CHAPTER 5: GROWTH AND MATURITY PROFILE OF YOUTH SWIMMERS IN MEXICO

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INTRODUCTION

Sport organization and participation in Mexico has developed considerably since the 1980s. Two factors are have apparently driven this expansion: (1) the assumption that most of the population should have access to sport in any of its different forms (youth sport, popular or recreational sport, and organized sport), and (2) strong interest in improving sport performances at national and international levels, i.e., high performance athletes (CONADE, 1991). In sports such as swimming or diving, opportunities for young participants are often limited due to scarcity of appropriate facilities throughout the country.

Studies of young athletes often focus on the "talented" and in many cases the elite (Malina, 1994, 1998). And, age-group swimmers are well represented among studies of the growth and maturity status of young athletes. Young swimmers are, on average, taller and heavier than reference data for the general population during childhood and adolescence, and in later elite adolescence swimmers tend to especially taller, but not exceptionally heavier. There is, needless to say, variation among studies and geographic regions (Malina, 1994, 1998). The data, however, are primarily available for Europe and the United States. Data for youth swimmers from Latin American countries are limited to reasonably select adolescent samples from Cuba (Alonso, 1986; Pancorbo and Rodriguez, 1986), Brazil (Rocha et al., 1977), and Venezuela (Perez, 1977, 1981), and a sample from the Bolivar Games in 1981 (Brief, 1986). More recently, the anthropometry and somatotype of an international sample of young adult swimmers, including those from Latin America, have been described (Carter and Ackland, 1994).

This paper is considers the growth and skeletal maturity status of youth swimmers from two urban centers in Mexico. They are participants in formal swim programs and are not, as a group, select, talented, or elite level swimmers. The data for this sample of Mexican youth swimmers are then compared to data for youth swimmers of approximately the same age from several Latin American countries.