developing and enjoying their experience, they did not care which model was being used.

While parents were not aware of the specifics regarding LTAD specifically, parents were knowledgeable regarding the type of training that the athletes were doing within each practice and that the athletes were involved in multiple, weekly structured practices, which were designed to help with technical skill improvements. Similar to the experience of athletes, when asked,

parents were unable to articulate the specific recommendations of the LTAD model; however, they were clearly able to articulate what specifically their sons did at the academy. They also knew that the academies did implement a player development approach that may align with the LTAD. Regardless, by stating the many factors within the academy such as high coaching qualifications, overall player development, a heavily weighted training to game schedule, the emphasis on a respectful learning environment, and less emphasis on team wins, they were stating their observations of what was happening at the academy, which was inadvertently demonstrating some knowledge of the LTAD recommendations. Once again, similar to the perceptions of the athletes, based on the experiences of the parents, the soccer academies were in compliance with the LTAD recommended training progression.

4.3 Coach Experiences

Coaches were asked to reflect on their academy experience by describing their involvement with the programming and the philosophies of the soccer academies. The coaches indicated that they had a high degree of control over the structure and programming in their practices. The LTAD is a framework that allows coaches to interpret and develop their own technical drills. It is an athlete-centered, coach-driven model and research has confirmed that coaches are a strong determinant for continued sport participation (Horn, 2002). Previous studies have also found that experienced coaches have a great influence on the type of relationships that develop with the athletes. More experience from the coaches led to higher learning from the athletes and a more satisfactory personal experience (Schempp, McCullick, & Mason, 2006). Alternatively, there were a few coaches who commented on the types of coaches that they felt would be beneficial for the academy system. Some of the coaches, when interviewed, said that coaches in Canada still need to become more educated as there was too much discrepancy

between each coach and their training. Additionally, another coach mentioned that it was beneficial to have a young coach training younger athletes as they were able to connect with them and they were more fluid in the type of training methods that they do, unlike some older coaches who might be set in their ways.

The coaches within the current study were able to develop a specific philosophy for academy soccer. Coaches focused on developing individual athletes, not teams. Coaches attempted to provide athletes with the best training environment and equal opportunity to develop skills, required to become a successful soccer player. These findings support LTAD principles, which suggest that players within the Training to Train stage are refining their basic skills, as well as tailoring new tactical knowledge for the athletes (Balyi et al., 2013).

The LTAD model is a stage-by-stage developmental model that allows every child the opportunity to engage in lifelong sport participation and to reach their highest level of optimal potential (Balyi et al., 2013). Interestingly, coaches who were part of academy soccer perceived that LTAD implementation was more of a priority within academy soccer than club soccer. This was due to the fact that academies all had highly trained coaches and focused on individual development, whereas clubs emphasize team wins. The LTAD model states that having a winning-at-all-costs attitude, from an early age, can lead to short-term results but does not support long-term engagement within sport (Balyi et al., 2013). As previously mentioned, the Training to Train stage for the LTAD is one of the most important stages for development. Since 2013, the LTAD has been implemented within Ontario soccer clubs, whereas these academies have all been doing developmental training many years prior.

Interestingly, while not a theme, two coaches believed that academy soccer, although it might be the best training for the athletes, comes at a price that not all can afford. Academy

participation can cost parents thousands of dollars each year for enrollment fees. This cost only allows certain families to be able to afford this training and some highly-skilled players might not be able to benefit from academy soccer due to the price. One of the reasons that soccer is the most popular team sport in Canada is due to the fact that it is affordable for parents. The LTAD model states that sporting systems need to change from exclusion to inclusion (Balyi et al., 2013) and the cost to play academy soccer could be deterring opportunities for some highly-skilled youth soccer players in Ontario.

Coaches were all very aware of the specific principles outlined within the LTAD model. The coaches demonstrated a complete understanding of the recommendations for athletes in the Training to Train stage of the model, as well as how to implement the recommendations for the athletes. Coaches also felt that the LTAD framework worked and that it was beneficial for developing successful athletes. Two coaches indicated that they would change some aspects of the model if possible. Interestingly, unlike club coaches who often lament the lack of more game opportunities within the early stages of the LTAD, academy coaches would like to see more focus placed on small-sided games, allowing for players to have more touches on the ball and more playing time for all athletes. The coaches felt that with the restricted amount of playing time allowed for their academy teams, it was not enough time on the field to allow the players to develop their skills.

The coaches clearly expressed that one of the most important objectives of academy soccer was to promote enjoyment and positive experiences for the athletes. However, they are also aware that to be perceived a successful academy by parents, they must develop elite players as well. Therefore, coaches were focused on developing elite level athletes who enjoyed playing soccer. Previous research has found that academy athletes usually train multiple times per week

and play competitive matches on weekends. Thus, soccer represents a meaningful part of their lives. Despite being physically, psychologically, and emotionally invested within the sport, only a few athletes will make that next step to professional soccer players. For athletes who do not succeed in making this step, Smith and McDonough (2008) highlighted that it was important for athletes to develop through sport the necessary competencies to succeed in other life contexts. Academy coaches play a significant role in making soccer fun and enjoyable so that athletes both understand the game, and love it. Allowing athletes to play soccer for life will contribute to their overall health and wellness, which is one of the main goals for participating in sport (Balyi et al., 2013).

