

# ATHLETE DEVELOPMENT PATHWAY

Our plan to develop athletes

version 1 - September 2024

# VISION FOR ATHLETE DEVELOPMENT

## PURPOSE

Develop athletes from under 15  
through to senior international level

## OBJECTIVE

Enhance the performance of National  
teams on the international stage



In recent years the New Zealand Water Polo high performance strategy has experienced a significant re-shaping in line with the overarching strategic framework that will guide our sport through to 2028 and beyond. The purpose of the following documentation is to provide all of our stakeholders clarity around the changes that have taken place in performance and the resultant implications for all of our stakeholders.

## OUR OBJECTIVES

- To enhance the performance of New Zealand National teams on the international stage
- A transparent and structured national programme and pathway that supports the development of athletes
- Increased quality and quantity of performance coaches available to our athletes

## STRATEGIC GOALS



- Pathway system delivering minimum twice weekly training environments (water polo training, swimming and strength and conditioning) throughout New Zealand as a part of a structured, collaborative and systemic build in performance
- Performance coaches throughout New Zealand are aligned with and impacted upon by NZWPs coach development pathway
- Minimum 40 athletes 18 + years of age within the American College system and European clubs
- The performance competition structure aligns with athlete development requirements and includes competitive experiences from age group National events through to world events
- Be competitive with and consistently finish inside the top 8 of World Aquatics age group World Championships, and win Australian State Champs
- New Zealand qualifies for the 2032 Brisbane Olympics in Mens and Women's

# DEVELOPMENT PATHWAY

The Athlete Development Pathway provides a framework to support athletes to develop their water polo skills from under 15 through to the senior international level.

## PATHWAY PRINCIPLES

- Designed for the typical athlete entry and progression in the sport, with multiple entry and re-entry points for selection.
- Recognises athletes may enter the sport at different times and progress at different rates.
- Can be treated as a guide for skill development and individual consideration will be given for squad selection, support and expectations.
- Designed to enable structured and planned programming across multiple squads and campaigns, allowing for efficiency across the pathway.
- Aligned with the NZWP Technical and Tactical Competencies at each stage of the pathway.
- Coaches take a ONE TEAM approach to the development of athletes and work together to enhance knowledge and collaboration across the pathway.
- A holistic approach to the development of athletes and provides core water polo skill development, knowledge and education in the areas of nutrition, psychology and athlete life.
- Selection into squads and teams will be evidence-based, providing transparency for athlete selection and development.
- Consistently apply performance principles to ensure that athletes are prepared for a high-performance training and competition environment.



# 1. TALENT IDENTIFICATION

The aim is to identify athletes who show the potential and attitude to represent New Zealand at World Under 16, 18, 20 and Senior Level. The purpose of an established pathway is to provide a long-term strategy into individual development of an athlete and increase the depth of Performance athletes in New Zealand.

This will include the 6 basic elements of the total performance picture to lay out a repeatable, transparent system that will lead to the structural health of water polo for the 2020s and beyond.

These key components include physical, technical, tactical, wellbeing, belonging and emotional. It is important to acknowledge that athlete development is fluid at a young age and the selection of an athlete into a squad can happen at any time following the set selection criteria by appointed selectors and coaches.

The talent identification matrix will be used to identify athletes at national tournaments and selection camps. It is acknowledged that talent ID for young athletes is not necessarily a predictor for adult success.



