



WHEN TO FOCUS ON HIGH PERFORMANCE SPORT

One of the most influential presentations at a coaching conference was that by German researcher Dr. Arne Gullich. After thousands of hours of interviews and detailed research analysis on Germany's very successful Olympic program, Dr Gullich's research had some very interesting findings. His two key findings were.

First. That the number of total hours of DIFFERENT sports a child played in their pre-teens was directly related to their success in international sport. In other words, just doing your one sport from the early ages is not a great way to ultimately become world-class. Olympians generally did a large cross-section of sports when they were young and then specialized later rather than becoming a hockey player or tennis player as their sole focus at 7 or 8 years of age.

Second. That the later a child specializes the better (within reason). Dr Gullich's research showed that kids who specialized very young (8, 9, 10 years of age) virtually never made Olympic teams. The average age of specialization was 15.5 years of age. By being active in many sports in their pre-teens and early teens and then specializing in their preferred sport, they have the appropriate background to ultimately become world-class. The German research actually showed a negative correlation from starting too young. Dr. Gullich found that kids who specialized too young were generally very good junior athletes, who more often dropped out of sport (due to burn-out and injury), before they hit senior high performance levels (in their 20s).

While there is no absolute road map for any child - gymnastics requires early specialization - the basic principles of the German research remain accurate in the large majority of children and sports.