It is important to note that one of the academy coaches felt that although a player development model was being utilized within their academy, it was not specific to the LTAD model. The academy was using a professional team soccer-specific development model as their framework. While there were some overlaps between the two models, it was not the LTAD that was specifically implemented.

Based on the reflection of the soccer academy coaches, it appears that the LTAD model is well understood and well implemented within these academies. There did not appear to be an adverse to the implementation of the LTAD model that can anecdotally be found within club soccer environments. The coaches were highly trained, knowledgeable regarding LTAD Training to Train recommendations, and willing to implement the recommendations. They adhered to, supported, and promoted an individual development approach that emphasized skill advancement versus team wins. They all felt that the LTAD model was working to develop skilled athletes and that if able, they would change the focus of the model at this stage to emphasize small-sided game play even more.

4.4 Overall Findings

There was triangulation between players, parents, and coaches as to the implementation of the LTAD model recommendations for the Training to Train stage within the four soccer academies. Although cost prohibitive for some, soccer academies may be worthwhile for others, in that, athletes experience tenets of the LTAD model such as highly qualified coaching, an individually focused skill advancement perspective, a respectful motivational climate, and a training progression that is commensurate with their development stage. Interestingly, however, it was only the coaches who were knowledgeable regarding the implementation within the academy. Both parents and athletes could clearly articulate the behavioral strategies outlined at the academy with player development as the overriding objective but they could not correlate this with the LTAD model.

This overriding finding could be interpreted in one of two ways. First, one could say that as long as the LTAD model is being implemented and that the athletes are the benefactors of such implementation of the LTAD guidelines by coaches, academies have successfully fulfilled their agenda. Is it necessary for both parents and athletes to know the intricacies of the LTAD model or should they simply know that it is effective and confident in the implementation by academies? Some within the soccer world would say yes. Parents and athletes are on a need to know basis.

A second perspective, however, is that soccer academies could increase their success if both parents and athletes knew the objectives and recommendations of the LTAD model within the academy. Grove (2016) developed six tips for coaches to help parents understand LTAD. The first tip is that LTAD follows stages of human development and coaches need to inform parents that they are training children, not professional players. The following three recommendations

were that the coaches need to inform the parents on where to find the LTAD guide and to read the manual, as well as meet with the parents and talk about the model, and after meeting with the parents they will “get it” (Grove, 2016). Within the current study, some coaches mentioned that they have had meetings with the parents about development and if parents ever wanted to approach them to talk about development, they were happy to. The final two tips were that the LTAD model allowed for more kids to achieve their optimal potential, as more kids can develop into champions and less drop out of sport. Furthermore, as time goes by be sure to share stories that support the LTAD in the sport-specific system (Grove, 2016).

The LTAD is mandatory within Ontario soccer but a new Ontario Player Development League (OPDL) has recently emerged that will have ramifications for the continued support of the LTAD by Ontario soccer. The OPDL has become the new mainstream “elite” league within Ontario youth soccer. The OPDL starts at U13 and the clubs that are in the league are assessed every two years to determine if they are following the correct development patterns. With a discussion from an Ontario Soccer Association (OSA) manager, the OPDL teams have increased over 100% in participation from 2013 to 2016. In discussion with the academy coaches, they all mentioned that they have had some players leave to go play for OPDL clubs, but not the majority. The key factor that the OPDL teams can offer players that academy soccer cannot was that they are able to enroll for OSA sanctioned tournaments, which academies are not allowed. This brings up the question as to why the OSA has taken away the opportunity for academy soccer to participate in sanctioned tournaments? Academy soccer in Ontario, has been developing elite level players for years, but not being able to showcase the players in Ontario tournaments could lead to players missing potential scholarships and other professional opportunities. This could further develop into players leaving the academy system to go play in

the OPDL, or other clubs, which might not have the same level of coaching and focus for development.

4.5 Limitations

As with any research study, there are limitations that must be identified. This study included a small sample of well-established Ontario soccer academies. The recruitment process for these academies occurred by e-mail and personal conversations. There were over 30 academies contacted and seven replied to gain further knowledge about the study and after receiving this information, four academies were willing to participate. This led to the participants being self-selected. The academies that participated may have discussed LTAD because they implemented it. The academies who did not respond to participate within the study might have been avoiding it because they do not implement LTAD. After the academies were willing to participate, coaches and team administrators sent out an e-mail to the parents that a researcher would be attending practices for the upcoming week and if they were interested in participating, to attend the practice. With these recruitment methods, there was the possibility that the participants who were willing to partake in the study were more knowledgeable than the average Ontario soccer athlete, parent, and coach. They also could have been more favourable regarding the experience as well. Therefore, the research may not be completely representative of the entire Ontario soccer academy population.

As well, the athlete participants in this study were 10-14 year old males. This specific age group was quite young, and some athletes were more conversational than others. Key information may not have been relayed. Additionally, with the sample only being male athletes, there could have been noticeable differences in experiences if female athletes were included within the study.

Moreover, the academy coaches who were facilitating the programs were very experienced and knowledgeable about implementing youth development training methods. The academy coaches were all qualified with at least their National Coaching Certification Program (NCCP) recognized, Provincial (Ontario) 'B' Coaching License, which may not be the case for coaches outside of academy soccer.

