

# FUNdamentals

By Jeff Thornton

**A**s a fully-developed adult, it's easy to make assumptions. It's easy to fall into the traps of believing everyone takes for granted what you take for granted, that what you find easy, other people will too. In other words, people can become trapped in their own worlds.

But the job of a coach, very often, is to understand someone else's little world. To take someone on a sporting and physical journey from a certain level of competence or ability to a different, higher level of ability.

And as part of that you need that understanding of where they start from...and why.

It may have been an old Jesuit maxim of give me the child at seven and I will show you the man, but in sporting terms, there are many who believe that seven is exactly the age when youngsters need to be getting the sporting basics – whether they and their parents realise it or not!

And this is where the FUNdamentals of movement comes in, because as the sports coach UK document Introduction to the FUNdamentals of Movement says: "There is mounting evidence to suggest that poor early movement experiences produce significant long-term effects, and that problems encountered in childhood can persist well into adulthood."

In other words, get things wrong early, and it is very difficult to put some of those basics correct in later life. Or transversely, get the basics right, and they stay with you.

Sticking with analogies...you can't build a skyscraper without excellent foundations, you never forget how to ride a bicycle. Taking it further, and into a sporting context, you can't build an Olympic champion without the sporting basics feeling like second nature.

And this is where the FUNdamentals comes in, and the changes which need to be made in 21st century Britain.

We're not just talking about our increasingly sedentary lifestyle, although that may be an element, as Graeme Foreman, sports coach UK's technical lead on the FUNdamentals, says.

"What we are all keen to see is youngsters enjoying an active start, and that is the point of FUNdamentals – being active, having fun, moving through play.

"We have moved on from 20 years ago – and sometimes perhaps not always for the better. There are more cars, fewer places to play, a higher level of parental concern."

And this combines so that it's perhaps too easy to overlook the a-b-c, which in this context refers to agility, balance and co-ordination.



As Graeme admits, not all the technological advances have been bad, although those days when youngsters would be out kicking or throwing a ball, with very few safety fears, seem long gone for many.

He's a big fan of the Nintendo Wii – IF it encourages people to get moving and become more active.

Does playing 'tennis' on the Wii lead to youngsters picking up a racket and wanting to be the next Andy Murray?

"The key is for kids to be out there playing, there's not one sport which doesn't need that," says Graeme. "So, for example, the Wii may gets kids involved and participating, and it can build onto other activity."

And this all comes back to those sporting FUNdamentals.

"Whichever route you end up taking, whether it's sport for leisure, in a local league, or whether you pursue elite level activity, you still need those key transferrable skills.

"Perhaps 20–30 years ago people did this themselves, now we are working very hard with Level 1 and Level 2 coaches, with teachers and with parents.

"Obviously there are issues surrounding the general health of the population, concern at rising obesity levels in youngsters, but it's never too late to become active, there are so many opportunities. For example, you can take up rowing – which is a 'late specialism' sport – as opposed to things like swimming or gymnastics, which are early specialism sports so need those fundamentals of balance, co-ordination and agility instilled very early."

The core age group for FUNdamentals is the 6–9 range "but of course there are early and later developers – some youngsters may pick up skills and show ability at age five, others it could take longer," says Graeme.

But what Graeme is keen to stress is that in order to pursue any sporting

activity, coaches must sweep aside any preconceptions, and ensure the basics are correct.

This is why the point of not making assumptions is so important, as how do you KNOW that a child can run well, that they know how to catch? Indeed have you really analysed what's involved and broken it down to the core elements?

"Kids need balance first – that's pivotal to co-ordination and agility," says Graeme. "You add the co-ordination, and with that develops the agility. Once you have all those, then coaches can look at the other skills – the running, throwing, catching, before becoming sport-specific.

"If a child can't catch, and can't play an activity, then they quickly disengage, sometimes from all sport, and for good."

Even at the elite level, the FUNdamentals are still key and can have a big impact.

How many youngsters have been taught actually HOW to run, the most efficient way? We make an assumption that once a child is 'off and running' then that's it. But someone's posture or gait can have an effect of whether they pick up injuries later in life.

So how can the message get across?

Well that's where Graeme comes in, and he's passionate about the subject.

"With the FUNdamentals, there are no negatives. If we get the balance, co-ordination and agility right then they have the ability to do what they want.

"The key people in delivering this are teachers at primary school. We know that many are not PE specialists, so we are working hard to raise their understanding. There's an individual learning plan for each child, so ideally we develop what their needs are in this area, with game-based learning."

Other key groups are Level 1 and Level 2 coaches – governing bodies of sport all have long-term development models and understand how important the FUNdamentals are.

And of course the other key group in all of this are parents. It can be difficult to get to them, although making them aware of health and well-being through the media is important. Even having the youngsters take the fitness message home from school and sports clubs is important.

So the preparation of learning DVDs and activity cards has been a key area Graeme has worked on, again to get that message across.

"Of course they could always give me my own show on TV to get this message out there," laughs Graeme, "I can see it now..."



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