The Individualization of Team Training
James Smith 2005

In many instances team weight training consists of athletes of varying levels of strength preparedness— all performing the same training parameters. If the training parameters are not Auto Regulated or assigned to specific classifications of athletes the respective development of preparedness for each sportsman becomes inhibited. This translates into a collective of disproportionate preparedness at the team level.

When coaching a large group of athletes it must be the trainer’s directive to achieve proportional development in preparedness for each individual athlete. The value of this is tremendous; as the preparedness of the team as a whole is defined by the preparedness of each athlete.

From a logistical perspective; the initiation of such an objective may appear as being unreasonable, specifically in situations in which the trainer/trainers are largely out numbered by athletes. The solution is, in fact, very reasonable in practice, yet requires a proficient understanding of the multi-faceted Process of Attaining Sports Mastery (PASM).

In regards to directing the PASM model towards strength preparedness, it is the trainer’s responsibility to achieve a rise in the psychological, physical, tactical, and technical preparedness of the athlete.

In order that the trainer may most effectively accelerate the PASM the trainer must categorize the athletes in terms of classifications. The number of classifications will be dependent upon how many athletes are working out simultaneously and how much time and resources the trainer/training staff reasonably has to program training.

The trainer will designate a targeted training effect for each classification of athlete for every workout and phase of training. The degree of experience yielded to the athletes, based upon past training cycles, years, etc, will provide the trainer with valuable data for programming training for each classification.

In order to determine the qualifiers for classification the trainer must recognize the requirements of the sport. Certainly the biological age and level of preparedness must be taken into account prior to devising any set of qualification parameters. The trainer must evaluate the athletes in terms of preparedness, anatomical peculiarities/characteristics, physical/sporting requirements, etc.

“The training process may be monitored by observing what changes, if any, are evident in the athlete’s functional state or condition, i.e. the variations, caused by the established loads, of the functional parameters directly related with the
performance. The athlete’s condition must be objectively evaluated at regular intervals (once a month, for instance) and set against established workloads. A methodical observation of this relationship is one of the most important tasks faced by the modern coach. It is important to stress that the data illustrating the variations in an athlete’s condition in relation to given workloads is what provides the coach with the opportunity to increase their expertise and their ability to take correct decisions when planning the training process.” (1)

The training process, SPP/skill practice included, must be considered an organic whole. Special Strength Preparedness (SSP) must be developed alongside the acquisition of sport technical mastery. In order to facilitate these process trainers must begin fostering a rise in the athletes’ physical/psychological/tactical/technical preparedness at a very early age.

In order that trainers may transcend the academic/theoretical nature of this directive it is useful to assimilate the significance of the rise in the athlete’s ability to solve training problems. In the former USSR/Eastern Bloc it was commonplace for every great athlete to be supported by a team of great coaches and scientists. In contrast, in the West in collegiate and professional sport, it is far too commonplace that a team of athletes largely out number the support staff, specially the trainers whose job it is to develop physical preparedness. For this reason, it becomes very effective for the trainer to promote a degree of self sufficiency onto the athletes.

When the trainer is able to effectively instruct technical proficiency so that the athletes may perform a variety of means, the result is a situation in which the potential for athletes to practice a greater amount of individualization and optimization becomes heightened. In order to fully realize this potential the trainer must indoctrinate the athletes with psychological and tactical lessons which serve to raise their ability to solve training problems.

Many trainers already impart much effort to instructing technical proficiency in performing the means. What is lacking is the effort to develop psychological and tactical preparedness. Again, the training process must be considered as an organic whole. Accordingly, the trainer must impart the meaning of the methodics, before-during-or after the workouts, so that the athletes may begin to develop the ability to solve certain training problems themselves.

All that is required of the trainer is that he/she take time during the workouts, or during separate hours, and convey basic training principles to the athletes. In order to do this the trainer must be knowledgeable enough and willing to assist the athletes in becoming their own coach.