Another limitation for the current research study was the fact that the Long-Term Athlete Development Model (LTAD) lacks empirical evidence for the implementation of the model. This led to a research team designing interview questions that they believed would bring out information-rich responses. The questions were designed to obtain experiences with LTAD but they were structured in a way that would allow for the subgroups to explain their activities and understandings within academy soccer, as LTAD might be a term they have never heard before.

4.6 Future Research

Future research is required to continue the LTAD model on a larger and potentially more diverse group of participants within Ontario soccer and other sports. The present study focused on academy level soccer, as it was a specific population within Ontario soccer. Future research could further explore academy soccer implementation, or embark into club systems. There are multiple pathways in Ontario soccer that could be explored by researchers that would benefit knowledge about the experiences people have with the implementation of the LTAD model.

It would also be beneficial to expand the research to include females and examine other stages in the LTAD model. For example, researchers could compare and contrast between male and female experiences within academy soccer. As well, researchers could examine the similarities and differences about the experiences with LTAD when athletes are in different developmental stages.

Additionally, longitudinal research examining the experiences people have with the LTAD model would be beneficial. The lack of empirical evidence with the model might be due to the recent implementation, but longitudinal research over the next few years would benefit both the LTAD model and Ontario soccer development. Ontario soccer has a ‘2020 vision’ that is all encompassing for the athletes, coaches, parents, and referees and with more empirical evidence to show that development is occurring within Ontario soccer, it could lead to more enjoyable experiences for everyone involved. Furthermore, this research may enable future researchers to have a better understanding of experiences with the LTAD model within Ontario soccer.

Finally, this research study was designed as a qualitative examination of the perceptions of athletes, parents, and coaches who were involved in academy soccer. After discussion with an academy coach, he described an interesting quantitative measure for the LTAD model implementation called “Technical Benchmark Exercises”. These eight exercises were designed towards soccer athletes in the Training to Train stage, to motivate players to improve their ball skills, short and long range passing, speed and agility, and shooting (Ontario Soccer Association, 2014). Athletes are given one attempt at each exercise excluding controlled running with the ball, and their scores were tallied and compared against a previous national level player. This quantitative method was designed to indicate to coaches, athletes who should follow the elite path in soccer. Utilizing this established criterion measure of LTAD success is an interesting possibility for future research.

4.7 Conclusion

Each year ParticipACTION releases the ‘Canadian Physical Activity Report Card’ for children and youth. In 2016, youth participation for ‘Organized Sport and Physical Activity

Participation' received a 'B' grade, which has had continued improvement over the past decade (ParticipACTION, 2016). This 'B' grade demonstrated that well over half of the Canadian youth population was participating in organized sports. Some of the key findings from the report stated that 76% of 11-15 year olds in Canada reported that they currently participate in organized sports (ParticipACTION, 2016). Additionally, majority of the children participating in organized sports were playing soccer, as it was the number one team sport for participation in Canada (Shendruk, 2014). Canadian soccer was the organized sport where most children were obtaining their daily physical activity recommendations and it was essential for a foundation to be created, which would allow for proper development. The implementation of the LTAD model within soccer is considered to be a large benchmark for success.

This study has been one of the first to qualitatively examine LTAD in Canadian soccer, more specifically, Ontario soccer academies. The main objective of the study was to gain knowledge of the experiences that athletes, parents, and coaches have with LTAD. Semi-structured interviews were conducted with the three subgroups (athletes, parents, and coaches) who have been involved with academy soccer over the past few years. Participants in the study came from four academies across the Southern Ontario regions. Among the many interesting findings, results indicated that the LTAD is being implemented within these Ontario soccer academies. In one circumstance, while the LTAD was not specifically implemented, still an individual player development model was used. This finding is interesting, but only represents a small sample of Ontario soccer academies. Parents still need to be aware of LTAD implementation within academy soccer before enrolling their child, as some academies might think they are implementing the LTAD model, but they are really not. For the soccer academies that participated in the study, the coaches were aware that they are purposefully implementing

the LTAD model within the academy, athletes and parents were less knowledgeable about the LTAD principles while being aware of the structure of the academies, which supported the guidelines. The athletes largely did what they were told to do by the coaches and did not care about LTAD. The parents of the athletes were more focused on academies building their child's skills and opportunity for development and making sure that it was a fun environment. It was clear that parents placed their child in academies to develop as soccer players for higher competition and that they did not want to miss a potential future opportunity for their child's advancement. The coaches on the other hand, were very knowledgeable about LTAD, they believed that the model was beneficial. The coaches were very qualified and had ideas regarding how to improve the model in order to make it more effective and progressive for future soccer participation in Canada. The high degree of certification and accreditation of coaches within these soccer academies will allow for the best chance of optimal development for the athletes. All of the coaches had received at least a Provincial 'B' coaching license, which demonstrated the value of being educated from multiple National Coaching Certification Program (NCCP) courses, which some club team coaches might value, and some might not. By these coaches being knowledgeable towards the LTAD model and purposefully implementing it within the structure for games and practices, it will give these athletes the best opportunity for success. This study provided preliminary evidence for the experiences and implementation of the LTAD model in Ontario youth soccer academies.