# 1. TALENT IDENTIFICATION

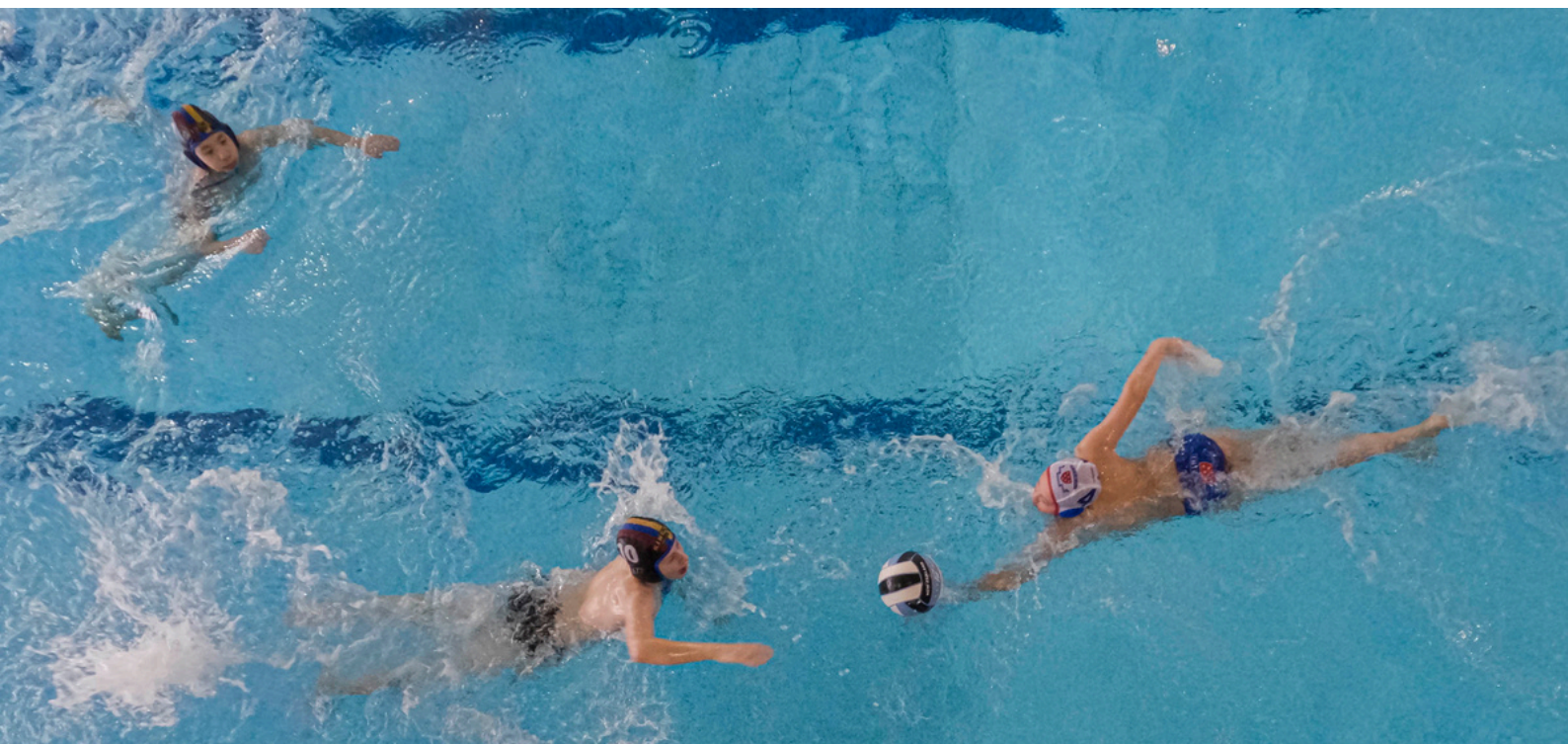
## RELATIVE TALENT IDENTIFICATION MATRIX

The NZWP relative talent identification matrix will play a crucial role in the nationwide identification of water polo talent, both at national events and during selection camp sessions.

The primary objective of this matrix is to establish a standardised approach to talent identification, with a strong emphasis on key aspects of water polo development: physical fitness, tactical understanding, technical ability, positional awareness and a player's overall attitude towards the game.

It is important to highlight that the matrix operates within a relative framework, meaning scoring will be context specific adapted to the level of play. An example of this is a division two level player might achieve a higher score when competing in the division two grades, but this score could shift lower when assessed in the more competitive selection camp environment, where the overall comparative standard is elevated.

