

If one were to look at the scope of practice of the strength and conditioning specialist you will find the following definition provided by the NSCA (National strength and conditioning association):

“Certified Strength and Conditioning Specialists (CSCS) are professionals who apply scientific knowledge to train athletes for the primary goal of improving athletic performance. They conduct sport-specific testing sessions, design and implement safe and effective strength training and conditioning programmes and provide guidance regarding nutrition and injury prevention. Recognizing that their area of expertise is separate and distinct, CSCS consult with and refer athletes to other professionals when appropriate.”

You can easily deduce from the above statement that it would be quite the same for individual sports and team sports other than the fact that the team sport may have more athletes in a group to train.

But let’s say for instance you have a Super 14 rugby squad of 30 players and a Olympic squad of 30 swimmers.

How would your role be different being responsible for the 2 different sports?

The strength and Conditioning coach will have the following responsibilities

Responsibilities	Team sport (rugby)	Individual sport (swimming)
1. Fitness Testing	Yes	Limited
2. Strength programme design	Yes	Yes
3. Fitness conditioning	Yes	No (only certain components)
4. Recovery	Yes	Limited
5. Pre-match or competition Warm-up	Yes	No
6. Programme periodization	Yes, full responsibility	Yes, partial responsibility

1. The strength and conditioning coach for the swimmers will most likely do some fitness testing but the coach will also do testing which can be related to fitness like time trails and so on. Whereas with rugby at a professional level the coach will virtually do no fitness related testing.
2. In both cases the strength programme design will be done by the strength and conditioning specialist. The only difference will be with the swimmers that the strength coach needs to get information from the swimming coach regarding his programmes frequency and intensity to properly plan his sessions to get the desired adaptation. In the case of the rugby programme the strength coach would know exactly what is being done because he does the layout of the session and knows the strain that is being placed on the players.
3. Inherently in the swimmers programme the coach designs their programme they do in the pool and the biggest part of their swim coaching programme is geared to getting them swimming fit. The rugby player’s fitness is purely the responsibility of their

Strength and Conditioning specialist and the coach rarely focuses on that aspect.

4. After matches the rugby players are taken by the Strength and Conditioning specialist for a recovery session of his choice. He is also responsible to check on the players during the week to see if they are recovering sufficiently and communicate this to the rest of the coaching staff. The Strength and Conditioning specialist for the swimmers are usually not directly involved in their competitions and mostly only give input regarding recovery during their preparation and by educating the swimmers on proper recovery methods and protocols.
5. The rugby team’s Strength and Conditioning specialist would usually travel with the team and lead the warm-up session for practices and matches.
The swimmers will be warmed-up by their swimming coach or on their own for training session and gala’s.
6. The rugby strength and conditioning specialist usually gets the playing schedule well in advance and plans his strength and fitness programme accordingly and advises the coach regarding his planning for the year ahead. The strength and conditioning specialist for the swimmers ideally gets the periodization from the swimming coach according to phases the swimming coach has planned and ensures that the strength programmes are periodized to facilitate optimal adaptation in relation to the swimming programme.

In conclusion you can see that the individual sports and team sport have two different ways that strength and conditioning is done and that the roles that the strength and conditioning coach plays are vastly different.

In both cases it is very important to remember that it should always be about what is best for the athlete. The coach is the person who is responsible for strategy and technique first and foremost. But even the best planning would be useless if the athlete is not fit or does not have the necessary power and speed. That is where the strength and conditioning specialist comes in. It is his or her role to ensure that the athletes are in top condition when they participate.

In a way it can be said that the coaches determine the limits of every athlete. For example, if the coach says to an athlete that he or she will be able to do a workout with a 100kg weight or in X amount of time. That will be exactly the goal towards which we will be working – nothing more and nothing less. Basically it means that the athletes with whom they work will only be able to do as well as what the coach believes them capable of doing.

For a strength and conditioning specialist it is always important to remember that he/she is working with human beings who consist of flesh, blood and emotions. With every goal he has to be aware of the physical as well as the emotional state of the athlete with whom he is working 🌈

Strength and conditioning for Team sport vs. Individual sport

Text: Ignatius Loubser, Head Strength and Conditioning Specialist, hpc Images : Reg Caldecott