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Appendix A: Long-Term Athlete Development Model



Canadian Sport for Life - Long-Term Athlete Development

Appendix B: Ethics Approval



September 19, 2016

Dear Kody Watson

REB # 5058

Project: "The Long-Term Athlete Development Model in Youth Soccer Academies"

REB Clearance Issued: September 19, 2016

REB Expiry / End Date: September 01, 2017

The Research Ethics Board of Wilfrid Laurier University has reviewed the above proposal and determined that the proposal is ethically sound. If the research plan and methods should change in a way that may bring into question the project's adherence to acceptable ethical norms, please submit a "Request for Ethics Clearance of a Revision or Modification" form for approval before the changes are put into place. This form can also be used to extend protocols past their expiry date, except in cases where the project is more than two years old. Those projects require a new REB application.

Please note that you are responsible for obtaining any further approvals that might be required to complete your project.

Laurier REB approval will automatically expire when one's employment ends at Laurier.

If any participants in your research project have a negative experience (either physical, psychological or emotional) you are required to submit an "Adverse Events Form" within 24 hours of the event.

You must complete the online "Annual/Final Progress Report on Human Research Projects" form annually and upon completion of the project. ROMEO will automatically keep track of these annual reports for you. When you have a report due within 30 days (and/or an overdue report) it will be listed under the 'My Reminders' quick link on your ROMEO home screen; the number in brackets next to 'My Reminders' will tell you how many reports need to be submitted. Protocols with overdue annual reports will be marked as expired. Further the REB has been requested to notify Research Finance when an REB protocol, tied to a funding account has been marked as expired. In such cases Research Finance will immediately freeze the release of your funding.

All the best for the successful completion of your project.

(Useful links: [ROMEO Login Screen](#) ; [ROMEO Quick Reference Guide](#) ; [REB webpage](#))

Yours sincerely,

Appendix C: Consent Form Parents
INFORMED CONSENT STATEMENT - Parents
Wilfrid Laurier University

The Long-Term Athlete Development Model (LTAD) in Youth Soccer Academies
 Primary Researcher: Kody Watson & Supervisor: Dr. Kim Dawson

Purpose:

You are invited to participate in this research study about long-term athlete/player development (LTAD/LTPD) in youth soccer academies. The purpose of the present study will evaluate the implementation of the long-term player development model within Canadian youth soccer academies from various perspectives – athletes, parents, and coaches.

The researchers are affiliated with Wilfrid Laurier University. The primary researcher is Kody Watson, a Kinesiology Masters student who is conducting this research for their thesis project. The principal supervisor is Professor Dr. Kim Dawson within the Department of Kinesiology at Wilfrid Laurier University.

Explanation of Procedures:

If you decide to partake in this study, you will first be asked to complete a demographic questionnaire with information regarding your background experience with the soccer academy your child's experience with the academy. The background questionnaires take approximately 5-10 minutes to complete.

After completion of the questionnaire, you may be contacted to complete a semi-structured interview that will take approximately 30-45 minutes to complete. We would also like to contact your child as well. Therefore, we are asking you today to consent to both you and your child, who is currently at the academy consenting, participating in this study. Each interview will be audio recorded and there will be field notes taken by the researcher throughout the interview. After the interview, you will be provided the opportunity to accept, add, change, or remove any information on their interview transcript. Your child will be given this opportunity as well.

Potential Risks:

This study involves minimal physical or psychological risks. If the interview session requires a break, due to length of time to complete, then you will be provided the opportunity to take a break. Your child will receive this same opportunity.

Benefits:

The benefit of this research project is to add much needed empirical evidence regarding the evaluation of the LTPD within Canadian soccer. You may also benefit by gaining a better understanding of the LTPD within the soccer academy.

Confidentiality and Anonymity:

All information will be kept confidential and your anonymity will be ensured. Your name and academy affiliation will be removed from interview transcripts. A number will be used to code the interviews, in order to de-identify information. Only the researchers will have access to the data. All data will be protected by the principal investigator during the implementation of the study and once completed the raw data will be stored within the Kinesiology Department at Wilfrid Laurier University. Quotations used within the study will not contain any identifying information. Documents, records, and audiotapes from this current study will be stored securely and kept for 5 years, after which time they will be destroyed. Your child will be guaranteed this same level of confidentiality and anonymity.

Participation:

Your participation within the study is completely voluntary and you may withdraw from the study at any time for any reason without consequences. In the case of you deciding to withdraw, any information you previously provided that can be identified as yours, will be returned to you, or destroyed and removed from the research study. This is also extended to your child.

Contact Information:

If you have any questions about the study or the procedures, you may contact the researcher Kody Watson by email wats8550@mylaurier.ca. This project has been reviewed and approved by the University Research Ethics Board. If you feel you have not been treated according to the descriptions in this form, or your rights as a participant in research have been violated during the course of this project, you may contact Dr. Robert Basso, Chair, University Research Ethics Board, Wilfrid Laurier University, (519) 884-0710, extension 4994 or rbasso@wlu.ca.

Publication & Feedback:

The results of this study will be disseminated in a thesis defence presentation, journal articles, and presentations. If you would like to know the results of the study, please indicate this below and a final report will be emailed to you after the completion of the study.