If the trainer is able to impart the significance of readiness vs. preparedness then the training process now becomes much more suitable for individualization. In such a case the trainer may outline the targeted training effect for each workout
because the athletes are psychologically, tactically, and technically prepared enough to regulate loading in order to most optimally suit their physiological state for that day.

Trainers must prescribe means which most optimally and appropriately suit the various classifications preparedness, physiological/anatomical peculiarities, requirements, etc. The athletes regulate loading based upon their readiness weighed against preparedness. By providing the athletes with loading parameter ranges and auto regulatory guidelines the trainer allows for greater individualization to occur while maintaining the programming and organizational method of their choice. To this end, Verkhoshanski (1977) states the following: “Especially distinct, individual differences can be displayed in the structure of strength preparedness. Different sportsmen obtain the same results with different degrees of work on the basic muscle groups; with their different ability to quickly contract; and finally, the compensation for the functional lag of one muscle, results in a more expressive development in another.” (2)

Clearly this is a long term and multi-faceted process just as the PASM. The objective is to heighten the athletes’ awareness over time (e.g., over a semester, summer, off season, etc) so that eventually the training process becomes as individualized as possible regardless of how outnumbered the training staff may be. This objective is not to imply that athletes must acquire the skill set of a highly qualified trainer; but merely a working understanding of the physiological effects of the means and the methodics which are utilized by the trainer.

A rise in the athletes’ awareness will accelerate the learning curve. In the interest of producing more highly qualified coaches/trainers it is recommended that all athletes question the methodics utilized by the trainer. If the trainer is unable or unwilling to provide answers than the athlete must recognize that the trainer is incompetent. In such situations it becomes the athletes’ responsibility to seek other means of guidance.

Athletes must be motivated enough to take interest in the development of their physical preparedness; there are few acceptable alternatives.

The most significant difference between the weight room and the classroom is that the learned information in the weight room may be directly applied in the practical setting. Accordingly, athletes must feel comfortable with asking questions and solving training problems.

In order that each athlete reaches their own highest level of psychological/tactical/technical/physical preparedness, he/she must be willing to become their own coach. Ignorance is far too commonplace at the coaching level to take anything for rote.

Targeted awareness goals for athletes:
• Know the loading parameters which coincide with the Maximal Effort (ME),
  Dynamic Effort (DE), Submaximal Effort (SE), and Repeated Effort (RE)
  methods and their physiological implications
• Know numerous special exercises which may be rotated according to rate
  of adaptation
• Know the training effects of the means and methods and the principle of
  Dynamic Correspondence
• Know your sporting and intra sport/positional physiological requirements
• Special exercises should be rotated every 3-4 weeks in order to avoid
  adaptive stagnation
• ME training should be deloaded every 4-6 weeks
• SE training is a wise alternative to ME training during the competitive
  season for most team sport athletes
• Know the significance of readiness versus preparedness

It is the opinion of the author that a complex of means be utilized, as opposed to
complex means, in order to achieve any targeted cumulative training effect over
the course of training cycles. By utilizing means which are relatively easy to
instruct/learn/perform the training process is greatly economized and the
sportsmen may select from a wider range of means. In so doing, pools of special
exercises may be created to coincide with basic movement patterns. Athletes
may then be given lists of special exercise along with loading parameter/auto
regulatory guidelines and basic programming strategies.

As the athletes heighten their ability to coach themselves they will accelerate the
PASM.

There is a reason why many athletes, from the high school to the professional
level, seek out the coaching of a private trainer. This reason is rooted in the
premise that individual training yields more concentrated, individualized, and
accelerated results specifically under the guidance of a knowledgeable and
experienced trainer.

The most optimal method to individualize the training is, in fact, to reduce the
trainer:athlete ratio. This ideal, however, is not a realistic one for most
institutions. Accordingly, coaching/training staffs must make every attempt to
maximize the individualization of team training despite the logistical challenges.
The considerations outlined in this article will serve to facilitate this process.

References:

(1) Verkhoshanski, Y. V. “The Skills of Programming the Training Process” From:
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(2) Verkhoshanski, Y.V., “Fundamentals of Special Strength-Training in Sport”
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