



**Does maturity
affect
performance? ▶**

Some youngsters start puberty very early or very late. There is no need for parents or coaches to overreact to this situation. Research shows that at age 12, there can be a four-year difference in the physical maturity of children. An early maturer can be a foot taller and weigh 30 or 40 pounds more than a late developer.

In sports such as hockey or basketball which require strength, power, and speed, the more mature child will usually perform better and fitness levels will be greater than in less developed peers. In certain sports, the opposite is true. Being big and tall is a disadvantage to a gymnast or a figure skater. The less a skater weighs, the easier it is to land jumps.

The uneven spread of early and late developers creates a difficult challenge. Many coaches with no understanding of this phenomenon choose certain kids to play on their teams for the wrong reasons. The early developers may have a lot of success in sport. They are picked first for team sports and receive much of the coach's attention. This may cause late bloomers to develop low self-esteem and many drop out of sport.

The most famous example of a late bloomer is basketball star Michael Jordan, who was cut from his junior varsity high school team and went on to become one of the greatest players of all time.

Lately, a concern about late bloomers has surfaced within ice hockey. It began with the NHL drafting 18-year-olds. Today, scouts are looking for even younger players. That means the NHL may miss out on late bloomers like Hall-of-Famers Guy Lapointe and Larry Robinson, both of whom began to skate at age 13.

Parents and coaches must encourage and nurture late developers to keep them in sport long enough to benefit from their eventual maturity. Towards the end of adolescence, late developers often surpass and become better athletes than early developers. Many of Canada's Olympic athletes have been late developers. Freestyle skier Lloyd Langlois soared through the air on his way to an Olympic medal, but as a child, he floundered on the ice in a town where everybody played hockey.