Consent:

I have read and understand the above information. I have received a copy of this form. I consent to participate in this study.

Participant's Signature _____ Date _____

Investigator's Signature _____ Date _____

I have read and understand the above information. I have received a copy of this form. I consent to my child participating in this study.

Participant's Signature _____ Date _____

I consent to myself and my child being audiotaped during the interview.

Participant's Signature _____ Date _____

Investigator's Signature _____ Date _____

I consent to the use of mine and my child's direct quotations without the use of my name or my child's name in presentations/papers resulting from this study.

Participant's Signature _____ Date _____

Investigator's Signature _____ Date _____

I would like a copy of the study results sent to me via email.

Yes _____ No _____

My email address is: _____

Appendix D: Consent Form Coaches
INFORMED CONSENT STATEMENT - Coaches
Wilfrid Laurier University

The Long-Term Athlete Development Model (LTAD) in Youth Soccer Academies
 Primary Researcher: Kody Watson & Supervisor: Dr. Kim Dawson

Purpose:

You are invited to participate in this research study about long-term athlete/player development (LTAD/LTPD) in youth soccer academies. The purpose of the present study will evaluate the implementation of the long-term player development model within Canadian youth soccer academies from various perspectives – athletes, parents, and coaches.

The researchers are affiliated with Wilfrid Laurier University. The primary researcher is Kody Watson, a Kinesiology Masters student who is conducting this research for their thesis project. The principal supervisor is Professor Dr. Kim Dawson within the Department of Kinesiology at Wilfrid Laurier University.

Explanation of Procedures:

If you decide to partake in this study, you will first be asked to complete a demographic questionnaire with information regarding your background experience with the soccer academy. The background questionnaires take approximately 5-10 minutes to complete.

After completion of the questionnaire, you may be contacted to complete a semi-structured interview that will take approximately 30-45 minutes to complete. Each interview will be audio recorded and there will be field notes taken by the researcher throughout the interview. After the interview, you will be provided the opportunity to accept, add, change, or remove any information on their interview transcript.

Potential Risks:

This study involves minimal physical or psychological risks. If the interview session requires a break, due to length of time to complete, then you will be provided the opportunity to take a break.

Benefits:

The benefit of this study is to add much needed empirical evidence of the evaluation of the LTPD within Canadian soccer. You may also benefit by gaining a better understanding of the LTPD within the soccer academy.

Confidentiality and Anonymity:

All information will be kept confidential and your anonymity will be ensured. Each participant's name and academy affiliation will be removed from interview transcripts. A number will be used to code the interviews, in order to de-identify information. Only the researchers will have access to the data. All data will be protected by the principal investigator during the implementation of the study and once completed the raw data will be stored within the Kinesiology Department at Wilfrid Laurier University. Quotations used within the study will not contain any identifying information. Documents, records, and audiotapes from this current study will be stored securely and kept for 5 years, after which time they will be destroyed.

Participation:

Your participation within the study is completely voluntary and you may withdraw from the study at any time for any reason without consequences. In the case of you deciding to withdraw, any information you previously provided that can be identified as yours, will be returned to you, or destroyed and removed from the research study.

Contact Information:

If you have any questions about the study or the procedures, you may contact the researcher Kody Watson by email wats8550@mylaurier.ca. This project has been reviewed and approved by the University Research Ethics Board. If you feel you have not been treated according to the descriptions in this form, or your rights as a participant in research have been violated during the course of this project, you may contact Dr. Robert Basso, Chair, University Research Ethics Board, Wilfrid Laurier University, (519) 884-0710, extension 4994 or rbasso@wlu.ca.

Publication & Feedback:

The results of this study will be disseminated in a thesis defence presentation, journal articles, and presentations. If you would like to know the results of the study, please indicate this below and a final report will be emailed to you after the completion of the study.

Consent:

I have read and understand the above information. I have received a copy of this form. I consent to participate in this study.

Participant's Signature _____ Date _____

Investigator's Signature _____ Date _____

I consent to being audiotaped during the interview.

Participant's Signature _____ Date _____

Investigator's Signature _____ Date _____

I consent to the use of direct quotations without the use of my name in presentations/papers resulting from this study.

Participant's Signature _____ Date _____

Investigator's Signature _____ Date _____

I would like a copy of the study results sent to me via email.

Yes _____ No _____

My email address is: _____

Appendix F: Demographic Questionnaire for Parents
Demographic Questionnaire for Parents

The Long-Term Athlete Development (LTAD) Model in Youth Soccer Academies

Demographic Questionnaire

The following questionnaire deals with issues pertaining to both yourself and child's affiliation with the youth soccer academy. Personal information will be collected and be kept confidential from this questionnaire and no individual will be identified personally in results from this graduate research. Participation in this study and questionnaire are completely voluntary and participants may refrain from answering any questions. Thank you for your participation with this study.

Directions: Please read each statement carefully and fill out your answer

Personal information:

1. Parent's name: _____

2. Parent's gender: _____

3. Usually in each family there is one person who is more involved with the academies. In your family, who is this adult? Please check the response that best indicates this relationship.

