

## **Introduction**

This is the first of many articles where I intend to share with you some of the theories behind our training sessions. It is scholarly in nature and the product of a combination of some coaching and training manuals that I have at my disposal.

This article and many others has been compiled and adapted from the FIVB (Level 1 Manual) and Volleyball USA (VCAP Manual).

It is scholarly in nature so it is open to criticism (objective or subjective). Please take the time to go through it and you will enjoy your pre-season training.

This article seeks to explain the 10 principles of conditioning which we should follow or at least endeavour to achieve.

## **The ten Principles of Conditioning**

### **1. Specificity**

Sport conditioning is unique and specific to the sport itself. The movements and energy requirements of volleyball are unique to volleyball.

A rugby player conditioned for rugby for example; may have the fitness to last an enduring rugby match but may not be volleyball fit to take the responsibilities of a 'middle blocker' in a competitive match.

Every sport has different rules, objectives, equipment, movement patterns, energy demands, sport skill and athletic skill requirements. Setters, back row specialists (libero), middle blockers and outside hitters have different and specific movement patterns, jumping outcomes, etc.

Every player must therefore train according to the demands of their specialist position to achieve the best output. Specialisation is therefore important during practice and play.

### **2. Adaptive progress**

Training is a progressive process, you move from simple to complex and as your conditioning improves, you increase the load.

The maturity, age and development level (training age level) of a player changes the training goals, types of exercises done and the amount of resistance/load used during training.

What was last year's goal cannot continue to be this year's target, a foundation has been set and we now need to build from that foundation. The choice of exercises, number of repetitions, rest periods etc. have to change to accommodate the progress of the players.

### **3. Training is seasonal**

The time of year changes your program. In the off-season, you devote more time to develop athletes. In the pre-season, you refine/polish athletic skills and relate them to volleyball skills to get ready for the season. During the season you maintain athletic skills and focus on volleyball skills to peak at the right time.

The integration of athletic skills to volleyball skills requires proper planning by the coach. However, such plans can only deliver if the players are available consistently and the plans are followed meticulously.

Each competitive season has its own peak and with today's players participating in varsity, club and beach play as well as other sports, these multiple peaks complicate the planning process. It is, therefore, important to establish competitive priorities for each athlete and design a plan that contains the elements of an off-season or base phase, which develops the athletic skills component; a pre-season, which refines the base and makes it more specific to volleyball skills; and, the in-season or competitive season. Strategically placed between these elements are active rest or recovery phases that reinvigorate the players.

#### **4. Performance measurement**

Field tests can measure the athletes' progress; assess effectiveness of the training program and indicate individual needs of each athlete.

#### **5. The individual**

All players are different. They react to conditioning programs differently, based on their unique strengths and weaknesses. Therefore, conditioning must be individualised.

#### **6. Planned recovery**

Improved performance is not a straight line upward, but rather a series of small spikes or waves moving generally upward. Good rest, recovery and nutritional practices insure upward movement by avoiding overtraining.

#### **7. Injury prevention**

Injury has a major negative impact on performance. All conditioning should establish injury prevention as the top priority with improved performance as an additional benefit. Volleyball players can't be at 100 percent if they are injured.

A player who misses training due to injury is a great loss to the team and to the development of the player. Building a good strength base with strong bones, tendons, ligaments and muscles in a balanced way takes years. Athletes with good command of body movement may have fewer injuries. An unstable, imbalanced and structurally weak player may be prone to injury. *(We take for granted the benefits of everyday tasks but they contribute tremendously to building a good strength base. The distances we walk on a daily basis are getting shorter and shorter and the general strength of our bones, tendons, ligaments and muscles is adversely affected)*

#### **8. Performance team**

There are many areas of expertise required to condition volleyball athletes and it is next to impossible to be an expert in all of these areas outside help is almost always needed.

It is always important to take advantage of specialist help if available to get the players the best conditioning support from experts. *(which are high performance centre, sports science team, physiotherapists etc.?)*

#### **9. Safe Environment**

Conditioning is done to prevent injury; it should not be the cause of injury. Creating a safe training environment for the athletes is essential.

Exercise technique, or how to perform the athletic skill development activities, is divided into two considerations. The first is teaching techniques. Volleyball related footwork, court

movement and jumping, and plyometrics are areas that volleyball coaches may be most competent in teaching. Weight training, stretching, injury prevention and functional rehabilitation exercises may need outside help.

## **10. Skills Transfer**

Conditioning activities (athletic skills) should have a direct or indirect transfer of volleyball (sport) skills. General conditioning has indirect transfer; special and specific training has direct transfer.

The following athletic skill components and definitions were identified at the USA Volleyball Athlete Summit held in 1996. Development of these skills should relate directly to volleyball skills.

Power: explosive strength, power is force applied as quickly as possible.

Agility: ability to change directions while maintaining balanced body control and speed.

Mobility: being able to produce volleyball specific movements in a variety of planes.

Footwork: ability to perform quick foot movement patterns related to volleyball skills.

Recovery: athlete's ability to return repetitively to a ready state for exercise.

## **Conclusion**

The above article is not meant to make you conditioning experts, but to give you an idea of why things are done the way they are done. An enlightened player performs better, and makes better decisions based on knowledge acquired.

Until the next time...!

Let's Work harder!!!

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