This relative assessment ensures fairness and accuracy in talent evaluation, aligning with the specific demands of each competitive context. Once selected into a national squad, data will be collected from the National Standardized Testing (Physical Capacity) to validate the grading system.



	Beginner Level	Developing Level	Intermediate Level	Advanced Level
<b>Physical Capacity</b>	<p>Poor general fitness struggles with endurance. Low water elevation struggles to move laterally and doesn't move from horizontal to vertical well. Wonder if this could be framed as: Low level of general fitness and cannot maintain speed and agility over the period of a quarter or game.</p>	<p>Below average general fitness and endurance. Lower than average elevation and lateral movements. Shows some ability to move horizontal to vertical. Relating back to in water fitness or period of a game: Below average general fitness, cannot maintain for more than half game time.</p>	<p>Above average general fitness and endurance. Higher than average elevation and lateral movements. Shows good ability to move horizontal to vertical. Above average general fitness and endurance, can maintain speed and agility for more than half a game.</p>	<p>Demonstrates good fitness and endurance. Elevates well and moves well laterally. Moves effectively and quickly from horizontal to vertical body positions. Demonstrates good fitness and endurance, can maintain speed and agility for more than three quarters of a game.</p>
<b>Game and Tactical Awareness Offence</b>	<p>Limited understanding of offence. Poor structural play. Moves to incorrect spaces and moves at incorrect times. Limited defensive tactical knowledge. Makes poor decisions on when to shoot, pass, enter the ball.</p>	<p>Basic structural ability, basic tactical knowledge. Moves sometimes to correct places based on the situations. Basic tactical knowledge. Makes some good decisions on shot selection, timing and distribution.</p>	<p>Good Structure in offence. Moves well most of the time in offence based on the situation. Good level of tactical understanding and general ability to break down opposition defense. Makes good decisions in distribution and shooting.</p>	<p>Demonstrates good offensive awareness. Knows where to position in relation to the play, moves/drives at good times. Distributed based on situation and shows appropriate timing of shot using a good shot selection. Elevates well and moves well laterally. Moves effectively and quickly from horizontal to vertical body positions.</p>
<b>Game and Tactical Awareness Defence</b>	<p>Poor defensive body positions (gains a lot of exclusions) Allows goals in their blocking lines. Struggles to press 1 v 1. Allows CF, Drivers direct position towards the goal.</p>	<p>Shows some good defensive moments relating to the situation – press or zone. Attempts blocking movements. Still gains exclusions and moves late in defense</p>	<p>Shows good defensive awareness. Can identify the need to press and zone and execute these well. Show potential in body positions and is able to defend 1 on 1.</p>	<p>Demonstrates good defensive movement. Can press and play in zone. Moves between defense at the correct time and understand the principle of each. Body positions are good in zone and press. (Horizontal to vertical and moving between positions).</p>
<b>Coachability and attitude</b>	<p>Communicates poorly or not at all. Speaks poorly to coaches, teammates and reacts unreasonably to the referees.</p>	<p>Limited communication, at times poor teammate behavior and sometimes reactive to calls.</p>	<p>Displays good teamwork, communicates effectively and responds well to referee calls.</p>	<p>Demonstrates exceptional teamwork and leadership. Works well with coach and is a positive influence on the game in general. Supports teammates and clearly shows future leadership skills.</p>

\*(GK, CF, CB, DRIVER) If a player plays a range of positions rate them on each and work out an average.