_____ I am the person who is in most contact with the academy.

_____ The person in my household who is in the most contact with the academy is
 _____ (please provide name and contact email)

4. How long has your family been involved with academy soccer? _____

5. Is this your first child to be enrolled in a soccer academy?

_____ yes _____ no

If you answered no, who was the person enrolled in the academy and are they currently enrolled now? _____

Information about child who is enrolled in the soccer academy:

1. Child's name: _____

2. Child's gender: _____

3. Child's age: _____

4. How long has your child been playing academy level soccer? _____

5. How many years has your child been playing soccer with this academy? _____

6. Has your child been involved in any other soccer academies? _____

If you answered, yes to the above question, what soccer academy were they involved with and for how long?

7. Does your child, play other sports and/or are involved with other co-curricular activities outside of the soccer academy? (Circle one) Yes or No

If yes, please specify what sports or activities

Contact information:

What is the best way to get in contact with you? _____

Home phone number: _____

Cell phone number: _____

E-mail address: _____

Thank you for your completing this background questionnaire and providing your consent to be contacted for the interview portion of the study.

Appendix G: Demographic Questionnaire for Coaches
Demographic Questionnaire for Coaches

Experiences of the Long-Term Athlete Development (LTAD) Model in Youth Soccer Academies

Demographic Questionnaire

The following questionnaire deals with issues pertaining to your affiliation or administration with the youth soccer academy. Personal information will be collected and be kept confidential from this questionnaire and no individual will be identified personally in results from this graduate research. Participation in this study and questionnaire are completely voluntary and participants may refrain from answering any questions. Thank you for your participation with this study.

Directions: Please read each statement carefully and fill out your answer

Personal information:

1. Coaches name: _____
2. Coaches gender: _____
3. What administration position do you fill within the academy? _____
4. How long have you been involved with academy soccer? _____
5. How many years have you been involved with soccer at this specific academy? _____

Contact information:

What is the best way to get in contact with you? _____

Home phone number: _____

Cell phone number: _____

E-mail address: _____

Thank you for your completing this background questionnaire and providing your consent to be contacted for the interview portion of the study.

Appendix H: Interview Questions for Coaches

Interview Guide for Coaches

1. Can you describe your position at the soccer academy?
2. How involved in the programming are you at the academy?
3. Can you describe the philosophies of the soccer academy?
4. Can you explain how the long-term player development model (LTPD) fits within the academy's mission?
5. Can you explain particulars of LTPD for 10-14 year old boys and is your team implementing the principles?
6. What are your feelings of the LTPD suitability to your soccer academy?
 - Positives?
 - Negatives?
 - Challenges to implement?
7. Has soccer development changed in any way since the mandatory implementation of LTPD?
 - Evidence based practice vs. this is what we've always done?
8. What does the academy define as a successful experience and what are the main goals for the athletes?
 - a. Expand?
 - b. Clarify?
 - c. Development?
 - d. Fun?
9. Would you change anything about the LTPD model?
 - a. Do developmental models work?

FOR ALL OF THE INTERVIEWS

Anything you want to ask me or to further explain?

Thank you for participating in this interview.

Appendix I: Interview Questions for Athletes

Interview Guide for Athletes

1. What sports do you play, and what is your favourite sport?
2. How many days a week are you at the academy and can you describe what your daily activities are at the soccer academy?
 - What does your typical practice involve?
 - Drills, scrimmage?
 - Games against other academies or age groups?
3. Can you describe how the coaches treat you and other teammates at the academy for practices and games?
 - Fair to all athletes?
 - Positives?
 - Negatives?
4. Can you describe to me how competitive the soccer is at the academy?
 - What happens if you miss a practice?
 - What happens if you do not play well? Are there repercussions?
 - Positives?
 - Negatives?
5. Can you describe your experience with the academy?
 - Positives?
 - Negatives?
 - Expand?
6. Have you ever heard of the Long-Term Player Development Model, if so how do you feel about it?
 - Positives?
 - Negatives?

FOR ALL OF THE INTERVIEWS

Anything you want to ask me or to further explain?

Thank you for participating in this interview.

Appendix J: Interview Questions for Parents

Interview Guide for Parents

1. Why did you choose this academy for your child, what do you want your child to gain from academy soccer?
 - Positives?
 - Negatives?
2. Can you describe your familiarity with the Long Term Player Development model and are you aware of the recommendations for boys ages 10-14?
3. Has the academy ever talked about LTPD and are they using the model to guide programming?
 - Was the academies approach to the LTPD a factor in your decision to enroll your child for soccer academies?
 - Why?
4. How do you feel about the LTPD in academy soccer?
 - Positives (evidence based)?
 - Negatives?
5. Do you ever disagree with coaches about the experience that they are providing for your child?
 - Practices?
 - Games?
6. Can you generally describe what the daily activities are like at the soccer academy?
 - Scrimmaging/Competition/Equal play?
 - Drills?
 - Fitness Training?
 - Games against other academies or age groups?
7. Can you describe what is important to your child involving their soccer and what is important to you involving your child's soccer involvement?
8. What would be a successful outcome when your child finishes soccer at the academy?

FOR ALL OF THE INTERVIEWS

Anything you want to ask me or to further explain?

Thank you for participating in this interview.

