



UNDERSTANDING MATURATION IN DEVELOPING ATHLETES

What is Maturation?

As athletes grow and develop, they go through a lot of changes - physically, hormonally, and mentally. Their bodies get taller, stronger and change shape. Their hormones begin shifting, and their perception and belief systems change too. This natural process is called maturation, and it usually happens around ages 11–14 for girls and 12–16 for boys. During this time, you might notice some ups and downs in your child’s coordination, speed, strength, or even motivation. That’s completely normal. Their body is adjusting and that can temporarily affect their athletic performance. As a parent or guardian, this is critical information that can help you patiently guide your young person.

Early versus Late Maturers: What’s the Difference?

Every athlete is on their own unique timeline. Some hit puberty early (“early maturers”), while others develop a little later (“late maturers”). Neither is better or worse—they just have different journeys through sport.

EARLY MATURERS

These athletes often seem to have a head start. They may be:

- Taller, stronger, and faster than their peers
- More likely to get picked for teams
- Successful early on due to size advantages

But there can be downsides too:

- They may rely more on size than skill
- They may be pushed into higher age groups before they’re emotionally ready
- They may miss out on opportunities to deal with setbacks and build resilience

How you can help:

- Focus on their effort and learning, not just their results
- Encourage them to develop skills and decisionmaking, not just rely on physical strength
- Provide opportunities to build resilience

LATE MATURERS

These athletes might feel like they’re always a step behind. They may be:

- Smaller and lighter than their peers
- Overlooked during team selections
- Not as fast or powerful (yet!)

But here’s the good news:

- Most late maturers catch up physically by age 18/19
- They often build excellent technical skills
- They develop grit and resilience through the process of non-selection

How you can help:

- Be patient and keep reminding them that everyone grows at their own pace
- Celebrate the small wins and personal progress
- Most importantly, if they love the sport, help them stay in it until their body matures

WHY THIS MATTERS

- Not all kids grow and develop at the same time
- Growth spurts can affect coordination and performance
- Some injuries are more likely during rapid growth phases
- Young athletes need support and patience as they grow, develop and adjust