<p><b>Technical Positional Play* Goal Keeper</b></p>	<p>Poor or no communication. Poor lateral movement in goal. Poor distribution, poor anticipation. Doesn't leave goal-line to steal. Poor basic positioning (to far or in goal)</p>	<p>Some communication. Some ability to move laterally to block and gain positioning. Able to complete some technical movements well but other not – covering near post on counters, stepping back in zone, offline in press</p>	<p>Good level of communication in most situations. Identifies the need to change positioning based on defense and shooters positioning. Attempts lobs movements and covering near posts. Able to do all technical movements to an ok level</p>	<p>High level of communication (shot clock, defense), good goal position, ability to play in zone and press. Adjust positioning dependent on the situation. Distribute well and accurately. Completes lob movements where relevant. Anticipates play.</p>
<p><b>Centre Forward</b></p>	<p>Doesn't take position on 2m. Can't turn inside or outside. 1 or no shooting technical ability (sweep, back, layout) Struggle with defensive cover and ability to move in defense.</p>	<p>Can take some position or attempt to hustle for 2m position. Can do more than 1 type of shot. Struggles to cover and apply good defensive positions. Could grade a CF a 2 if they were very strong in offence but lack any defensive skills.</p>	<p>Takes position on 2m and can keep attacking position most of the time. Has the ability to attempt a range of shots. Can move well towards ball and earn some ejections. Covers ok on defense and is aware of defensive duties.</p>	<p>Takes position on 2m. Can turn inside or outside. Different shot selection based on defense. Ability to exit ball on zone. Able to keep position towards goal and protect space. Move explosively towards ball on entry. Ability to cover and play multiple defenses. Wins penalties, scores and ejections.</p>
<p><b>Centre Back</b></p>	<p>Unaware of defensive position of where offence ball is. Defends on outside of players allowing inside string turns. Doesn't have any control on press into zone transition. No transition to counterattack. Poor or no distribution in offence. Gains lots of ejections.</p>	<p>Some attempt to play pressing and in front of CF. Attempt to follow ball and step goal side. Stops some inside turns and shots from being completed. Some signs of good positioning. Still shows lack of ability to switch from press into zone play. Sometimes distributes well and attacks the goal. Poor shot timing and selection.</p>	<p>Can play press and understand what the correct positions are based on offense ball movements. Understands the principle of stepping from press into zone. Can make good distribution decisions and is actively attacking the goal.</p>	<p>Takes position on 2m. Can turn inside or outside. Different shot selection based on defense. Ability to exit ball on zone. Able to keep position towards goal and protect space. Move explosively towards ball on entry. Ability to cover and play multiple defenses. Wins penalties, scores and ejections.</p>
<p><b>Driver Left/Right</b></p>	<p>No 1 on 1 defense. No ability to step from press into zone. Poor shot selection and distribution in attack. Lack of defensive awareness. No driving or movement. No counter play</p>	<p>Some ability in 1 on 1 defense. Some variation in types of defensive movements. Some different types of shots are based on circumstance and basic distribution. Some driving/movement but likely at in correct timing and spacing. Attempted counter play</p>	<p>Ability to defend in press and in zone. Different types of shots based on situations – good decisions in distribution. Drives and moves based on situations. Wins some exclusions on driver movement. Attempts transition play</p>	<p>Can play a variation of zone and press effectively. Has a range of shooting ability based on the circumstance and executes well. Distributes and makes good decisions in attack. Goes in counter and plays good transition to gain advantages. Can win exclusion on drive movement.</p>



# 2. JUNIOR DEVELOPMENT

## DEFINITION

A Junior Development athlete is defined as someone born in an odd year—such as 2007, 2009, or 2011. World Aquatics hosts three age group World Championships: Under 16, Under 18, and Under 20. In these events, athletes born in even years are the oldest in the Under 16 and Under 18 categories, while athletes born in odd years are the oldest in the Under 20 category. This can create the perception that more opportunities are available for even-born athletes.

However, an athlete born in an odd year can still be selected for an even-aged team. For instance, an athlete born in 2007 can be chosen for the 2006 World Under 18 Championships team. To address concerns that odd-year athletes might miss out on opportunities at a younger age, we have created a Junior Development Pathway. This pathway is part of the World Championships Under 20 four-year plan includes Junior Development Squads, which often combine two odd age group.

To note that any athletes involved in the Under 18 or Under 16 programs will not be eligible for Junior Development opportunities until they are no longer part of the Under 18 and Under 16 Campaigns. Australia holds odd year State Championships which NZ send teams to.