Appendix K: Athlete Themes

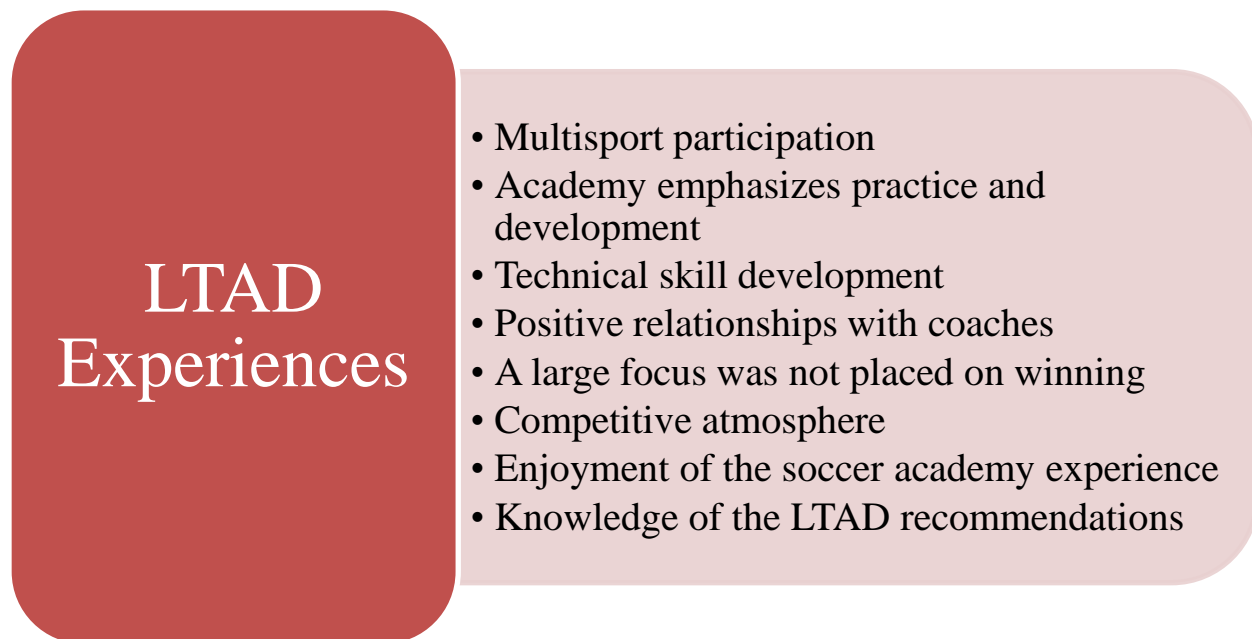


Figure 1. Athlete Themes

Appendix L: Parental Themes

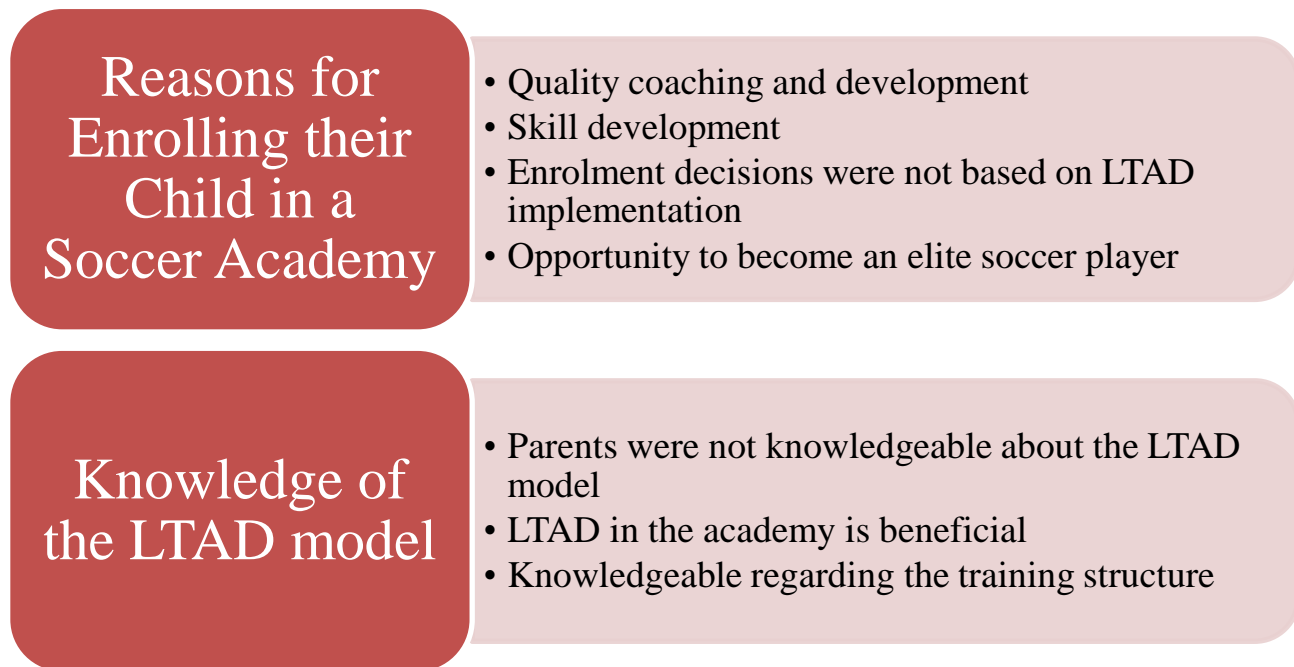


Figure 2. Parental Themes

Appendix M: Coach Themes

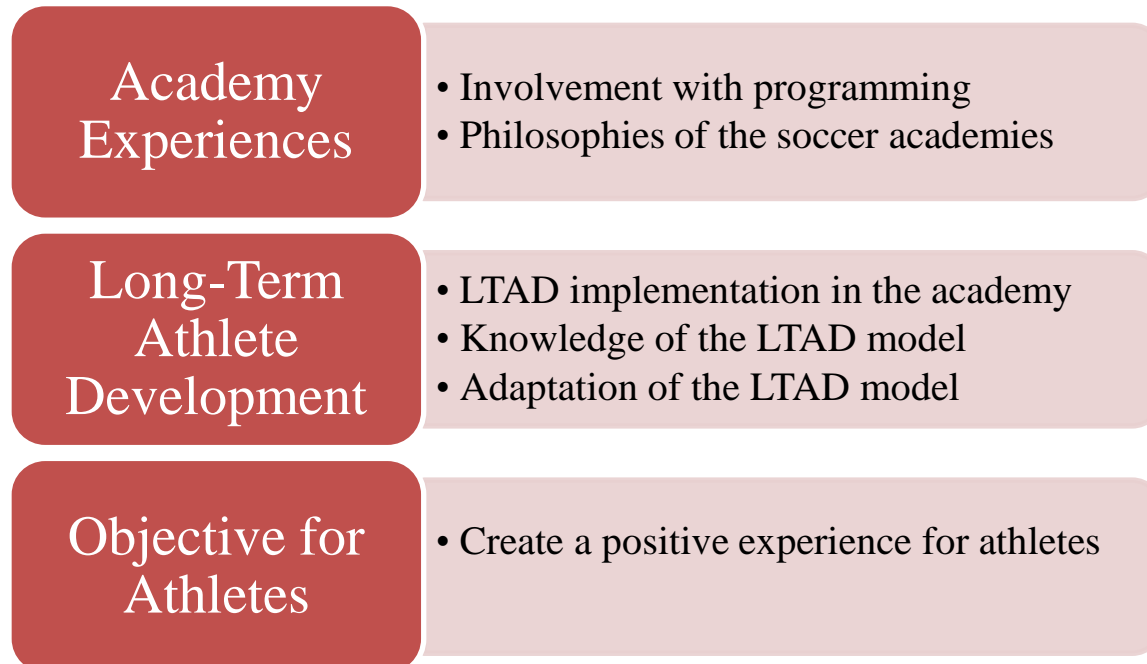


Figure 3. Coach Themes

Appendix N: Summary of Key Findings

Table 5
List of Themes for Athletes

Multisport participation	Athletes indicated that soccer was their favourite sport and they also enjoyed to participate in a variety of sports.
Academy emphasizes practice and development	Athletes commented that they were practicing multiple (2-3x) per week, with a game on the weekends.
Technical skill development	Athletes mentioned that they were completing sport-specific soccer training, as well as fitness training to help develop their aerobic base.
Positive relationships with coaches	All of the athletes felt that their coaches were helping with their player development.
A large focus was not placed on winning	The athletes did not feel pressure to win games, they were able to develop skills and everyone was able to participate.
Competitive atmosphere	The competition within the academy was highly-skilled with a positive competitive environment to keep athletes engaged.
Enjoyment of the soccer academy experience	All of the athletes mentioned that they were enjoying their academy soccer experience.
Knowledge of the LTAD recommendations	All of the athletes could not describe specifics about the LTAD.

Table 6
List of Themes for Parents

Quality coaching and development	The reason parents enrolled their child within academy soccer was due to quality coaching and player development.
Skill development	Parents wanted their sons to gain proper technical skills to excel in soccer.
Enrolment decisions were not based on LTAD implementation	Parents commented that the LTAD was not a factor for enrolling their child in academy soccer.
Opportunity to become an elite soccer player	Parents believed that the soccer academy was a beneficial way to increase the probability that their child would become an elite soccer player.
Parents were not knowledgeable about the LTAD model	Parents also lacked knowledge in regards to the LTAD recommendations for their child.
LTAD in the academy is beneficial	Parents also felt that the LTAD model was beneficial and that their son was improving soccer skills from the development.
Knowledgeable regarding the training structure	Although parents did not have much knowledge in regards to the LTAD, they were

	knowledgeable with what drills were occurring in practices and were aware of the daily activities in the academy.
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Table 7

List of Themes for Coaches

Involvement with programming	The LTAD framework allowed coaches to have a high degree of control for drills they were running at practices.
Philosophies of the soccer academies	The coaches all mentioned that soccer academies are focused on individual player development.
LTAD implementation in the academy	Coaches believed that the LTAD was better implemented in a program with highly trained coaches.
Knowledge of the LTAD model	All of the coaches were very knowledgeable of the LTAD.
Adaptation of the LTAD model	All of the coaches mentioned that the development model works, but they would add to the model if possible.
Create a positive experience for athletes	Coaches were focused on the soccer development as well as making sure the athletes were enjoying their soccer experience.